ARABIC DEATH DISCOURSE IN TRANSLATION: EUPHEMISM AND METAPHORICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION IN JORDANIAN OBITUARIES

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Abstract: Some events are too distasteful and coarse to be approached without linguistic ‘gymnastics’ or ‘maneuvering’. One of these is undoubtedly death, a timeless taboo in which psychological, religious, and social interdictions coexist. This paper investigates the conceptualization and translation of the euphemistic metaphorical encoding operative in Arabic death discourse, particularly in a selected corpus consisting of 450 obituaries, drawn from three respectable Jordanian newspapers, where the sentimentalization of death, deriving from orthodox Muslim beliefs, provided a fertile soil for the burgeoning of metaphorical fatalism-laden euphemism. Given the pervasiveness of metaphor to refer to human mortality, the present study utilizes the influential “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” advanced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to account for the different conceptual metaphors, and their relevant linguistic instantiations which substituted the notions of death and dying. The analysis also reveals that the translation hurdles encountered essentially originate from the fact that Arabic and English offer conflicting prototypical models of agency, thereby landing the translator with the laborious task of negotiating the meaning between two contrasting cultural models, which has been found to strip the source language text from its dynamism, and, consequently, to procure irredressable translation loss, however satisfactory the translation equivalents may be.

Keywords: Arabic (Jordanian) death discourse, euphemism, metaphorical conceptualization, cognitive mapping, Arab fatalism and agency, translation loss

1. INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural studies have spent considerable effort exploring how encoding and decoding messages can vary quite considerably from one language to another. Such lingua-cultural differences are more likely to be self-evident in delicate matters, some of which may well embody harsh or distasteful experiences or realities. The failure of humanity to come to terms with death has been prevalent in different times and societies. In attempting to make the crushing truth less true, many euphemisms signifying death and dying emerged as mani-
festations of our denial of it (Slovenko 2006:540); whereas, direct reference to death *viz-a-viz* the stalest soporific terms available (i.e. *death* and *dying*) does seem to appear as ‘malignant’ linguistic code that warrants ‘gobsmacking’ and mesmerizing communicators, irrespective of the cultures they belong to. Whether propelled by the linguistic impetus for palliating indecency and indelicacy, by the social drive to uphold decorum, by fatalism, “a doctrine that events are fixed in advance for all time in such a manner that human beings are powerless to change them” (*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* 1986:451), by determinism “a theory or doctrine that acts of the will, occurrences in nature, or social or psychological phenomena are casually determined by preceding events or natural laws” (ibid:346), by superstition, by abhorrence, or by fear (see also Ullmann 1966:245), the fact remains that when facing death, communicators try to mitigate the impact of what they wish to convey.

Indeed, the very existence of sharpest straightforward words that may inspire fear of supernatural forces such as death will automatically trigger a quest for euphemism, i.e. alternatives that do not arouse abomination, revulsion or dread. Yet, the mystifying power of language is ubiquitous (cf. also Berger and Luckmann 1966:16). These alternatives can be referred to as *euphemisms*. Gladney and Rittenburg (2005:28) consider euphemisms as substitute expressions for “blunt precision or disagreeable truth” (cf. also Kany 1960:y; Wilkes 1979:123). Thus, euphemisms may minimize threat to the addressee’s face as well as spare communicators’ disquiet (cf. Matthew and Batchelor 2003). Therefore, taboos are normally veiled by a tendency towards indirect reference, which fashions a linguistic coating and involves the proliferation of euphemisms. Such a linguistic coating can be seen as a form of wrapping, which shows consideration for the other in the same way as when gifts are presented elaborately wrapped (Hendry 1993:64). However, when a euphemism is used to mislead or deceive, it becomes *doublespeak* (cf. McGlone et al., 2006:263; Brown and Levinson 1987; Gladney and Rittenburg 2005:29–30). In death discourse, there is no intention to mislead, and so this does not constitute a case of doublespeak within the context of the present discussion.

Thus, euphemism is a lexical device whereby a taboo is robbed of its most explicit, unpleasant, offensive, or obscene nuances. Linguists have traditionally characterized euphemism as a lexical substitution strategy for topics that evoke negative affect. This strategy may serve the ostensibly noble motive of sparing an addressee communicative discomfort (Allan and Burridge 1991; Liszka 1990). It is obvious that it is often difficult to talk about a sensitive issue without employing emotionally loaded words. Obituary writers, desiring to uphold their commitment to the facts of the subject of the obituary, oscillate between factual writing and emotive partisan views. The most prominent aspect will depend on the degree of inclination the writer shows to his subject (Hatim and Mason 1990:148). Accordingly, euphemism is not only a politeness strategy
through which communicators can avoid loss of face; rather, it is a tactful way
to speak about taboos, about the unspeakable, about painful experiences, about
those matters banned from public sphere and ‘lingering’ deep in our subcon-
scious. This reluctance to speak openly about human mortality is, as Sexton
(1997:335) indicates, characteristic of the overall discomfort associated with the
subject of death as a whole (cf. also Stein 1998:4; Hilmer; and Donaldson

Despite the fact that human beings have the predilection to employ elusive
and slippery appellations to refer to the subject of death and dying, there are
compelling pragmatic-communicative situations where communicators have no
choice in evading the notions of death and dying. One of these cases is obituar-
ies; those newspaper announcements devoted to the exposition of death, as an
unfolding story in our daily undertakings. Taking into account the pressing need
to record death, the seriousness of the situation and the formality which the so-
cial context imposes on obituaries, as an all-pervasive phenomenon in Arabic, it
is not surprising that obituaries are a rich soil for metaphorical-euphemistic lan-
guage germane to the death taboo.

Given the pervasiveness of metaphor in euphemisms, i.e., the fact that
metaphorization can be considered a potent source for euphemistic reference
(Warren 1992:146–149) and a remarkable device to cope with death (Goatly
1997:159; Sexton 1997), it is our purpose in this paper to investigate, in a sam-
ple of Arabic Jordanian obituaries, the translation problems stemming from
conceptual metaphors in euphemistic use, i.e., we seek to investigate the transla-
tion problems resulting from the euphemistic figurative language used to design-
ate the taboo of death in the framework of the renowned “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” advanced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). We also examine how a
certain conceptualization accounts for the interpretation of death-related
euphemistic metaphors. The investigation undertaken shows that metaphorical
expressions or structures referring to the death taboo can be insightfully de-
scribed in terms of Lakoff and Johnson’s cognitive view of metaphor, and
should also provide us with an insight into the way experience is conceptualized
and euphemized in Arabic.

This seems to be an extraordinary line of research, because, while there is
an extensive scholarly work on the cognitive aspects of metaphor and other fig-
ures of speech, not to mention the relatively recent studies touching on the
metaphorical conceptualization of human mortality (e.g., Marin Arrese 1996;
Sexton 1996; Bultnick 1998), not much scholarly ink has been spilled over con-
ceptual metaphors, and their relevant linguistic instantiations, as a purely
euphemistic device, nor over such a linguistic phenomenon from the perspective
of Arabic–English translation studies. Thus, we will attempt to gain an educated
insight into the cognitive role of metaphorical euphemism as a resource to pare
down the taboo of death in Jordanian official writing, and, more importantly, to

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highlight the difficulties and problems associated with translating these culturally-sensitive Arabic metaphorical euphemisms into English (for a fuller account on sensitive texts in translation, see Simms 1997:187–239).

Although there is a spate of scholarly treatments covering as diversified aspects of metaphor and/or metaphorical euphemism as the linguistic, literary, cultural, and cognitive, scant attention has been given to metaphor and/or metaphorical euphemism in translation. The sparse translation studies available still envisage the translatability of metaphor as a problematic and demanding cross-cultural activity (see Tobias 2009; Suzani 2006; Huang and Zhoul 2005; Kövecses 2002; Dobrzynska 1995; Alvarez 1993; Fass 1991; Hermans 1985; Toury 1981:24; Raffel and Burago 1972:238; Hall 1964:406). Thus, neither conceptual metaphors nor their linguistic equivalents are necessarily always the same in interlingual-cultural transfer (cf. Abdul-Raof 2001:121–122; Deignan et al. 1997; Fung and Kiu 1987; Broeck 1981). For Newmark (1982:84), the purpose of metaphor is to describe an entity, event or quality more comprehensively and concisely and in a more complex way than is possible by using literal language; for him, it is the translation of metaphor that is “the most important particular problem” (Newmark 1988:104; see also Megrab 1997:235).

Newmark (1988:108–111) isolates seven strategies for translating metaphorical expressions, which can be subsumed under three broad options: (i) Reproduction of the same metaphorical image in the TL; (ii) Replacement of the source language metaphorical image with a different TL image that conveys a similar sense, and (iii) Reducing the source language metaphorical image to sense or literal language. Newmark argues that (i) should be the default position, that is, a metaphor should be translated by a metaphor, unless the target language metaphor does not have comparable frequency and currency in the relevant TL register (for more information see also Dagut 1976; Dagut 1987:77; Newmark 1985; Mason 1982:149). However, Newmark’s approach falls short of providing a more generalized framework for engaging with the source text on any level deeper than the surface one which calls for mere word-for-word equivalence in the target text.

Accordingly, cognitive linguistics seems a potentially very promising sub-discipline to provide a framework within which metaphors can be described, understood, and translated (see Gibbs 1992, 1994; Ahrens and Say 1999; Kittay 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Crespo Fernandez 2006a, 2006b). Indeed, translation research has given prominence to the cultural aspect of translation, thereby undermining the traditional views that boil down to achieving ‘linguistic equivalence’. This relatively new translation trend lends support to the notion that translation is influenced by factors that go beyond the actual words of the text (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990; Hermans 2006; Venuti 1998). Thus, in light of the cognitive linguistic model of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), being adopted in this paper, metaphors reflect varying cognitive, physical, and cultural
human experiences across languages. To put it differently, every culture has its own microscope through which it envisages and depicts the world, and so metaphors are expected to differ cognitively, linguistically, culturally and translationally across languages (Lakoff and Johnson’s 1980 immensely influential cognitive linguistic model will be taken up in more detail in section 4).

To this effect, Lakoff and Johnson (1980:12) plainly state that “a culture may be thought of as providing, among other things, a pool of available metaphors for making sense of reality”; “to live by a metaphor is to have your reality structured by that metaphor and to base your perceptions and actions upon that structuring of reality” (ibid:12). Dagut (1976:28) emphasizes that “what determines the translatability of a SL metaphor is not its ‘boldness’ or ‘originality,’ ‘but rather the extent to which the cultural experience and semantic associations on which it draws are shared by speakers of the particular TL.” Similarly, Snell-Hornby (1995:41) accentuates the same idea in the sense that “the extent to which a text is translatable varies with the degree to which it is embedded in its own specific culture, also with the distance that separates the cultural background of source text and target audience in terms of time and place” (cf. also Buchowski 1996).

Thus, identifying the cognitive mappings and sub-mappings between the source and target domains of any given conceptual metaphor may well assist in both gaining a deeper understanding of the conceptual basis of linguistic metaphors and more adequate and communicative translation from one language into another. That is if the translator understands the cognitive, linguistic, euphemistic, and cultural processes behind the expressions or structures used in the source text, then s/he would be in an empowered position to yield a proper translated target language version, and at the same time to intelligently increase the degrees of interlingual-cultural approximation (for more insightful information on the applicability of the cognitive approach to metaphor translation and other relevant notions see also Schäffner 2004; Crerar-Bromelowe 2008; Mandelblit 1996; Tirkkonen-Condit 1996 and 2001; Charteris-Black 2004).

2. THE TABOO OF DEATH AND ISLAMIC FAITH

Death has been described as “a fear-based taboo” (Allan and Burridge 1991:153), where different fears coexist: fear of the loss of dear ones, fear of living in limbo, fear of the disintegration of the body, fear of evil ghosts, and fear of what awaits us in the next phase (i.e., afterlife). For instance, Gross (1985:203) confirms this outlook on death when he reports that for some Australian tribes the taboo of death constrains verbal communication to such an extent that it is strictly forbidden to utter the name of the person who has passed away. It seems that in some cultures any denomination employed as an indirect
reference to death is tantamount to the word death itself, i.e., any indirect denomination would trigger the same emotional response and possess the same force as that of the taboo itself. This alludes to the fact that sometimes the boundaries between the lexical item and its referent are vague. As a result, the euphemistic options may not always warrant softening the taboo satisfactorily, as in certain social contexts any reference to death, however indirect it may be, is definitely disturbing, owing to the fact that any euphemistic alternative will instantly call it to mind. In such a case silence qualifies as the sole relieving outlet (cf. Bultnick 1998; Marin Arrese 1996).

As far as Arabic is concerned, the taboo of death cannot be adequately understood without considering the pivotal role that Islam plays in sepulchral matters. For all Arabs and Muslims, Islam is believed to provide a reason not only for living, but also for dying. Therefore, there is no wonder that most, if not all, the verbalizations as well as the funeral rituals relevant to death are derived from Islam and its terminology. Accordingly, consolation is based on the firmly-held Islamic belief in the resurrection of the dead, to be followed by a completely new life in Heaven, the blessed eternal abode of the faithful, which makes the circle of the Islamic faith come into full (for similar ideas in Christianity see Wheeler 1994). Thus, the Islamic faith is definitely a source of comfort and relief in the face of death, particularly the promise of a blissful Hereafter beyond this mundane life, beyond physical death; a hope which constitutes the essence of Islamic orthodoxy, and accounts for a great deal of the metaphorical euphemism rampant in obituaries, as it will be illustrated very soon.

3. AGENCY: ISLAMIC FATALISM VS. WESTERN DETERMINISM

Many features of the discourse used in Muslim death obituaries are manifestations of the underlying agency of God’s (Allah). Muslims routinely attribute divine authority to all events and experiences of life, but at the same time they also portray themselves as volitional agents in these events. Farghal (1993:43–45) discusses this in terms of Arab fatalism, commonly associated with “some sort of theism functioning as its ultimate agency”. By contrast, as Farghal (ibid.:44) points out, the concept of determinism replaces fatalism in the Western philosophical tradition, thus functioning as a default natural law governing the course of events.

The terms fatalism and determinism are sometimes confused and used interchangeably. While the former stresses that all events are predetermined by fate, and are, therefore, unalterable, the latter emphasizes that there must be a cause behind every event which necessarily precipitates such an event. From the point of view of determinism, there is no human free will, and so any decision
taken is seen as the natural and inevitable result of factors such as physical conditions and environmental circumstances beyond the control of the individual. On the other hand, in the concept of fatalism, preceding events do not precipitate the events that follow, nor does a fated event take place according to a natural law. Events happen because of a decree of God or of some supernatural power (see also Lacey 1986:79; Strawson 1986:95; Berofsky 1971:11–12; Farhgal 1995).

Indeed, there has always been a standard misinterpretation of the multifaceted nature of Islamic fatalism (cf. Acevedo 2008). For example, a flawed understanding of the Islamic view, according to which events are destined by the force of God before whom individuals stand powerless and helpless, some Muslim fatalists would blame everything on the Divine force, and, as a result, reject life responsibilities and sensibilities. To this effect, fatalism is misunderstood here in the sense that such Muslim fatalists turn out to envisage fatalism as a path for unacceptable actions, for immorality, for passivity, or as a peg on which all forms of failure and negativity are hung. Though the question of fate and free will has confused people at all times, Islam provides a fairly clear account of fatalism. Islam is uncompromisingly committed to the freedom of humanity. The Qur’an presupposes two basic qualities of humanity, that is, intelligence and freedom. Humanity needs intelligence and free will as to see the difference between what is good and evil, and what is lawful and unlawful. So, an individual needs freedom to opt for a certain course of life which he/she deems fit for his/her future. If these two basic qualities are lacking, then the whole concept of religion would be absurd and meaningless.

In Arabic, the words قضاء qadaa’ and قدر qadar are often used for predetermination and destiny. Whereas the word qadaa’ means judgment or settlement, the word qadar means determination or assessment. The Qur’an speaks of Allah’s eternal decree (qadar), but elsewhere it allows a place for human free will. However, in Islam these two opposed views are harmonized and reconciled in that humanity has a certain freedom to acquire actions broadly foreordained by Allah. Islam never denies human free will. Allah, according to the Qur’an, tests human beings in this life in order to find out who follows His laws and who does not and will then chastise or reward them accordingly. For this reason humanity should possess free will to choose between good and evil. Thus, according to the Qur’an, what makes history is not a compelling Divine Will; rather, it is humanity’s own choice, the operation of which Allah Almighty has made a simple condition for the coming into effect of His universal will.

Allah is recognized by Islam as the first and ultimate cause of all things; but this does not mean that He is the creator of the deeds of humanity. Every deed, which an individual does, is followed by a corresponding act of God. If an individual, for instance, chooses to cross a highway in a reckless manner and
gets hit by a car and dies, then death here is a Divine act. So Allah not only cre-
ated the human beings, but also endowed humanity with discretion to choose how to act, and thus, an individual is responsible for his own deeds, and is made to suffer the consequences. Therefore, the doctrine of predestination, or the decreeing of a good course for one individual and an evil course for another, finds no support from the Qur’an. However, the doctrine of the decreeing of good and evil follows from the doctrine of the foreknowledge of God. If Allah knows what will happen in the future, whether a certain individual will opt for a good or an evil course, then it follows that Allah’s foreknowledge of a particular event does not mean that He interferes with the choice of the agent or the doer. Hence, Allah’s foreknowledge has nothing to do with predestination.

It is clear now that individuals enjoy a special status in Islam as creatures with a role and mission. Thus, Allah’s power over His creation and His fore-
knowledge of all our actions and events, and their results do not obviate or obliterate that status. More importantly, Allah’s knowledge of the choices the individuals are going to make, along with His knowledge about their concomi-
tant consequences, does not block this freedom. This means that there is a balance between Allah’s qadar and an individual’s freedom, i.e. an individual’s conscious exercise of will falls within the ample scope of Allah’s qadar, and Allah’s qadar does not preclude having human freedom of choice. So in Islam, there is no contradiction between belief in Allah’s will and plan on the one hand, and the freedom of humans on the other, because Allah’s will and plan are unlimited, within which there is room for a free and active role for humans. Obviously, the Islamic belief in qadaa‘ and qadar does not impede people from striving to achieve their goals in life, as Islam does not encourage passivity and inactivity. However, an ill-perceived view of Islam may lead others to think that Muslim fatalism causes stagnation and inactivity in society. Thus, any social decline or backwardness in any given Muslim country should never be ascribed to Islam itself; rather, to the people who practice Islam.

Thus, as part of a pragmatic strategy, Muslims tend to emphasize that a super-
natural agent intervenes in the lives of people, and does what the individual cannot or should not do. In this way, individuals can resolve conflicts in their lives, and accommodate discordant or disturbing thoughts and actions by reframing them in Allah’s universal sovereignty. Once these undesirable thoughts or elements are attributed to an outside entity, there would not be inconsistenci-
es in the Muslim’s life, and the psychological dilemma is resolved. By con-
trast, the notion of God’s agency in Christianity consists of three components: the Holy Spirit (liveliness), Christ (teleological action), and God the Father (cognition). Equally important is that God as a pure spirit acts in the world through Christ. It is also crucial here to point out that the Western conception of agency draws on the irresistibility of what they call historical laws: humanity is in a continuous progress towards the final happy end, and so this progress de-
pends on the fatalistic, irresistible laws of history which are completely independent of humanity. As a result, humanity must, in any case, obey these laws; otherwise, they are certain to be eliminated (cf. also Bates and MacWhinney 1982:217; Croft 1994; Langacker 1991; DeLancey 1984; Van Oosten 1985). Apparently, Western conceptions of agency and fatalism seem to considerably differ from their Islamic counterparts. Therefore, these differences are likely to complicate the task of the Arabic translator.

Thoughts or actions that cannot be attributed to Christ or the historical laws may prove troubling in Western cultures, as applying the notion of agency to an absolute supernatural agent all the time map on to conceptions of mental instability and illness in such cultures. Thus, when communicating bodily experiences, translators are actually negotiating between two divergent types of fatalism, i.e., they are negotiating between two contradictory cultural models, which pose serious translation challenges. The claim made in this study is that the fatalistic metaphorical euphemisms used in Arabic obituaries will reflect this ongoing process of negotiation, which requires a carefully nuanced translation. One way for an Arabic translator to negotiate this impasse is to provide a translation that takes this discrepancy into account and, at the same time, tries to downplay the role of supernatural agency as a central element in ritual discourse.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE COGNITIVE MODEL

There has been a growing influence of cognitive linguistic notions and research on metaphor in several disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. The interaction between cognitive scientists and linguists has led to a growing and impressive body of research about metaphor in language and cognition. Metaphor has been studied by cognitive linguistics (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987); cognitive psychology (e.g. Gibbs 1994; Allbritton et al. 1995; Gibbs and O’Brien 1990); cultural studies (Fernandez 1991; Holland and Quinn 1987; Csordas 1994; Emanation 1995), and anthropology (D’Andrade 1995; Quinn 1991; Strathern 1996). The theoretical framework upon which the present paper rests is drawn from the cognitive model of the “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” (henceforth CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their pioneering book Metaphors We Live By. This represents one of the central areas of research in the more general field of cognitive linguistics.

According to cognitive semantics (Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987), abstract reasoning depends largely on the use of conceptual metaphors. Metaphors are conceptual in the sense that metaphor plays a key role in people’s internal mental representations of many, particularly abstract, concepts. In the role of cogni-
tive models, conceptual metaphors really determine our world view. So our view of the world is essentially determined by our image fields. A central principle in CMT (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987, 1990) is that we cannot capture reality in isolation from human categorization, and that the structure of reality, as reflected in language, is a product of the human mind. The most principal tenet in this model is embodiment. That is, human conceptual categories, the meaning of all language structures, both at the micro and macro levels, are not a set of universal abstract features or uninterpreted symbols, but rather, motivated and grounded in experience, in our bodily, physical and social/cultural experiences, because after all, “we are beings of the flesh” (Johnson 1992:347). Johnson (1987:172) explains that the way we reason and what we can experience as meaningful rest on structures of imagination that shape our experience in the way it is. For instance, emotional unresponsiveness is associated with coldness and that is why an unsympathetic person has a cold unfeeling demeanor (Grady 1999:79).

In the CMT framework metaphors are analyzed as stable and systematic relationships between two conceptual ‘domains’. Metaphor in this view is not just a linguistic device, but a central organizing mechanism in language and thought. Metaphor is characterized as a process where one experiential domain is conceptualized in terms of another (Lakoff 1993:203; Taylor 1989; Sweetser 1990). In a nutshell, the CMT proposes that language use reflects inherently metaphorical understanding of many areas of bodily experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987; Sweetser 1990). Metaphors are systematic inter-linkages of multiple expressions which map one relatively concrete ‘domain’ on to another. The overall process boils down to the idea that a concrete domain (the source domain) is mapped on to a more abstract domain (the target domain, the death taboo in our case). In a metaphorical example like *There is an international conspiracy to bury the issue of the displaced Palestinians.* Certain specific components of the source and target domains are selected through a combination of the source language used (“bury”), and the relevant conceptual metaphor, a ‘mapping’ – presumably stored as a knowledge structure in long-term memory – which specifies how components in the two domains are aligned with each other. In this metaphor, knowledge structures pertinent to existence have been put into correspondence with structures concerning seeing and sensing. Owing to the fact that such a mapping is regulated, non-existence is associated with burial as well as other conditions which preclude sight and disclosure. It is this general mapping between visual perception and intellectual activity that nearly any concept related to the experience of vision is likely to have an explicit counterpart in the structure of knowledge and ideas. It is clear that the CMT is primarily concerned with identifying principled conventional patterns of metaphorical conceptualization, where *unidirectional* projections prevail, i.e., in which one-way mappings are from source to target, unlike the
case with the blending theory advanced by Fauconnier and Turner (1996, 1998) which sanctions bidirectionality. Furthermore, the CMT, tacitly and sometimes explicitly, assumes that conventional metaphorical mappings must be internally represented in the individual minds of language users, that is, the CMT assumes that conventional metaphorical mappings pre-exist as independent entities in long-term memory.

It follows also that these bodily experiences give rise to the development of an experiential gestalt, called image schemas, which cover a wide range of experiential structures, and can be metaphorically elaborated to provide for our understanding of more abstract domains. For instance, the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS HEATED FLUID IN A CONTAINER takes the image schema for containment as part of its source domain and maps this image-schematic structure onto anger, which produces a number of interesting linguistic instantiations (e.g., he was bursting with anger). Thus, metaphor is not only a figure of speech; rather, it is an imaginative cognitive device through which it is possible to “ground our conceptual systems experientially and to reason in a constrained but creative fashion’ (Johnson 1992:351). Although bodily experience is probably the most basic source domain for conceptual metaphor, people’s view of their bodies may vary as well. Anthropologists have shown in a number of cultural settings how many embodied experiences are shaped by specific local, social or cultural knowledge and practice (cf. Csordas 1994; Gibbs 1999:155). In other words, a given conceptual metaphor is “an emergent property of body-world interactions, rather than arising purely from the heads of individual people” (Gibbs 1999:154–56); that is, a given conceptual metaphor may be more typical of the discourse of one community than that of another (Boers 1999:48). Therefore, cross-cultural variation is also likely to occur, and so metaphorical models and their relative currency may also vary across communities defined in ideological terms. For example, while English takes the body as a whole as the container for anger, Arabic shows a preference for positioning this emotion in a specific substance of the body, the blood, as in يَطْفِئُ الرَّأسُ يَطْفِئُ من طَوْلِ الْأَنْتَظَارِ (His head is boiling from waiting for too long).

This conception of metaphor as a largely automatic correspondence between experiential domains can be applied to the study of metaphorical euphemisms figuring in the tabooed discourse of death. An illustrative metaphor could be DEATH IS A THIEF. In this conceptual metaphor, there is a projection from a source domain (thief) onto a target domain (death), and the interconnections that constitute this metaphor map our perception about thief onto our perception about death. That is, thieves are associated with stealing not killing. However, stealing and death are closely associated, as anything which we highly value, such as our own experiences of happiness, tranquility and peace, can be metaphorically “stolen” from us, just as life can. Whatever causes us to
metaphorically lose these precious elements of our experience can be cast as a thief. It is in this correspondence between the source and target domains where the euphemistic component is integrated into the overall cognitive conceptualization. The source domain is therefore used to understand, reason, structure, and, in some cases, tone down the target domain. This reflects one of the fundamental aspects of the standard cognitive model, the principle of unidirectionality, according to which the binding cognitive mapping process initiates from the more concrete domain and moves on to the more abstract one, i.e. only the source is projected onto the target domain, but not the opposite (cf. Barcelona 2003:214).

5. DATA AND METHODS

The corpus of the present study samples 450 death announcements excerpted from the obituary sections of three respectable and reputable Jordanian newspapers: Alra‘i, Al-Dustour and Al-Ghadd. As indicated earlier on, the reason why choice has rested with obituary pages emanates from the fact that these pages are replete with euphemisms related to the taboo of death. Another motivating reason is that these pages enable gleaning authentic data, avoiding, thereby, an approach to the metaphorical euphemism of death with hypothetical or fictitious examples. In an attempt to minimize variables: (1) the selected newspapers belong to the same period, i.e., the 2000s decade, (2) death notices targeting the Jordanian Christian community were excluded, (3) thank-you-for-your-condolence notices, which are normally devoid of any core death/dying-related material, as such notices are specifically designed by the family of the deceased to record their profound thanks for those who stood by them during the wake or mourning period, were also excluded, and (4) the selected newspapers have wide circulations and are regarded as reputable newspapers, targeting all the different educational levels of the Jordanian public, which has never ceased to experience, as any other Muslim nation, a strong sense of religious spirituality attached to death and many other aspects of life.

Rawson (1995:8) refers to this as a “sentimentalization of death”, the tendency to tone down the taboo by avoiding direct reference to it. As for methods, the researcher surveyed the obituary pages of the three selected newspapers thoroughly and exhaustively for euphemistic substitutions of the taboos of death and dying. Once a euphemistic substitute was spotted, it was accounted for metaphorically in terms of the conceptual mapping, as spelled out in the cognitive model already presented in the previous section, and translationally in terms of the challenges posed by the linguistic instantiations of these conceptual metaphors.
6. DISCUSSION

In general, the analysis of data obtained from the obituary sections of the three selected newspapers indicates that the use of euphemism in Jordanian death discourse is rife. In fact, out of a total of 450 death obituaries, the ‘unmentionable’ words death and die have appeared not even once in the data, i.e., they showed zero frequency, a fact which shows how the topic of death and dying is negotiated and managed in Jordanian newspaper obituaries, and how linguistic avoidance of these social taboos affects meaning making. Direct reference to mortality is completely avoided in all these obituaries. Therefore, the data presented here may provide a window through which we may observe how death and dying are shrouded in sentimental, metaphorical and fatalistic-euphemistic descriptors, which are likely to pose serious challenges in translation into English, as it will be elaborated in the course of this study.

6.1. Euphemistic ‘Metaphor-free’ Conceptualization of Death

Before moving on to the metaphorical conceptualizations of death and dying, and the possible associated translation difficulties, it is crucial to point out that the analysis of data revealed the emergence of some lexical and semantic devices, totalling 213 (10.9%) euphemistic substitutes out of 1953 occurrences, that were employed, alongside metaphorical euphemism, to tone down the taboo of death. These include metonymy, generic terms, and legal terms. Let us discuss these devices before proceeding any further. As far as the semantic devices are concerned, metonymy has been found to account for 27 (1.3%) euphemistic references to death. Indeed, the obituaries consulted show the existence of two types of metonymic associations: first, those which concentrate on the consequences of death for those left alive, which are the manifestations of the conceptual metonymy THE SENTIMENTAL EFFECTS OF DEATH STAND FOR DEATH (pain, dissolution, and wretchedness); second, those dedicated to ameliorate the communication on death and dying without making reference to the agonizing sentimental or even physiological effects of death. The first type can be best exemplified by the following metonymic expression:

بقلوب يعتصرونها الألم (lit. with hearts squeezed out by pain)

In the example above, the Arabic structure implicitly signals the occurrence of death, a conclusion that one may easily draw from the sentimental effects stemming from the semantics of such construction. This metonymic construction can be considered an overstatement that relatives, friends and acquaintances left behind utilize to magnify the degree of their sorrow and sad-
ness in an intelligent way to pacify the bereaved family. The verb *مَصْحُورَة* (squeezed out) seems to do most of the job here. The difficulty in translating this structure springs from the fact that native speakers of Arabic tend to exaggerate their sentiments and emotions, and that is why poignant words like *مَصْحُورَة* are opted for in order to heighten the degree of exaggeration. Though this lexical choice may not make complete sense to English mentality, which is not accustomed to such exaggeration, the image schema employed here may show up a cultural difference which deserves more attention in translation. A possible functional translation which may bridge the linguistic-cultural gap is *with hearts smashed by pain*, as the idea of *smashed hearts*, though harbouring a different image-schema, is an established and conventionalized metaphor that may serve the same function in the target text. The second type is best represented by the following example:

*ياَ بَعْلِيَ وَجَهَ رَبِّهِ* (lit. he met the face of his God)

This instance presents a prototypical religious (i.e., Islamic) representation of the schematic conceptual structure of death. The above instance profiles death in terms of a particular act, i.e., this religious expression characterizes dying as meeting God or seeing God’s face. This conceptual extension is clearly metonymic in that salient acts like meeting God and seeing God’s face are construed as manifestations of death. Translation-wise, what adds to the conceptual complexity of this metonymic structure is the Arab fatalism inherent in its very core. The structure *ياَ بَعْلِيَ وَجَهَ رَبِّهِ* is commonly used to make a euphemistic reference to death. By contrast, English commonly employs fatalism-free death terms in similar contexts, for instance, ‘pass away’. Hence, God stands for *Al-lah*, who from an Islamic standpoint is the agent of mankind’s death. Such agency is lacking in English, and so can never be incorporated in any TL counterpart. Thus, the challenge here speaks for itself. This being the case, the translator is propelled to yield a functional equivalent such as *in heaven*, *in a kingdom*, or even s/he enjoys a holy and uninterrupted communion with God, which is most often restricted to religious discourse, unlike its Arabic counterpart which can be utilized in religious and non-religious contexts. This restriction, on the part of English, is responsible for creating a linguistic and cultural communication rift. Despite the fact that the latter translation, from a Christian point of view, mainly supposes the fulfilment of happiness, it is the closest TL equivalent to euphemistically convey the conception of Islamic agency. Yet, there remains an unavoidable semantic loss pertinent to the fatalistic nuance in the Arabic death structure.

As regards the lexical devices, *generic terms* were responsible for 48 (2.4%) euphemistic references to mortality, while legal terms totalled 138 (7.6%). The most frequently used generic term to replace the word death was
which communicatively translates as “the painful affliction”, while
the most heavily employed legal term to substitute the word death was
which definitely fulfils a mitigating function when used in a non-legal context
like that of the obituary. The euphemistic term (death) is a fatalistic term
with an unconscious entailment of God (i.e. Allah in our case) as the supernatu-
ral divine authority in charge of life and death. Undoubtedly, the word death as
an optimal TL equivalent for cannot fare well without the ineluctable cost of
losing such a fatalistic connotation.

6.2. Euphemistic ‘Metaphor-based’ Conceptualization of Death

Initially, it is useful to point out that some conceptual metaphors have been
found to have a metonymic basis, which testifies to the fact that there can be
some sort of interaction between metaphor and metonymy. This can best be rep-
resented by the conceptual metaphors DEATH IS A REWARD and DEATH IS
A LOSS, which though intrinsically metaphorical in nature, and considered as
such in the present study, can assist in conceiving metaphors for death on the
basis of the well-known cause–effect equation. It is also crucial to indicate that
some metaphors have been found to present hyperbolic overtones, which further
complicates the process of translation. The euphemistic hyperbole here can be
defined as a tone-downing device which essentially relies on strongly highlight-
ing and magnifying a desirable feature of the source domain referent.

The data analysis revealed that a total of 1740 (89.1%) metaphorical
euphemistic substitutes refer to death and dying, accounting for more than three
quarters of the total number of the euphemisms identified. Thus, these results
evidently accentuate the fact that metaphor is by far the most extensively used
and powerful mechanism in the euphemistic conceptualization of the taboo of
depth in Jordanian newspaper obituaries. Metaphor can be envisaged as a robust
device with a great potential for euphemization of the death taboo, a device
which is viewed “not only as a specific figure of speech but also, in its broader
sense, as the foundation of language itself” (Wheeler 1994:21). Conspicuously,
this can explain the pervasiveness of metaphorical formulation in referring to
the topic of death and dying in Jordanian newspaper obituaries. The analysis
also shows that over-sentimentalization, a characteristic feature of metaphorical
euphemization in Jordanian obituaries, is indissolubly linked to the socio-
cultural norms as well as to a fatalistic point of view. Thus, sentimental obituar-
ies can be considered very representative of typical Jordanian social and reli-
gious attitudes to death and dying.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of Cognitive Linguistics presented
earlier on (section 4), the metaphors identified in the 450 obituaries will be ana-
lyzed in terms of the cognitive mappings to which they may be linked, and then

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will be discussed from a translational viewpoint. This should immensely help understand the way the taboo of death is actually verbalized, conceived and perceived, and more importantly, mitigated. The data analysis isolated six recurrent consolatory conceptual metaphors rampant in Jordanian newspaper obituaries: (1) DEATH IS A JOURNEY, (2) DEATH IS A REST, (3) DEATH IS A REWARD, (4) DEATH IS A BLISSFUL LIFE (5) DEATH IS A LOSS, and (6) DEATH IS THE END. The linguistic instantiations of these metaphors were then coded and counted. It is worthwhile mentioning that overlap is sometimes unavoidable, as some of the examples provided here can be suggestive of more than one conceptual metaphor, but the main focus will be placed on the strongest, overriding conceptual one. It is also important to point out that a sizable number of metaphors conceptualize death as a positive event, as a sort of reward in Heaven after a strenuous and virtuous life on earth. Entrenched in Islamic faith, four out of the six conceptual metaphors just mentioned, conceptualize the domain of death in terms of positive domains, notably, as a journey, a rest, a reward, and a blissful life. There are only two mappings which view death in a grim fashion: a loss and the end. Evidently, most conceptual metaphors detected explicitly advance a positive value-judgment of death, which is mainly derived from the prevailing Islamic theology.

6.2.1. Death is a journey

Rather than being ornamentally used, the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS A JOURNEY, which portrays death as a journey in the usual sense known to any human being, enjoys a privileged status in statistical terms. The results show that this particular metaphor was the source of 498 (25.4%) euphemistic metaphorical substitutes. In this conceptual metaphor, human mortality is conceptualized as a departure from this mundane life to another life in the hereafter, i.e., death is understood in terms of a more concrete domain, as a journey, a correspondence which provides the basis for the verbal mitigation of the taboo. In other words, there is a projection from the source domain journey onto the target domain death and the set of correspondences that constitute this metaphor map our perception about journey onto our perception about death. That is, journey is associated with moving from one place to another. Not only can individuals go through a physical journey, but they also can experience a spiritual journey as it is evident in this metaphor. Thus, the pragmatic bottom line this metaphor is suggesting is that the deceased should not be visualized as an entity that has perished for good; rather, it should be looked upon as an entity that has moved on to another place or world.

This metaphorical conceptualization enables speakers to transfer various properties from the source domain of journey to the target domain death, i.e.,
this metaphorical mapping encompasses a bunch of interconnections as a corollary of utilizing the knowledge we possess about journeys to describe the taboo of death. Such interconnections may include the following: firstly, the act of dying corresponds to the act of leaving or migrating; secondly, like physical journeys, this spiritual journey has a final destination, which is the other world or Heaven; thirdly, like any living human capable of making a journey, the deceased is the one that takes the journey, and so, the deceased is considered to be somehow alive. Despite the fact that there seems to be a widening gulf between the source and target domains, the reader’s immediate unflawed understanding of the euphemistic function of the metaphor in question is warranted on the grounds that these conceptual interconnections are already part of the reader’s cognitive system (Lakoff 1993:210). It is really in this conception of the deceased as a living person that this metaphor fulfils its euphemistic function. This conceptualization springs from the orthodox Muslim belief that there is an after-life beyond death, where all people will be resurrected and, after the Day of Reckoning, will live for ever either in paradise or hellfire. Therefore, the journey in the metaphors spotted is viewed from a Muslim perspective as the result of an action performed by the external agent, Allah.

Such sub-mappings can be traced in the way in which death is verbalized in the obituary pages consulted. Indeed, the results revealed that there are only two instances that were exclusively used to buttress such a conceptualization. The first incorporated the key word transferred, and so two versions were encountered in the corpus of the study: the first is the metaphorical construction

\[
\text{(lit. he/she transferred to the mercy of Allah), and, the second is}
\]

\[
\text{(lit. he/she transferred to the neighbourhood of his Lord).}
\]

It is crucial to point out that, statistically, these two versions were dealt with as one instance, owing to the fact that metaphorization is achieved here through the employment of a shared component, the linguistic sign transferred. The recurrence of such a two-version metaphor scored 153 times, thereby representing 7.8%.

From a translational perspective, the expressions “he/she transferred to the mercy of Allah” or “he/she transferred to the neighbourhood of his/her Lord” do emerge as persistently fatalism-laden structures, displaying the influence of Islam in people’s daily interactions. Obviously, the two structures make a direct reference to Allah as the supernatural agent to whose mercy or neighbourhood people will terminate after death. It is worthy of note that the structure “transferred to the neighbourhood of his/her Lord” offers a metonymic basis, as it is usually conceived as “transferred to the limitless bounties bestowed by Allah”, and, undoubtedly, mercy comes on top of these. Thus, for Muslims these two versions convey, more or less, the same semantic and pragmatic imports. This powerful fatalism inherent in such instances can be said to present an uphill translation task. This daunting translation task stems from the fact that expres-
sions like “mercy of Allah” and “neighbourhood of Allah” mitigate the taboo of
death, but they are not stylistically marked expressions: they belong to the ordi-
nary, everyday register of Arabic. Therefore, astute Arabic translators would
normally be quite hesitant to venture down the path of preserving these charac-
teristic fatalistic elements, as literal translation here is pretty counterproductive.
Alternatively, Arabic translators could choose to render such expressions com-
municatively, functionally or idiomatically, i.e., they could use fatalism-free
expressions such as ‘die’, ‘pass away’, or even ‘kick the bucket’ if the context
of the situation allows. Yet, however communicative, functional or idiomatic a
translation may be, a semantic or translation loss of the fatalistic features is un-
avoidable. A possible compensatory procedure that the Arabic translator can
follow here is to supply the missing parts of the message paralinguistically by
footnoting the translation.

The second instance which substantiates the conceptual metaphor DEATH
IS A JOURNEY is the metaphorical structure

\[ \text{\textit{Arabic structure}} \]

This euphemistic-metaphoric structure exhibited a higher frequency than the previous two-version instance already dis-
cussed. The Arabic structure, which communicatively translates as “we are pos-
sessed by Allah and to Him we are returning”, recurred 345 times, thus, constitut-
ing 17.6% in an earnest bid to euphemize the context of death. Clearly, the
overall semantics of the Arabic structure places much emphasis on the
journey, with Allah being the final destination, thus implicitly assuming that Al-
lah originally put us on a journey to this worldly life, and now it is time for
packing and going back (to Him). The mere mention of this Arabic structure in
any formal obituary is sufficient enough to stand on its own to euphemistically
designate the idea of death.

On an equal footing, without underlying any stylistic shifts, this structure
invariably features in the daily social life, as it is informally used to talk about
the taboo of death. In addition to that, sometimes native Arabic speakers in
some Arabic countries such as Jordan and Syria exploit this structure in their in-
formal gatherings to express their sympathizing attitude to anyone exposed to
grave problems, catastrophes, loss of anything, etc. Likewise, this structure is
charged with fatalistic content which complicates the activity of translation.
Conspicuously, this structure not only embodies the explicitly fatalistic lexical
item \textit{Allah}, but also includes the anaphoric pronoun \textit{الله} (to Him), a bound word
which functions as an amplifier or a booster of (Muslim/Arab) agency. Being
saturated with such an Islamic fatalism, Arabic translators may find themselves
in a vicious circle as they would be required to translationally obliterate the
force of such fatalism, considering the fact that these unmarked Arabic fatalistic
stretches are considered marked and insipid in English.
The persistent high Muslim view of a blissful life rests on the belief that obeying *Allah* in all the observances He prescribed will guarantee a decent care-free life on earth, and a peaceful, bountiful, and everlasting existence in Heaven. This belief propelled the obituary writer to utilize this poignant aspect of Muslim religious spirituality to conceptualize death euphemistically in 355 (18.1%) metaphorical alternatives. The 355 metaphorical alternatives have been found to be encapsulated in only two recurrent instantiations, a fact which reflects the degree of consistency in Arabic discourses of death. The two instances include:

(a) ركض على الدمع (بَنَذَنّ الله طَالِع...)
lit. condoles X the mercy-receiver (with God’s permission) Y
* X offers his/her condolences for Y the mercy-receiver (God willing)

(b) ركض على الدمع (بَنَذَنّ الله حَسَبُه...)
lit. condoles X the forgiven (with God’s permission) Y
* X offers his/her condolences for Y the forgiven (God willing)

As can be observed, the examples in (a) and (b) above offer metaphorical substitutes that constitute clear examples of the metaphor *DEATH IS A BLISSFUL LIFE*, where the former occurred in 282 (14.4%) verbalizations, while the latter in 73 (3.7%). Notably, these examples present a cognitive mapping according to which the attributes of the source domain, i.e., a blissful life, transfer to the target domain, i.e., death. Under the firm Islamic belief in the resurrection of the dead, metaphors of hope and consolation that arise from this conceptual association, for instance, *the mercy-receiver* and *the forgiven*, cater for positive overtones to beautify death. That is, the euphemistic aspect of the source domain in the metaphorical substitutes proposed (i.e. *the mercy-receiver* and *the forgiven*) in this mapping is pretty conceivable, considering the idiosyncratic way of reasoning about death from an Islamic perspective, as is the case in the *DEATH IS A JOURNEY* metaphor discussed in 6.2.1.

On the basis of this conceptualization, the expressions *the mercy-receiver* and *the forgiven* not only can be interchangeably used to make an indirect reference to death, and thus inspire a positive view of death, but they also imply a positive view of earthly life which fuels mercy and forgiveness after death. This sub-mapping stems from the Islamic belief that the worldly life is always seen as the determinant of the type of retribution or life the person would live in the hereafter; that is, upon a good conduct and righteousness in the earthly life, the deceased would enjoy the multifarious bountiful graces of God, whereas, conducting a sinister and mischievous life would only result in chastisement beyond death. In a nutshell, this conceptual metaphor seems to suggest two possi-
bilities: a transition from worldly happiness into more heavenly happiness; or, alternatively, a transition from worldly misery into more misery after death. However, the metaphor explicitly highlights the first possibility, rather than the second in order to ameliorate the taboo of death.

Translating these metaphorical substitutes is fraught with special difficulties that essentially arise from the fatalistic force which permeates the source domain of the conceptual metaphor, as indicated above. As it can be noted, the Arabic source domains the mercy-receiver and the forgiven are unmistakably charged with fatalism, owing to the fact that they are followed by the discourse conditional if God permitted, which illustrates how, in the microscope of Muslims, everything is conditioned by the permission/will of Allah. Discourse conditionals such as these do belong to the general, unmarked register in Arabic, whereas their English formal counterparts are confined to the religious register. Consequently, if the Arabic translator endeavours to achieve naturalness in what he/she is supposed to relay, he/she would be compelled to search for pragmatic equivalents that are devoid of such a discordant aspect.

6.2.3. Death is a rest

A third major metaphor conceptualizing death and dying positively is DEATH IS A REST, the least frequent one, which occurred 54 times (2.7%). In this conceptual metaphor, death is seen as a desirable condition where the beloved is immersed in a relaxing life after an earthly existence. This impressive judgment of death culminates in the word rest, which was exploited in the relevant instances of this metaphor to be the source of euphemistic substitution. The underlying cognitive mapping of the metaphor in question boils down to equating death with rest and repose, i.e., there is a projection from the source domain (rest) onto the target domain (death), and the set of correspondences that make up this metaphor map our perception about rest onto our perception about death. That is, the ostensible cognitive correspondences suggest that rest is associated with freedom from all pain, sorrow, doubt, struggle, disappointment, passion, and even further desire: at rest; in peace; and, in a state of complete satisfaction. On the other hand, rest offers the inverse sub-mapping that the sort of life after death is free from minor and major imperfections such as fatigue, misery, and wretchedness. Such a conceptualization which establishes equilibrium between death and rest cannot but be considered a remarkable euphemistic reference to the taboo of death, mainly because this unifying correspondence ultimately results in the denial of death as such: the beloved is no longer dead; rather, he/she is enjoying a graciously relaxing, and comfortable life.

The conventional linguistic expression encoding this conceptual metaphor was the Qur’anic verse:

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To the righteous soul will be said: “O (thou) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord, – well pleased (thyself), and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then, among my Devotees! Yea, enter thou my Heaven!” (Ali 1983:1735).

The above Qur’anic structure clearly encapsulates the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS A REST already explained. It is also important to note that this metaphor involves a metonymic basis in the sense that if a soul is in (complete) rest and satisfaction, it automatically means that death has already occurred. Ali’s translation provided above can be said to be a faithful TL version in terms of meaning, style, and most importantly, the degree of fatalism characterizing the (Qur’anic) Arabic structure. In Muslim theology, this stage of the soul is the final stage of permanent bliss. Thus, the climax of the entire situation is “enter thou my Heaven!” – God’s own Heaven that believers reach only through God’s grace. This translation is quite convenient since it is situated within the religious context. However, this Qur’anic verse proved to be utilized in social contexts such as that of the obituary pages, which represents a contextual shift that may well invalidate the felicity and acceptability of such a scriptural translation.

In other words, the contextual variation this verse is undergoing (from religious to social) does seem to entail re-translating, not over-translating. It is obvious that this metaphor reflects an underlying religious (and cultural) model of death attributable to an outside agent, God (Allah). Given that the notion of agency is mutually inconsistent between Arabic and English, negotiating this supernatural experience to English is bound to ‘flare up’ a conflict which imposes communicative-pragmatic pressures on Arabic translators. Thus, any conventionalized equivalent TL version should take on board the demands of this particular communicative interaction and, as a result, lessen this agonizing agency. Indeed, the association between death as a rest from the hardships of our worldly life is closely connected to the DEATH IS A REWARD metaphor that will be taken up in the following section.

6.2.4. Death is a reward

The previous conceptual metaphor which understood death as a blissful life is closely related to the current metaphor, where death is conceptualized as a reward. This clearly positive conceptualization, which figured in 333 (17%) metaphorical occurrences, subscribes to the Islamic view that death can be a reward for those pious and virtuous individuals who have led exemplary lives. Therefore, death is envisaged here as a commendable event which, far from being harmful, appalling or even spooky, underpins the notion of retribution in its

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brightest side (for the deceased), and involves a glimmer of hope and enhances a profound consolation and relief for the bereaved family battered by the hurricane of death. This conceptual mapping has a metonymic basis (THE EFFECTS OF DEATH STAND FOR DEATH), owing to the fact that it depicts death in terms of its effects. Indeed, the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS A REWARD evokes death as ‘benign fate’, as an event which calls for exaltation and reverence. Under this cognitive schema, the encyclopedic knowledge we possess about the source domain, i.e., reward maps onto our knowledge about the target domain of death. Accordingly, the sole conceptual correspondence here is that the act of dying is a religious reward, pre-conditioned by leading a righteous life on earth. This figuratively binding interface, which basically springs from Islamic ideology, constitutes the source of the reward, the reason why it was employed to mitigate the target domain of death.

The adorable cognitive equation DEATH IS A REWARD was mainly reflected in one recurrent metaphorical euphemism which occurred 333 times, thus making up 17% of the total number of the metaphors detected:

ُتَفَعَّلَ اللَّهُ يَاوْمُ رَحْمُتِهِ وَأَسْكُنَهُ فَسِيحَ جَنَّاهُ
(lit. May Allah engulf him/her in His broader mercy and put him/her up in His spacious Heaven).

*May Allah shower him/her with His unending mercy and send him/her to His spacious paradise.*

The Arabic structure above is a clear example of an interactive metaphoric-euphemistic formulation in which the ‘unmentionable’ words such as ‘die’ and ‘death’ are vehemently avoided. On a closer scrutiny, it is self-evident that this formulation does not lend itself to easy rendering in view of the fact that the known Islamic fatalism found its way to such a metaphor by the virtue of having the explicit word *Allah*. Being fatalism-laden, this Arabic structure is hard for native speakers of English to process and to accept. This complexity would remain looming unless the fatalistic elements are replaced with agency-mitigating culture-sensitive equivalents, or, completely weeded out which, in any case, would procure irredeemable semantic loss. It is clear that fatalism represents a cultural barrier that exceeds the linguistic resources of the TL. A literal approach to deal with this insurmountable translation impasse is very likely to smuggle in a conceptually-alien TL version, and so it bears witness to this perplexity. At best, the Arabic translator is therefore forced to render the configurations of fatalism either functionally or ideationally.

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6.2.5. Death is a loss

The metaphor DEATH IS A LOSS is one of the two conceptual mappings which conceptualize death bleakly, thus expressing a negative value-judgment of death. According to this highly frequent metaphor, the source domain of death is understood in terms of loss in 372 (19.4%) of the instances identified. This conceptual association has a metonymic basis (i.e. THE EFFECTS OF DEATH STAND FOR DEATH) which highlights the negative side of death. In line with Bultnick (1998: 44–45), the conceptual grounds of this mapping emanates from the fact that life is seen as a valuable and precious object, and death is thus seen as the loss of this asset. Contrary to the previous conceptual mappings, the metaphorical substitutes that this particular figurative mapping supplies does not offer any degree of consolation or relief. Following Allan and Burridge (1991: 162), the conceptualization of death as loss delineates death as “malign fate”, as an event that goes beyond the control of human beings, reducing them to powerless creatures in the face of the invincible event.

Two conventional linguistic instantiations embracing this conceptual metaphor have been detected, the first of which emerges in the following Arabic linguistic formula:

س ينعي س... الفقيد المرحوم/المغفور له ص

X offers his/her condolences for the loss of (the mercy-receiver/the forgiven) Y

Notably, the euphemistic substitute loss, which was the most employed term in this domain with 192 (9.8%) occurrences, represents the peak of this ‘lamentable’ conceptualization. It is worthy to note also that the two fatalistic chunks the mercy-receiver or the forgiven are inseparably linked with the entire structure, i.e., the Arabic term الفقيد for the loss of (the beloved) must always be followed by one of these fatalistic terms in order to mitigate the impact of the term loss, which sounds too harsh if it were to stand on its own. As regards the second linguistic realization of the conceptual metaphor in hand, the obituary sections consulted offered the following conventional linguistic construction, which occurred 180 (9.2%) times:

والسلون

 Imploring God to abound his family with good patience and oblivion

As can be observed, the words patience and oblivion appear to embody the cognitive metaphorical-metonymic equation in which death is felt through its grave consequences, which require the assistance of Providence to give more patience and to enable oblivion to take place, all in a bid to come to terms with this horrible condition. The key to understanding the euphemistic force of this Arabic discourse is the central dynamic of attributing the overall...
event to God, which was self-evident in the elements (i.e. imploring God) that preceded the linguistic metaphor patience and oblivion. As indicated earlier on, the difficulties associated with translating the two instances above lie in the fact that, unlike Arabic, English systematically reduces agency by attributing divine authority to the speakers’ own speech acts. Thus, the Arabic (fatalistic) prototypical model of agency spelled out by the instances relevant to this conceptual metaphor plays a negligible role in English, and so it can be labelled as futile and baffling, a fact which throws up a serious challenge in interlingual communication.

6.2.6. Death is the end

The last central conceptual metaphor that paints a somewhat dark picture of the taboo can be manifested in the cognitive schema DEATH IS THE END, which provided the basis for perceiving and mitigating death and dying in 138 (7%) occurrences. Within this framework, end, the source domain, is mapped onto death, the target domain. This metaphorical schema seems to be organically linked to the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema (Lakoff 1987:275), according to which every experience can be viewed as a process with an initial state (source), a sequence of intermediate stages (path), and a final state (goal). On such grounds, death is conceptualized as the final stage which marks the end of one’s lifetime. Sharing some basic metaphorical entailments, the most prominent aspect of the combination of these associative schemas is end which enables this conceptualization to reach its climax. The conceptual matching between death and end was found to be realized by two conventional linguistic structures in Arabic, the first of which, a two-version structure, occurred 84 (4.3%) times:

\[
\text{بقلوب مؤمنة بقضاء الله وقدرته}
\]

\text{Having faith in the fate and destiny prescribed by Allah}

At a quick glance, the common thread among the two Arabic correspondences above is that they are all manifestations of fatalistic encounters with the divine in one form or another. For both the translators and audience, these signs testify to the continual presence of Allah and confirmation of the fact that He does intervene in the lives of all human beings who, according to his will and plans, are doomed to perish willy-nilly, i.e., these images seem to serve exclusively as reminders that God has ultimate power over humans. Thus, these divine encounters fulfil a mitigating function in the sense that believers can accommodate the disturbing thoughts pertinent to death by attributing the event to Allah, the Creator. The type of difficulty associated with translating this fatalism-saturated
structure requires no further emphasis here. The second formal linguistic structure epitomizing the DEATH IS THE END metaphor, with 54 (2.7%) occurrences, was the following:

وسيشيع جثمانه/ها إلى مثواه الأخير في...

And he/she will be buried in his/her last abode in...

Interestingly enough, this instance does not seem to exploit a cognitive domain that is alien to its metaphorical English equivalent, i.e., this metaphor is an essential part of mankind’s bodily experience, and so, it constitutes a shared cognitive environment between English and Arabic. The universality of this conceptualization facilitates understanding how the expression *مثواه الأخير* last abode can be a salubrious euphemistic option in this context. Though Arabic tends to specify more fatalistic components in its conventionalized linguistic expressions, this particular instance is fatalism-free, which is likely to assist in yielding a straightforward translation.

7. CONCLUSION

The present paper attempted to investigate metaphorical euphemistic conceptualization, verbalization, and translation of the taboo of death in Jordanian newspaper obituaries. The salient sentimentalization of death and dying provide a fertile soil for euphemistic metamorphization, providing a source of relief and consolation in the face of death. The high frequency of metaphorical substitutes proves that metamorphization is a powerful device in generating euphemistic language. In fact, out of a total of 1953 euphemistic substitutes, the results revealed that 1740 (89.1%) metaphorical euphemisms have been detected to designate death and dying. This proliferation of metaphorical euphemisms does seem to be characteristic of Arabic obituary discourse. To a lesser extent, other lexical and semantic devices, totalling 213 (10.9%) euphemistic substitutes were indispensable in downtoning the taboo of death. These include metonymy (1.3%), generic terms (2.4%), and legal terms (7.6%).

Following the influential “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), it was possible to provide a better explanatory account of euphemisms connected with death and dying, which was evident in the conceptual interconnections in the euphemistic figurative language of the obituary pages consulted. Indeed, this paper demonstrated that the “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” lends itself to universal application, and so, the model of Cognitive Linguistics can be said to be a workable and reliable framework for advancing a conceptual and practical understanding of the notion of death in its various contexts. The applicability of this model showed that the metaphors detected
project different kinds of conceptual mappings and image-schemas. Six salient conceptual metaphors, which entail further sub-mappings or ontological correspondences between the source and target domains, have been found to euphemize death and dying. These include: DEATH IS A JOURNEY (25.4%), DEATH IS A BLISSFUL LIFE (18.1%), DEATH IS A REST (2.7%), DEATH IS A REWARD (17%), DEATH IS A LOSS (19.4%), and DEATH IS THE END (7%). The overwhelming majority of the linguistic metaphors, the instantiations of the six conceptual metaphors, have been found to draw on Islamic beliefs in general. In this vein, most of the metaphorical instantiations appeared to epitomize the Islamic hope that the deceased will enjoy a better life, especially if he/she has led a virtuous and righteous worldly life.

Translationally, a descriptive difference between Arabic and English that is apparent is that Arabic tends to utilize more fatalistic language than English does in depicting death and dying. The fact that the euphemistic metaphorical language of death and dying is fatalism-ridden has been shown to present Arab translators with serious translation challenges, which can be attributed to the fact that Arabic and English offer conflicting prototypical models of agency. The analysis also indicated that Arabic fatalistic language figures heavily in the obituary pages consulted. This proliferation has a mitigating function, but, at the same time, lands the translator with the difficult task of negotiating the meaning between two contrasting cultural models. This is so as the fatalistic Arabic expressions belong to the general, unmarked register of the language, whereas their formal English counterparts, if they happen to exist, would exclusively belong to the religious register, which would sound odd and would not make sense in similar social contexts. As a corollary, the translator is compelled to opt for a communicative, functional or idiomatic rendition. Nonetheless, such translation strategies may not warrant maintaining the same degree of informativity of the SLT, not excluding stripping it from its dynamism, a fact which would procure an irredressable translation loss at any case.

References


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