

Strategies for Translating Culture-Specific Metaphor on Taboos in Abdo Khal's "Throwing Sparks"

Sameh S. Youssef *

Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Arts, Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt

Mohammed A Albarakati

King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract—This paper investigates the strategies of translating Arabic culture-specific metaphor on taboos into English in "Throwing Sparks" by Abdo Khal, the 2010 winner of the Arabic Booker prize. The paper introduces the Triangle of Culture-specific Metaphor on Taboos (TCMT), which explains the intertwined relations between using cultural elements in metaphor to express taboo in a literary work. The study aims to answer the question of how do translators tackle culture-specific metaphors on taboos, and duly suggests means to improve them. Samples from four taboo types are selected for analysis, namely sex, homosexuality, poverty and slavery. The study finds that the techniques used to render the culture-specific metaphor on taboos are keeping the metaphor when the target reader is thought to understand the culture element, changing the metaphor for another type using explicitation when the target reader is thought to misunderstand the culture element and demetaphorizing the metaphor when the topic is not seen as a taboo in the target culture. The study suggests solutions for the translation of culture-specific metaphors, especially when they have religious reference, as the translators tended to translate them literally, which resulted in producing absurd images that create flaws in the semantics of the utterance.

Index Terms—culture, metaphor, poverty, taboo, translation

I. INTRODUCTION

Chief among rhetorical devices is metaphor, which is conceptual by nature because an expression maps the source domain (tenor) onto the target domain (vehicle). A metaphor suggests that one thing is another for reasons of comparison and symbolism. In other words, a metaphor expresses the way life is embedded within the language, and therefore it is directly related to the speaker's culture. For example, the word 'horse' in 'John is a horse,' means that John is strong/fast. In this sentence, our knowledge about the tenor (John) is mapped onto our knowledge about horses (vehicle), and thus a metaphor is created. Newmark (1985) maintains that functions of the metaphor include the vivid and complex description of entities, objects and concepts, and entertaining the audience in an aesthetic way. While metaphor is seen as a skillful way to strengthen the meaning, translators must pay more attention while tackling it as languages and their rhetorical devices may differ, especially in a language pair like Arabic and English.

Arabic literature in general is rich and it gets stronger as new players join the literary scene. In addition to the traditional Arabic literary poles, such as Egypt and Lebanon, new players started a few decades ago to appear and reshape the literary scene, such as Saudi Arabia, which has a rich tradition of poetry and storytelling. Saudi modern literary movements are incorporating new forms of expression and experimentation, as the Saudi literary scene has been experiencing growth and diversification in recent years, with a greater number of writers, poets, and literary events emerging. Since the millennium, Saudi literature has witnessed a revolution in the two senses of the word: development and rebellion. Recent developments in the Saudi literary scene may be due to several factors, including increased government support, the rise of social media as a platform for literary expression, and a growing desire among Saudi authors to address social issues in their writings, according to Alfraidi et al. (2022). The genre of Saudi novel has developed significantly in recent years, as Asiri (2022) claims that Saudi novelists resort to use symbolism in their novels to express their will to rebel against their communities, but in a soft way to allow the text to reach the targeted recipients. Perhaps one of the prominent examples of this is the controversial "Army Besharar" (*Throwing Sparks*) by the Saudi writer Abdo Khal. First published in Arabic in 2010 and won the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction (the "Arabic Booker"), the novel was banned for few years in Saudi Arabia due to its bold content and bitter criticism of the Saudi society. It took four more years for the translated English version of the novel to see the light. *Throwing Sparks* is translated into English by two translators, with a vast experience in literary translation: Maia Tabet, a Lebanese-born Arabic-English literary translator who lived in Lebanon, India, England and the United States and

* Youssef is also an associate professor at King Abdullaziz University, Saudi Arabia.

Michael Scott, an American Arabic-English translator, who lived in Lebanon and Qatar. The novel is selected as the corpus of this study as it discusses the taboos in modern Saudi society, and duly it uses symbolism, metaphor and euphemism to gain access to the Arab reader.

Khal's *"Throwing Sparks"* tells the story of Tariq Fadel and two of his friends, who are raised in severe poverty amidst sexual violence and abuses in a slum district in Jeddah, known as the "Firepit" and inhabited by poor workers and fishermen. When a luxurious palace is built near the firepit, the three friends find their way to serve the landlord, who is known as "the Master". As they switch their lives from the miserable poverty of the firepit to the vulgar corruption of the heavenly Palace, Tariq becomes the Master's punisher, who rapes his male opponents brutally. The story develops as the three friends have different roles in the Palace, disclosing all sorts of corruption and slavery.

To narrate a dark side of life in Jeddah, Khal uses a language that is brimful with metaphor to express topics that are widely seen as taboos in the Arab context. While a taboo is simply defined as something restricted or prohibited by customs and traditions and can be seen as a topic that strays from social norms and generates the risk of punishment and shame, Fershtman et al. (2011) add that a taboo is an unthinkable action. Taboos in the novel range from sex, homosexuality, poverty, corruption, death and slavery among others. The intensity and diversity of taboos explain Khal's excessive use of metaphor to be able to deliver his messages to the reader. There is a direct relation between the excessive use of metaphor and the taboos in the novel: the more intense the taboos, the more intense the metaphors. There are three intertwined elements in Khal's writings about taboo: a taboo (such as sex), is expressed by a figurative language (such as metaphor), which uses culture-specific elements as their vehicle (such as religion), and this in turn expresses the taboo. This intertwined relation between the use of culture-specific metaphor to express a taboo is introduced in this paper as the **Triangle of Culture-Specific Metaphor on Taboo (TCMT)**; it is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

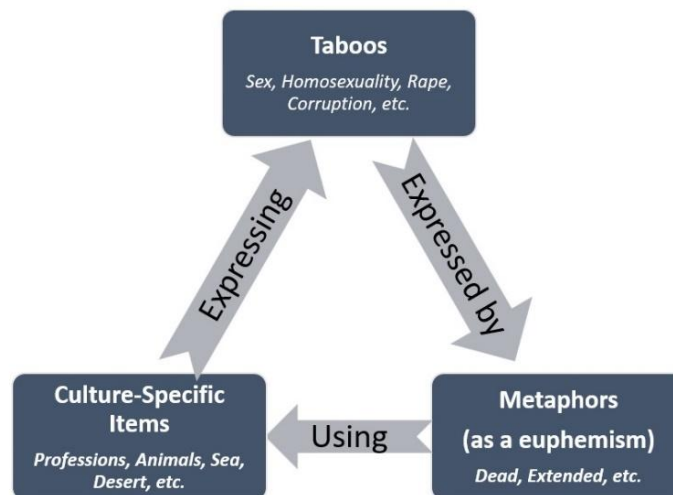


Figure 1: Triangle of Culture-Specific Metaphor on Taboo (TCMT)

Metaphor translation in general requires the translator to be very well-acquainted with the source and target cultures to produce a suitable equivalent in terms of the message, lexis, syntax, style, and cultural elements, while maintaining the aesthetic value of the text. Zauberga (2005) maintains that there is an asymmetrical cultural exchange when translating a literary work from one culture, i.e., Saudi culture, into a major culture, English in this study, claiming that translation usually becomes in favor of the major culture. This is evident on the format of the English version of the novel, which is divided into two sections, instead of three in the Arabic original, just to name one of several points that are worth investigating in further research on the translation of the novel.

Therefore, this paper probes the techniques used to translate the taboos in Khal's *Throwing Sparks* that are expressed by culture-specific metaphors and subsequently suggests how to refine them to balance between fluency and fidelity. The dilemma of this issue in literary translation is that if domestication techniques are used to level out cultural differences to ensure that the text is read as an original (fluency), it comes at the expense of the source text (fidelity). Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do literary translators tackle culture-specific metaphors on taboos?
2. What are the suggestions to improve the translation of culture-specific metaphors on taboos?

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Translating metaphor attracted the attention of several translation scholars. For example, Nida (1964) introduced formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence; later, Nida and Taber (1969) changed the former to be formal correspondence, which tends to focus on the form and content of the message, suggesting that the target text should be

closer to the source text as much as possible, while the latter is changed to be functional equivalence, seeking an equivalent effect as the message should be tailored to fit the linguistic and cultural contexts of the target text receiver as it is sometimes inevitable to make adjustments to the target text so that it suits the target reader. Venuti (1995) suggests the notions of invisibility and cultural colonization, which imply fluency vs. fidelity as the latter allows the reader to know the cultural and linguistic differences of the translated text. Meanwhile, Newmark (2002) suggests several ways for metaphor translation, ranging from maintaining the metaphor through altering it and finally to giving up the metaphor.

The literature is generally rich with studies on literary metaphor translation. Park (2009) investigates techniques of translating culture-related metaphors, concluding that priority is given to the transfer of meaning rather than the form. However, Park stresses the significance of retaining a metaphor in the translation by reproducing the image in the target text, explaining that a metaphor may not be identical to the source metaphor. The study suggests that when it is impossible to create an equivalent metaphor, the problem can be solved through focusing on cross-cultural translation. In a study on translating metaphor in the English-Chinese language pair, Shi (2014) maintains that there are two main approaches for translating a metaphor, namely: domestication and foreignization, stressing that the cultural element is paramount in the process of translating metaphor. Farghal and Mansour (2020) studied the English translation of Arabic metaphorical expressions in one of the novels of Naguib Mahfouz. The study concludes that maintaining the metaphor's aesthetic value is indispensable and this can be achieved through providing a comparably creative paradigm in the target text. Looking at the translation of metaphor from a different perspective, Ghazala (2012) tackles it as a cognitive stylistic conceptualization, stating that recent developments in linguistics and translation theory led to the emergence of a new cognitive stylistics perspective on translating metaphors. The study concludes that a metaphor reflects and constructs the concepts, attitudes and ideologies of the literary writer, and therefore it should be handled as a conceptualized cognitive figure of rhetoric to discover unexplored dimensions of meaning. For the best knowledge of the researchers, research on translating metaphor to express taboos are scarce, if any, and for this reason the study investigates how taboos are expressed by metaphorical language in '*Throwing Sparks*', which has not received the due attention from researchers despite its significance, especially when it comes to investigating the novel's English translation. Scarce studies investigated the novel from only a literary perspective. Algahtani (2016) examines the effect of socio-cultural elements on readers of selected contemporary Saudi novels, including Khal's *Throwing Sparks*. She maintains that readers' responses to Saudi novelists are marked with a strong belief that they rebel against the Saudi conservative culture, claiming that some Saudi novelists touch what is perceived as sensitive issues, leading to the ban of several novels on the grounds that they may pose a threat to the mainstream Saudi ideology. Al-Mahous (2021) focuses on the unique narrative style of Khal, while Al-Anzi (2021) probes the implicit taboos and cultural patterns in the novel, including sexual drive and moral corruption. Meanwhile, Sulaimani and Saadouni (2022) discuss the novel as manifesting rebellion and exposing the unspoken.

Previous studies on the novel show that there are research gaps that need to be bridged. Several researchers agree that the novel is rebellious and discusses bold topics and taboos, yet no study is found on the translation of the novel in general and metaphor translation of the taboos in particular, hence the significance of this study.

III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Because the novel abounds in figurative language, the data selection process excludes having a quantitative approach as the novel has hundreds of metaphors that are beyond the scope of this study. Instead, samples of culture-specific metaphors are selected for analysis as they represent four taboo themes: Sex, Homosexuality, Poverty, and Slavery. Because the main objective of this study is not studying metaphor per se but rather studying implications of its translation, the following are brief definitions of the metaphor types used in the analysis:

- 1- Primary Metaphor: Comparing two items to strengthen the meaning.
- 2- Complex Metaphor: Combining more than one primary metaphor.
- 3- Extended Metaphor: Using the same metaphor repeatedly throughout the text.
- 4- Creative Metaphor: Using a unique and original comparison that the text receiver can understand.
- 5- Conceptual Metaphor: Mapping one idea onto another.
- 6- Submerged Metaphor: Implying the tenor or vehicle rather than stating it explicitly.
- 7- Mixed Metaphor: Combining two metaphors in a manner that appears absurd.
- 8- Allegory: Extending the metaphor to be one of the themes.
- 9- Simile: Using a connecting word in the metaphor.
- 10- Antithesis: Comparing opposites using metaphor.
- 11- Metonymy: Referring to something or someone using an associated thing.

This paper adopts a functional analysis model, based on the model proposed by Toury (1995) for literary translation, which can be applied to non-literary texts. The model is based on the norms and the concept that translation does not function as an independent and isolated text; instead, a translated text is located through clear parameters pertaining to the target literature most of the times, and to the source literature when needed. In the analysis section, one main Arabic example is illustrated, followed by its literal translation as suggested by the researchers and followed by the actual English translation. The context of the utterance is introduced when needed and the culture-specific metaphor is

analyzed; then, the translation of the metaphor is discussed. When required, an alternative translation is suggested. After the analysis of the main example, other examples on the taboo are briefly introduced and discussed, due to limitation of space. Comments on the translations are used in the discussion and conclusion sections as recommendations for further research, echoing a statement by Lambert (1998, p. 132) that such comments are “interesting not so much in themselves but as objects of research”.

IV. ANALYSIS

A. Sex Taboo

Sex is one of the prominent taboos in the Arab culture. Saudi Arabia has strict laws regarding sexual behavior and pre-marital sex, while public displays of affection are considered illegal and can result in severe punishments. While social norms and cultural customs play a significant role in shaping the country's views on sexuality, individuals are expected to abide by strict codes of conduct. Public discussion or reference to sex is considered taboo and is generally avoided, let alone writing about the topic. Indirect language may be used in place of direct references to sexual acts, such as using the word (sleep) or (bed) as a soft alternative to (intercourse).

Example 1:

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Arabic Example | أمها يسرت لها هذه المهمة بإيمانها أن الأثني خشبة صالحة لأي من المسامير المعوجة، أو المستقيمة، ولا يهم أن تكون الخشبة عريضة، أو رفيعة، طرية أو يابسة، طويلة أو صغيرة طالما صاحب المسامير يقدر ثمن انغراس مسماره في تلك الخشبة. (ص. 98) |
| Literal Translation | Her mother had facilitated the task for her as she believed that a woman is a wooden plank that is fit for any nail , whether crooked or straight. It did not matter whether the plank was thick or thin, hard or soft, or long or short, as long as the nail owner evaluates the price of instilling his nail into the plank. |
| English Translation | Her mother had led the way. Women are like wooden planks , she told Souad, ever ready for a nail , be it crooked or straight. It did not matter whether the plank was thick or thin, whether it was hard or soft, long or short, as long as the owner of the nail could pay the price of hammering it into the wood. (p. 89) |

The context of this utterance is that the main character and narrator of the novel, Tariq, summons remembrances of the journey of his fall. When his aunt encouraged him indirectly to flirt with Souad (96) (هذه هي التي فيها السمن. ص. 96) (*Now that's what I call meat on the bone*, p. 87,) the two children agreed to play what the girl calls the “bride and groom” game in a dark part of a ruined house. She bargained for one riyal, and when he was about to sodomize the girl, lights went on and it was a scandal.

The figurative language in the Arabic text can be classified as a complex metaphor. The writer combines the culture-specific vehicles of the two metaphors. Instead of explicitly describing the ‘equipment’ of both the boy and the girl, he used this complex metaphor so that the nail refers to the boy’s organ, while the wooden plank refers to the girl’s body (the two vehicles); Tariq’s organ and Souad’s body are then the two tenors. Therefore, what the two children was about to do is mapped onto the concept of a nail hammered into a wooden plank, and duly creating a complex metaphor. According to the settings of the novel, the neighborhood is poor and several dwellers of the alley work in low-profile professions such as fishermen and the crafts associated with this job, like carpenters. Therefore, the writer chooses to use culture-specific elements that suit the settings of the novel and the place of the incident. Perhaps if the same situation is meant for two persons from generation Z, the writer would have changed the vehicles to be a wi-fi antenna and a USB port. This metaphor has two main functions, namely creating an aesthetic value of the text and expressing the taboo through euphemism, which is a soft, or rather indirect, expression that replaces a harsh or unacceptable one.

The English translation deals with this complex metaphor in a different way. In the first metaphor, where the girl is the tenor and the wooden plank is the vehicle, the translators rendered it as a simile (*Women are like wooden planks*), while in the second metaphor, where the boy is the tenor and the nail is the vehicle, the translators kept the metaphor, which is classified as a creative metaphor. The translators added a well-chosen word from the carpentry domain (hammering) to augment the overall image. Therefore, the complex metaphor in the source text is separated in the target text into a simile and a creative metaphor.

It is worth mentioning that this metaphor occurs throughout the novel three times. In the Arabic text, the first instance comes immediately in the paragraph preceding the example above stating “حتى إذ هممت بغرس مسماري” (p. 98) but the English translation reads: “*We were getting to the part where I had to push into her*” (p. 88). The third instance comes later in the novel when Tariq remembers Souad “عادت سعاد إلى مخيلتي وهي تساومني على ريال صحيح مقابل غرس مسماري في خشبتها” (p. 175) and the English translation reads: “*I was reminded of young Souad and how the child-sized seductress haggled over one riyal before accepting my nail in her plank*” (p. 166). In the Arabic text, the metaphor is preserved throughout the novel, creating an extended metaphor by using the same tenors and vehicles. However, the case in the English translation is different. In the first instance, the translators demetaphored the figure of speech completely, as the English reader may find the metaphor absurd so that the image will not go through. In the second instance, as explained above, the text clarifies the tenors and vehicles, and the translators even changed the first part of the complex metaphor to a simile for elaboration. In the third instance, the metaphor is maintained. Nida (1964) supports this approach, stating that priority is given to deliver the meaning, and sometimes departures from the formal structure is strongly desirable.

The novel is loaded with examples of culture-specific metaphors on the taboo of sex. Another example is when the Master throws a wild party at the Palace, and he is described as scrutinizing the dancers to select one for himself. This is

expressed in Arabic as “وهو يتفحص أجساد الراقصات بغية الوصول إلى أكثرهن تموجاً لينصب رايته في أمواجها المتكسرة” (p. 22). The literal translation for this utterance is: (He examines the bodies of the dancers to find who has the most undulating body to erect his banner in her broken waves). This is a complex metaphor, that has two metaphors: the first is a primary metaphor as the author maps the shape of the bodies of dancers (tenor) onto the concept of waves (vehicle). The second metaphor is a mixed metaphor, where two metaphors are combined in an absurd manner. The Master’s victory and his equipment in a sexual intercourse is mapped onto the concept of erecting a banner of victory, while the woman’s body shape/sway and her surrender is mapped onto the concept of broken waves. The overall metaphor uses cultural-specific elements, such as the wave, as the city of Jeddah is a coastal city. The overall metaphor has two functions: euphemizing and adding an aesthetic dimension to the text. The English translation of this metaphor is: “*The Master is (...) scrutinizing the dancers to decide which of the bodies he would most like to ride*” (p. 12). The metaphor in the English translation is a primary one, making a woman (tenor) something to be ridden (vehicle). The function of the English metaphor is to add an aesthetic dimension to the text through using a figurative language. Therefore, in this example, the metaphor is changed in terms of length and elements.

B. Homosexuality Taboo

In most Arab societies, homosexuality is not only a taboo but a sin and a crime that may generate “honor-killing” by family members. Although the Arab culture rejects homosexual practices based on cultural and religious grounds, its existence is not contested. The novel talked extensively on homosexuality between men, and there is not a single account on female homosexuality. In most cases, Khal hints that this practice is exercised as a result of social and psychological reasons: as a punishment, as a proof that someone is a hunter not a prey, and to a much lesser extent as a desire. As the English translation of the novel targets different audience whose perception of homosexuality is softer than the Arabs’, this taboo is selected for analysis to check how this may affect the translation of culturally-bound metaphor on homosexuality.

Example 2:

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Arabic Example | في كل حالات التعذيب التي مارستها ضد الآخرين كان ثمة جسدان وروحان، كل منهما يتعذب بصاحبه، كـمفتاح وقفل صدئ وبينهما لزوجة تطري التصلب وتنتهي انغلاق القفل بهزيمة منكرة ليبقى المفتاح معلقاً منتظراً مهمة أخرى ليؤدي دوره. (ص. 10) |
| Literal Translation | In all torture cases I practiced against others, there were always two bodies and two souls, each of which was tortured by its owner, <i>like a key and a rusty lock</i> , and between them there was a lubricant to soften any obstinacy to end the closure of the lock with disgraceful defeat; the key was then safe-kept waiting for another task to perform its role. |
| English Translation | My job was to loosen the hardest bond <i>like a key bearing down on a rusty, seized-up lock</i> . After which, the key was hung up for safe-keeping until the next time it was needed. (p. xii) |

This example comes at the outset of the novel and it is the point when the novelist makes a flashback so that it is repeated near the end of the novel with some changes in the lexicon and the narrative style. This situation shocks the readers at the end because Tariq is forced to ‘torture’ his friend Issa. In this example, Khal employs simile, using the homosexual intercourse as the tenor and duly mapping it onto the vehicle, which is the key and lock. In the Arab as well as most international cultures, a key is a symbol of power and authority: when a warring party surrenders, it gives up the key of the citadel or city to the victorious party. It can also be used for abstract concepts like saying ‘key to her heart’ or ‘key to success’. Meanwhile, a lock denotes privacy. Describing a lock as ‘rusty’ means that the lock is intact or has never been used. The key and lock, together, draw an image that has an aesthetic value, while euphemizing what is described.

The English translation maintains the exact simile, and used the same vehicles, i.e., key and lock. However, the translators omitted a part of the original simile for unknown reasons. To augment the image of the rusty lock, which means it has never been used, the Arabic text says (وبينهما لزوجة تطري التصلب وتنتهي انغلاق القفل), which literally means (*between them there was a lubricant to soften any obstinacy and ends the closure of the lock*). The researchers believe that ignoring this part is a mistake because it overlooks a part of the overall image, especially that using a lubricant is a common practice in opening rusty locks, while it can be used in sexual practices. This concurs with the views of Nida (1964) stating that the content must be preserved at any cost.

There are several instances where Khal expresses homosexuality using plenty of culture-specific metaphors. For example, in the first paragraph of the novel, the Arabic text reads (وهو يراني أوسع فجوات خصومه) (p. 7), which literally translates (*while he watched me widening/stretching the holes of his rivals*). The main function of this Arabic metaphor is euphemism. On the other hand, this metaphor is translated into English as (*while he watched me sodomise his rivals*) (p. ix). The translation method is demetaphorizing the metaphor. The translators did not find it offensive to the target reader to use a direct term, i.e., *sodomise*, to express an idea that is seen as a taboo in the culture of the source text. Landers (2001, p. 85) states that sometimes “the best way of dealing with opaque items in the source culture is not to translate them at all”, adding that this does not mean to omit them, but rather to express them in a manner understood by the target readers.

Throughout the novel, Khal uses the word (ظهر), which literally means (*back*) as a metonymy to (anus/butt/bottom). In most instances, the word is not translated as a metonymy, but rather the meaning is transferred directly without any euphemism.

In the novel, Tariq has an alias of “*ناطور النفخ*” (p. 81), which literally means (*Blower / Blowing Motor*). This alias is expressive as the word “*نفخ*” (*blowing*) has a sexual connotation in the Arab culture. The word “*blow*” does not have the same sexual connotation in English and thus it is translated into English as “*the Hammer*” (p. 91), which is a very successful domestication of the term.

During a study group lesson in the mosque, the sheikh once said “*هناك فوارق بين الكبائر إلا أن ما يقترفه بعضكم يهز عرش الرحمن*” (p. 102) and it is translated as “*But not all sins are created equal. The sins of some among us today are enough to shake the very throne of the Creator*” (p. 93). Although the translators tended to use domestication techniques throughout the novel, they were hesitant to do the same when it comes to references to Islam. It is in the Islamic traditions that acts of homosexuality cause the anger of God. In popular culture, this is expressed metaphorically as “*shaking the throne of the Merciful*”. Therefore, the source text metaphor employs intertextuality to refer to homosexuality, whereas the English translation does not make any clear reference to homosexuality. Suggested solutions for such a problem can be using explicitation, which is clarifying in the target text what is implied in the source. A suggested translation for this example is: “*But not all sins are created equal. The sin of homosexuality committed by some among us today is reported to be enough to shake the very throne of the Creator*”.

C. Poverty Taboo

Gandhi once described poverty as the worst form of violence, hence the taboo. Poverty is a vague concept because describing a person as poor is usually based on economic factors only, while it should be based on multiple dimensions, including the social, intellectual and psychological. Although the topic is sensitive, Khal has a wide margin of freedom to express poverty in the Saudi society, especially that the events started decades ago. Poverty is tackled in the novel as one of its main themes and a prompter of actions and reactions, such as driving the inhabitants of the poor neighborhood to seek work at the Palace through changing their careers and tempting the poor young men to join the staff in the Palace.

Example 3:

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Arabic Example | ويتحول الخدم بجزائهم المزرقة إلى كائنات غير مرئية وهم يتنقلون بين المدعوين بالمشروبات، والفواكه، والحلويات ذات الأصناف، والأشكال المتنوعة، يتحركون من غير أن تمسهم عيون الحضور كبيوت حينما المواجه للقصر، بيوت تبدو من داخل القصر كما لو كانت قامت انحنت في حالة ركوع دائم لم يؤذن لها برفع هاماتها. (ص. 18) |
| Literal Translation | <i>Servants</i> , in their brocaded uniforms, turn into invisible creatures, moving between guests bearing different types and sorts of beverages, fruits and sweets. They move without being touched by the eyes of the attendees, like the houses of our neighborhood, which lies in front of the Palace. From inside the Palace, <i>those houses appear as if they were statures bent in a state of permanent bowing</i> that have not been allowed to raise their heads. |
| English Translation | <i>Servants</i> in brocaded suits glided all but invisibly among the guests, bearing trays of beverages and fruits and all sorts of desserts. No one cast so much as a glance at their movements, and they remained to all intents and purposes <i>as unseen as the houses of our neighborhood</i> across the way. From the Palace, <i>our houses looked like prostrated servants</i> forbidden to straighten up. (p. 8) |

Few lines before this example, Khal describes the wild parties held at the Palace, and soon switches to compare all the manifestations of richness at the Palace to the poverty-stricken neighborhood. This utterance has multiple metaphors, starting with the simile between the servants and the houses, as both of them are unnoticed and unseen. The figure of speech that best describes poverty is the simile “*بيوت تبدو من داخل القصر كما لو كانت قامت انحنت في حالة ركوع دائم لم يؤذن لها برفع هاماتها*”, which is translated as “*From the Palace, our houses looked like prostrated servants forbidden to straighten up*”. In this simile, the author employs religion as a culture element. Houses are the tenor and the movement of bowing in the Muslim’s prayers is the vehicle. The status of the tenor is mapped onto the concept of submission to denote full surrender.

The English translation kept the simile, making a slight change to strengthen the meaning. In the Arabic text, the word “*يركع*”, which literally means (bow) is often used in a religious context, but the English verb (bow) can be expressed in other Arabic words to denote the action of bowing such as (*ينحني*). To add an Islamic-bound effect to the English simile to keep pace with the Arabic one, the word (bow) is changed to (prostrate), a word that is more affiliated with the Islamic prayers.

The writer uses religion-specific elements extensively throughout the book to denote poverty. These references include the following metaphor: “*حين كان أهل الحي يطوفون بأمنياتهم حول القصر*” (p. 34), which is translated into English as “*when the neighborhood’s inhabitants swirled around the Palace full of hopes and dreams*” (p. 23). The conceptual metaphor in this example is expressed through mapping the act of the poor people of the neighborhood who walk around the Place, having plenty of wishes and aspirations, onto the idea of circling on foot around the Kaabah (*tawaf*) where Muslims pray to God to fulfil their wishes. The English translation fails to transfer this meaning, and only those who have a solid knowledge of Islam may interpret the English metaphor as intended. The solution can be using explicitation through, for example, changing the conceptual metaphor to a simile or changing the metaphor by using elements that can be easily understood by the target reader. A suggested translation for this example using a simile is: “*when the neighborhood’s inhabitants used to circle around the Palace as if they circle around the Holy Kaabah in their pilgrimage, full of hopes and dreams*”.

Other examples of culture-specific metaphors on poverty include “الخروج من صحراء الأحلام” (p. 49), a submerged metaphor that maps the difficulty of achieving the dreams of the poor young men onto the concept of desert aridity and toughness. The translators maintained the metaphor with its culture-specific elements because the hard nature of the desert is universal and target readers can grasp the intended meaning easily. It is translated as “to leave the desert of dreams” (p. 38).

Furthermore, Khal uses antithesis, not only in the vocabulary but also in concepts, to augment the meaning. For example, he uses allegory to compare between the poor neighborhood and the Palace on one hand, and hell and heaven on the other. To create this allegory, there is a clear intertextuality with texts that represent all the monotheist religions, a matter that poses less challenges to the translators. Allegory is a skillful way to tell history and events, as Youssef (2014, p. 98) maintains that “it poses challenges to translators who are required to transfer the meaning to recipients from other cultures and backgrounds”. It is worth mentioning that because Saudi Arabia has never been colonized, *Throwing Sparks* is best interpreted as a postmodern artwork. Features of postmodernism include metafiction, which is the willing suspension of disbelief, and therefore the novel poses the question: is the Palace really heaven and is the neighborhood really hell? Expressing this doubt in several instances, an illustrative example says: “الآن، ومن داخل القصر، “أنظر إلى جهة النار، وأحلم بالعودة إليها، أتوق إليها بنفس الرغبة التي كنت فيها شغوقاً بدخول الجنة” (p. 23). This metaphor, which is part of the allegory, is translated as: “Once on the inside, I remembered the Firepit – the old neighborhood – and dreamed of going back. I yearned for it with the same longing that once propelled me so obsessively to enter Paradise” (p. 23). In this example, the translators maintained the metaphor and kept the same tenor and vehicle. As we discuss here a feature of postmodernism, the following remark is not directly connected to metaphor translation, but rather to the translation strategy adopted by the translators. The novel illustrates other features of postmodernism such as temporal distortion. It is observed that the translators failed in several instances to maintain the original timeline, domesticating the format of the novel to look like a traditional English novel. Perhaps this justifies the reason the translators completely ignored translating a significant paragraph in the novel, which justifies the temporal distortion. It reads “وكلما عدت لترتيب أحداث حياتي، وجدت نفسي عاجزاً عن فعل ذلك، حياتي تقع من الأحداث تومض في ذاكرتي فأخلط أزمانها ومواقعها” (p. 268), which literally means “Whenever I return to put my life events in order, I find myself unable to do this. My life is like spots of events that flash in my memory so that their times and places are blurred”.

D. Slavery Taboo

Officially, there is no slavery in Saudi Arabia since 1962 but, like anywhere else in the globe, slavery practices exist. A despicable violation of all human rights, slavery is part and parcel of human history. In fact, the English term “slave” is taken from the fact that the Slavic people were among the first people to be enslaved. Slavery is paradox: while people believe that all men are created equal, they still advocate slavery practices, which is known as “Modern Slavery”; that is, exploiting a person in a forced labor, forced marriage or debt bondage and the enslaved person cannot refuse for fear of power abuse or violence. *Throwing Sparks* discusses the above-mentioned three types of modern slavery, with a focus on forced labor due to power abuse.

Example 4:

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Arabic Example | كنت كالطائرة الورقية ألق في الفضاء، وخط رفيع يمسكني به، وبمجرد جذبته إليه، أهوى، وأكون مغفراً بالتراب (ص. 8) |
| Literal Translation | <i>I was like a kite</i> flying in space, attached to him by a thin thread. As soon as he pulled it, I fell and became full of dust. |
| English Translation | He held me tightly <i>as if flying a kite</i> – all he had to do was tug on the fine thread and I would tumble down and wait, covered in dust (p. x) |

In this example, Tariq talks about his relation with the Master. Completely enslaved, this figure of speech is a simile that embodies Tariq as a kite whose fate is decided by the Master who has full control over him/the kite. The simile in the Arabic text employs culture-specific element, as it is common to see in the sky of the beaches of Jeddah scores of kites flown, both in summer and winter.

This figure of submission and slavery is translated into English as a simile, using the same element, the kite as a vehicle. Maintaining the figure of speech is due to the universality of flying a kite, which means that the target audience can grasp the meaning easily.

To augment the idea of being enslaved in a forced labor, Khal adds after few lines the sentence “السمة الصغيرة عندما تعلق في شباك صياد بيحر بقاربه جاذباً شبكته من خلفه، تفكر في أمرين: التخلص من الفخ الذي وقعت فيه، أما أعز أمنية فهي أن يقف القارب في مكانه” (p. 12), which is translated as “A small fish caught in a net behind a fishing boat yearns to escape the trap. But the boat needs to stop long enough for the fish to break free” (p. x). This complex metaphor is used to augment the idea of slavery as in both languages the tenor in the first metaphor is Tariq while the vehicle is the small fish, whereas slavery is the tenor in the second metaphor and the fishing net is the vehicle. The whole image uses culture-specific elements relevant to fishing, which is the main profession of the inhabitants of the neighborhood.

Throwing Sparks does not deal only with forced labor as a manifestation of slavery, but it tackles the issue of forced marriage, as illustrated by the story of the marriage of Samira, and also debt bondage, which drove Issa to lose his brains. Khal also tackles the issue of being enslaved in love. He writes: “وعيسى بلغ مرحلة السجود من أجل عينيها ونسى أن السجود” (p. 328), which is translated as: “Issa has already reached the point of prostration before Mawdie, ignoring the fact that prostration is an inescapable part of enslavement” (p. 300). In the Arabic text, Khal uses

a culture-specific element, which is prostration as performed in Muslims' prayers, as the vehicle to denote Issa's love and submission, which is the tenor. Prostration in prayers is a stage of total submission, and therefore it is used metaphorically to denote how much Issa loves Mawdie. The English translation uses the same metaphor and the same element, which generates an utterance that can be easily seen as a translationese. There are several solutions to this challenge: one is to maintain the same aura of the religious cultural element, so the translators can change the word "prostration" to "worshipping", as the verb "worship" is used to mean strong love, and at the same time the term shall maintain the aura of the original image; another solution is to use the word "kneeling", as it denotes total submission and the target reader is familiar with it.

V. DISCUSSION

After the analysis of some examples of culture-specific metaphors on the selected taboos, this section highlights some significant remarks in the attempt to answer the two research questions. The first research question asks about the means literary translators use to tackle culture-specific metaphors on taboos. The analysis shows that when tackling sensitive issues and taboos, metaphor can be used as a means of euphemism (Fernández, 2011; Pfaff et al., 1997). It allows the meaning to pass softly and indirectly to the reader without violating any social or moral standards. In *Throwing Sparks*, the translators retained – to a large extent – the aesthetic value of the culture-specific metaphors on taboos, employing different strategies such as maintaining the metaphor, or changing the metaphor to a simile. The translators, therefore, worked to reproduce a comparably creative and aesthetic paradigm in the English translation. When tackling issues that are considered sensitive by Arab readers, the writer uses culture-specific metaphors. However, when the translators see that the topic is not a taboo to the target reader, they employed three strategies: 1) demetaphorizing the figure of speech and transferring the meaning directly, 2) changing the metaphor through altering the local culture-specific elements to global ones or changing the type of metaphor, and 3) maintaining the metaphor. In the English translation of the novel, explicitation techniques are successfully used, especially when the source text employs metonymy to denote a culture-specific issue. However, the translators were hesitant to use explicitation techniques with the culture-specific elements pertaining to Islam in most of the metaphors. They tended to maintain the metaphor and translate it literally, although the terminology used is meant largely to explain and strengthen the meaning of the metaphor.

The second research question is about the suggestions to improve the translation of culture-specific metaphors on taboos. It is evident from the analysis that domestication and explicitation techniques should be used when the meaning is thought to be blocked. A metaphor has an aesthetic value that should be retained, but not at the expense of the meaning, which has priority over the form. This reminds us of the never-ending struggle of fluency vs. fidelity. In our case study, the English translation of "*Throwing Sparks*" can be said to be a domesticated novel in form, when compared to the original. Domestication techniques go beyond the form as the language used in the translation reads original, except in a few instances. Therefore, it can be said that the translators generally made a good job giving priority to fidelity rather than faithfulness to the original text. Choosing the appropriate technique is usually based on the translators' understanding of the target reader's culture. Culture-specific elements used in a metaphor to express a taboo smoothly go through to the Arab reader. The case is reversed, however, with the reader of the translated text when it comes to local culture-specific elements, as the English reader, for example, may not be aware of the characteristics of the vehicle, and therefore, may find the image absurd, which is unacceptable in translation. Explicitation techniques are successfully used, especially when the source text employs metonymy to denote a culture-specific issue.

VI. CONCLUSION

Translating culturally-bound expressions is challenging, let alone being part of a metaphor on a taboo in a literary work. The Saudi writer Abdo Khal's 2010 Arab Booker winner "*Throwing Sparks*" and its English translation are selected to investigate strategies and techniques of translating culture-specific metaphors on taboos. The study introduces the Triangle of Culture-specific Metaphor on Taboos (TCMT) to explain the intertwined relation between metaphor, culture and taboo. Selected examples representing four taboos, namely sex, homosexuality, poverty and slavery, are analyzed. The study finds that metaphor can be used as a means of euphemism when tackling taboos. Translation techniques to render culture-specific metaphors on taboos varied, ranging from keeping the metaphor, through changing the metaphor and finally to demetaphorizing the metaphor, using domestication at large. Changing the metaphor may include changing the type of metaphor or changing the culture-specific elements. One of the solutions to guarantee that the reader understands the meaning is to use explicitation. However, it is noted in several cases that when the metaphor employs culture-specific expressions pertaining to Islam as a vehicle, the translators tended to translate them literally, which caused absurdity in the utterance. The study offered suggested translations and solutions for such cases through settling the conflict between finding formal equivalents to preserve the context-free semantics on the one hand and finding functional equivalents to preserve the context-sensitive communicative value on the other hand. Although this study is a step in a long road to explore the appropriate techniques to translate culturally-bound metaphor

on taboos in literary works, the topic needs more endeavors by employing other frameworks to verify the findings of this paper. The researchers also recommend continuing the investigation in other language pairs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was funded by the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission, Ministry of Culture, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under [grant number 116/2023] as part of the Arabic Observatory of Translation.

REFERENCES

- [1] Al-Anzi, Hamda. (2021). 'The Implicit Cultural Patterns in Tarmy Besharar Novel by Abdo Khal'. *Al-Adaab for Language and Literary Studies*, Vol. 11, 317-357.
- [2] Al-Mahous, Mansour. (2021). 'The Narrative Recurrence in Abdo Khal's Novel Tarmi Bisharar'. *Journal of Arabic Studies, IMSIU*, Vol. 58, 392-422.
- [3] Alfraidi, Tareq, Mohammad A. R. Abdeen, Ahmed Yatimi, Reyadh Alluhaibi, and Abdulmohsen Al-Thubaity. (2022). 'The Saudi Novel Corpus: Design and Compilation'. *Applied Sciences* 12, no. 13: 6648. doi.org/10.3390/app12136648.
- [4] Algahtani, Noura. (2016). 'The Impact of Socio-Cultural Contexts on the Reception of Contemporary Saudi Novels'. *Sociology Study, February 2016*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 104-110. doi: 10.17265/2159-5526/2016.02.003.
- [5] Asiri, Ibrahim. (2022). 'The Political Symbol in the Contemporary Saudi Novel'. *International Humanities Studies*, Vol. 8(2), June 2022, ISSN 2311-7796 Online.
- [6] Farghal, Mohammed and Mansour, Raneen. (2020). 'Translating Arabic Metaphorical Expressions into English: Mahfouz's Morning and Evening Talk as an Example'. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies (IJAES)*, Vol. 20, No.1, 2020, 105-124. doi.org/10.33806/ijaes2000.20.1.6
- [7] Fernández, Eliecer Crespo. (2011). 'Euphemistic conceptual metaphors in epitaphs from Highgate Cemetery'. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics. Spanish Cognitive Linguistics Association* Vol. 9, No.1, 198-225.
- [8] Fershtman, Chaim, Uri Gneezy, and Moshe Hoffman. (2011). 'Taboos and Identity: Considering the Unthinkable'. *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics*, 3(2), 139-64.
- [9] Ghazala, Hasan. (2012). 'Translating the Metaphor: A Cognitive Stylistic Conceptualization (English – Arabic)'. *World Journal of English Language*, Vol. 2, No. 4; 2012, 57-68. ISSN 1925-0703.
- [10] Khal, Abdo. (2011). *Tarmy Besharar*. Fifth edition, Aljamal Publications, Beirut, Lebanon.
- [11] Khal, Abdo. (2014). *Throwing Sparks*. Maia Tabet and Michael Scott (translators). Doha, Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing.
- [12] Lambert, José. (1998). 'Literary Translation, Research Issues'. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. Mona Baker (editor). London and New York: Routledge, 130-134.
- [13] Landers, Clifford. (2001). *Literary Translation: A Practical Guide*, (Vol. 22). Multilingual Matters.
- [14] Newmark, Peter. (1985). 'The Translation of Metaphor'. *The Ubiquity of Metaphor: Metaphor in Language and Thought*, Wolf Paprotte and Rene Dirven (eds.), 295-326. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia.
- [15] Newmark, Peter. (2002). *A Textbook of Translation*. London: Prentice Hall International.
- [16] Nida, Eugene. (1964). *Toward a Science of Translating*. New York: Brill Academic Publishers.
- [17] Nida, Eugene and Taber, Charles. (1969). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. 2nd edition, E J Brill, Leiden.
- [18] Park, Ocksue. (2009). 'The Issue of Metaphor in Literary Translation: Focusing on the Analysis of a Short Story Translation'. *Journal of Language & Translation*, Vol. 10-1, 155-175.
- [19] Pfaff, Kerry L., Raymond W. Gibbs, and Michael D. Johnson. (1997). 'Metaphor in using and understanding euphemism and dysphemism'. *Applied psycholinguistics* 18.1, 59-83.
- [20] Sulaimani, Radwan and Saadouni, Nadia. (2022). 'Manifestations of rebellion in the Saudi novel "Tarmi Bicharar" by Abdo Khal as a model'. *Djoussour El-maar* 4, Vol. 2, 403-416.
- [21] Toury, Gideon. (1995). *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- [22] Venuti, Lawrence. (1995). *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [23] Xuedong, Shi. (2014). 'The Strategy of Metaphor Translation: Domestication or Foreignization'. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 766-770.
- [24] Youssef, Sameh. (2014). 'Translation Challenges and Solutions: The Case of Allegory'. *Faculty of Arts and Humanities Magazine, Mohamed V University*, Issue 9, Volume 3, 97-118. Rabat, Morocco.
- [25] Zauberga, Ieva. (2005). 'A Knock at the Door: On the Role of Translated Literature in Culture Image Making'. *Across Languages and Cultures*, 6(1), 67-77.



Sameh S. Youssef is born in Egypt in 1967. He has his Ph.D. in translation and linguistics on a socio-pragmatic analysis of challenges of translating culturally-bound expressions in 2005 from Helwan University, Egypt with first grade of honor.

He is an associate professor of translation and linguistics at Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt, and working now at King Abdulaziz University, Rabigh branch, Saudi Arabia. He worked in several universities worldwide including the University of Maryland and the French University in Egypt. He has a record of more than 20 publications including 10 research papers, 8 translated books and 5 book chapters.

Dr. Youssef is a member of several professional societies including Poetics and Arab Society for Comparative Literature. His research interests include translation studies, pragmatics, discourse analysis,

cultural studies, and sociolinguistics.



Mohammed Albarakati is an associate professor at the European Languages Department at King Abdulaziz University. He is currently the chair of the Translation Association in Saudi Arabia. He obtained his PhD from the University of Leeds, UK in 2013 in comparative linguistics and translation. He has been appointed as the Head of the English Department, and vice-dean for development at King Abdulaziz University, Rabigh branch, Saudi Arabia.

He has published more than 10 papers on translation and has been member of a number of translation committees, and translation projects in Saudi Arabia. His research interests include translation quality assessment, translation project management, cultural studies, and literary translation.