

METAPHORICAL MEANING SHIFT IN ENGLISH-IGBO TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Metaphor is an important feature of human language and thought through which abstract experiences are understood in terms of concrete, embodied and culturally familiar domains. Although metaphors can sometimes be transferred directly between languages, differences in conceptualization, cultural experience and linguistic expression may result in shifts in metaphorical meaning during translation. This study examines metaphorical meaning shift in English-Igbo translation, focusing on the ways in which metaphorical expressions are retained, modified, replaced or lost in the target language. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach and draws data from a corpus of English metaphorical expressions and their Igbo translations. The metaphors were identified and classified according to structural, ontological and orientational conceptual types, with conventional and novel metaphors treated as categories of conventionality. The analysis was guided principally by Conceptual Metaphor Theory and informed by approaches to metaphor translation. The findings show that metaphorical meaning does not always transfer intact from English into Igbo. Some expressions retain both their conceptual mapping and imagery, while others preserve the central meaning but modify or replace the source-domain imagery. The findings show that metaphorical meaning shift often occurs when culturally specific imagery is modified through strategies such as explicitation and paraphrase. The study concludes that metaphor translation involves conceptual and cultural negotiation and recommends greater attention to conceptual and cultural equivalence, as well as the development of bilingual English-Igbo metaphor resources for translator training and culturally sensitive language technologies.

Keywords: metaphor, metaphor translation, meaning shift, English, Igbo, conceptual metaphor, cultural equivalence

Introduction

Metaphor is not merely a decorative feature of literary language. It is deeply involved in the way human beings conceptualize, interpret and communicate experience. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that ordinary thought and language are substantially metaphorical because people

frequently understand abstract concepts through more concrete domains of experience. Thus, expressions concerning emotions, relationships, conflict, success, failure and other abstract experiences are often structured through concepts drawn from the body, animals, physical movement, objects, warfare and other familiar domains.

The cognitive view of metaphor has important implications for translation. If metaphor is understood as a conceptual relationship rather than simply an unusual combination of words, translating a metaphor would involve more than finding a lexical equivalent. The translator must determine what conceptual relationship is being expressed, how that relationship is encoded in the source language and whether a comparable conceptualization exists in the target language. This is particularly important in translation between languages whose speakers have different cultural experiences and conventional ways of conceptualizing the world.

Metaphor therefore constitutes a significant problem in translation studies. Schäffner (2004) observes that metaphor may become a translation problem because linguistic and cultural differences can interfere with its transfer between languages. She identifies procedures such as replacing a metaphor with another metaphor, rendering a metaphor through sense or paraphrase, and deleting metaphorical imagery as possible ways of dealing with such problems.

The problem becomes especially significant when metaphor is translated between English and Igbo. English and Igbo possess distinct cultural histories, linguistic structures and conventional patterns of figurative expression. Consequently, an English metaphor may have no direct Igbo equivalent even where the underlying meaning is understandable. Conversely, an English metaphorical expression may be translated successfully into an Igbo metaphor that does not reproduce the same lexical imagery but achieves a comparable communicative effect.

The data used in the present study demonstrate this phenomenon. For example, the English expression 'A lump in the throat' is translated as *ihe kodoro n'akpiri*. The English body imagery is retained, although the source noun lump is rendered through *ihe* ("something"), a culturally resonant expression for the target audience. This is a case of equivalence with partial metaphor retention. Similarly, 'be all ears' is translated as *ntị dī gī nkọ*, retaining the body-part imagery associated with attentive listening.

However, other expressions demonstrate considerable shifts. Finger on the pulse, for example, is rendered as *Ọ chī gburugburu ya n'aka*. The source expression conceptualizes awareness or control through the physical act of monitoring a pulse with a finger, whereas the Igbo expression shifts towards a more general notion of awareness or control. The analysis therefore identifies loss of the source metaphorical imagery.

It is this movement between preservation and change that constitutes the focus of the present article. Rather than examining metaphor translation simply in terms of whether an English expression has an equivalent Igbo expression, the study investigates metaphorical meaning shift: the ways in which conceptual meaning, metaphorical imagery and communicative effect are preserved, modified, replaced or lost during translation.

Although metaphor spreads across English and Igbo, the translation of metaphor between the two languages may not always result in the complete transfer of the source-language meaning and imagery. Differences in linguistic structures, conceptualizations and cultural experiences may result in metaphorical expressions being preserved, modified, replaced or losing their metaphorical force when translated into Igbo. Existing approaches to metaphor translation often focus on the strategies used to transfer metaphors across languages, with less attention given to the shifts that occur in metaphorical meaning as a consequence of such translation choices, particularly in English-Igbo translation. This situation necessitates an examination of how

metaphorical meanings shift in the movement from English into Igbo, the forms these shifts take and the factors that account for the preservation, modification, replacement or loss of metaphorical meaning.

This study therefore addresses what happens to metaphorical meaning when they are translated from English into Igbo. To achieve this, the study seeks to identify the major forms of metaphorical meaning shift in English–Igbo translation; examine the extent to which metaphorical imagery is retained in Igbo translations; analyse cases in which metaphorical imagery or conceptual mappings are modified or replaced; and examine instances in which metaphorical imagery is lost while the communicative meaning is retained.

The study addresses the following questions: What forms of metaphorical meaning shift occur in English–Igbo translation? To what extent is English metaphorical imagery retained in Igbo translations? How are source-language metaphorical mappings modified or replaced in Igbo? In what situations is metaphorical imagery lost while the communicative meaning is retained?

2.0 Literature Review

This section explores the conceptual, theoretical and empirical studies on metaphor and metaphor translation.

2.1 Conceptual Review

Various concepts related to the study are discussed in this section.

i Metaphor

Traditionally, metaphor was often viewed as a figure of speech involving the transfer of a word or expression from one domain to another. Contemporary cognitive approaches have expanded this understanding by treating metaphor as a fundamental mechanism of conceptualization. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) maintain that metaphor allows speakers to understand one conceptual domain in terms of another. In the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, for example, expressions such as attack an argument, defend a position and win an argument reflect a systematic mapping between the domains of warfare and argumentation.

This understanding is particularly relevant to translation because the translator is required to transfer not only words but also conceptual relationships. An English metaphor may therefore be considered successfully translated when its central conceptual or communicative function is adequately reproduced in Igbo, even where the linguistic imagery changes. This is because, a change in imagery does not necessarily mean metaphor loss but rather an attempt to replace the imagery with culturally resonant one thus producing an acceptable expression. This is called cultural substitution.

ii Classification of Metaphor

The study distinguishes three major conceptual types: structural, ontological and orientational metaphors. Structural metaphors involve understanding one concept in terms of another structured domain. For example, ‘words are weapons’ conceptualizes language through warfare. In the data, *okwu ọnụ bụ ngwa agha* preserves this conceptualization.

Ontological metaphors involve understanding abstract experiences as entities, substances or physical objects. Expressions such as ‘wounded pride’ conceptualize an abstract emotional state through physical injury. The corresponding Igbo expression, *ugwu a kpuru n’ala*, is analysed as retaining the conceptualization of emotion as physical damage.

Oriental metaphors organize concepts through spatial orientations such as up/down, in/out and front/back. ‘Fall head over heels in love’ provides an example in the data. It conceptualizes overwhelming love through bodily falling. The Igbo translation, *dabanye*

n'ihunanya kpam kpam, retains part of the falling schema while omitting the specific inversion imagery.

The study also distinguishes conventional and novel metaphors. These are treated not as competing conceptual types with structural, ontological and orientational metaphors, but as categories based on degree of conventionality. A metaphor can therefore be structural and conventional, structural and novel, ontological and conventional, or ontological and novel.

This distinction is useful in translation because conventional metaphors may have established equivalents in the target language, whereas novel metaphors often require greater interpretation and may be more vulnerable to modification or loss.

iii Metaphor and Culture

Metaphor is closely associated with cultural experience. Kövecses (2005) demonstrates that while some conceptual metaphors may have broad or potentially universal bases, their specific linguistic realizations vary across cultures. He argues that culturally embedded metaphorical expressions can differ because speakers have different experiences and cognitive preferences.

This cultural dimension is important to English–Igbo translation. An English metaphor involving a particular animal, object or social practice may evoke associations that are not identical in Igbo. A translator may therefore preserve the underlying concept while changing the source imagery.

The data illustrate this clearly in animal metaphors. ‘Goat-hearted courage’ is translated as *ebule ji isi eje oḡu*. The English expression associates courage with a goat's heart, whereas the Igbo expression uses the image of a ram charging with its head. The source and target expressions thus differ in lexical imagery but maintain a conceptual association between animal behaviour and courage.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This section reviews the main theory used for the study

i Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The principal theoretical framework for this article is Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT proposes that metaphor involves systematic mappings between a source domain and a target domain. The source domain normally provides a more concrete experiential structure through which the target domain is understood.

For example: ‘Language is a weapon’

This conceptual mapping is represented in expressions such as ‘words are weapons’. The abstract domain of language is understood through the concrete domain of weapons. The Igbo translation *okwu ọnụ bụ ngwa agha* maintains the same conceptual mapping and therefore retains the metaphor.

CMT is appropriate for the present study because it allows the analysis to distinguish between meaning and imagery. A translation may preserve the underlying conceptual mapping while changing the linguistic expression through which the mapping is realized. This distinction is central to understanding metaphorical meaning shift.

ii Metaphor Translation and Meaning Shift

Metaphor translation has long been discussed in terms of translatability, equivalence and translation procedures. Newmark (1988), for example, discusses different approaches to metaphor translation and emphasizes the importance of considering both meaning and communicative effect. Nida (1964) similarly emphasizes the importance of reproducing meaning and effect in the target language rather than mechanically reproducing source-language forms.

A cognitive approach adds an important dimension to these perspectives. Schäffner (2004) argues that translation procedures should be considered in relation to the conceptual structures underlying metaphors. Her discussion shows that metaphor can be transferred through different procedures, including substitution, paraphrase and deletion.

For the present study, meaning shift refers to a change between the source metaphor and target expression involving one or more of the following:

The source-domain imagery; the conceptual mapping; the degree of metaphoricality; the cultural associations or the manner in which the communicative meaning is represented.

Meaning shift does not necessarily mean that translation has failed. A translation may lose the original imagery but successfully communicate the intended meaning. The distinction is therefore made between metaphorical retention and communicative meaning preservation.

This distinction is demonstrated by ‘Pain in the neck’, translated as *Onye maobu ihe na-akpasu iwe*. The English expression conceptualizes annoyance as physical pain associated with a body part, while the Igbo translation communicates the meaning directly without retaining the body imagery. In this case, metaphor is lost even though the intended meaning is preserved.

2.3 Empirical Review

The empirical review examines previous studies related to metaphor translation

Rojo et al (2014) compared metaphorical and non-metaphorical translations of English figurative expressions through an experimental study of emotional responses of participants using their heart rate. Their findings showed significant differences between metaphorical and non-metaphorical translations, with paraphrased versions producing a diminished emotion response. The study demonstrates that removing metaphorical imagery may preserve propositional meaning while nevertheless altering the effect of the original expression. This finding is particularly relevant to the present study’s analysis of metaphorical meaning shift especially instances in which English metaphors are paraphrased or explicated in Igbo.

Chelli (2022) re-examined the findings of an empirical study involving 48 student translators who translated metaphorical expressions, focusing on the relationship between the translation strategies employed and Newmark’s proposed hierarchy of metaphor translation procedures. From a cognitive perspective, the study demonstrated that analysing metaphor translation solely at the linguistic level may not fully account for the conceptual processes involved in transferring metaphorical meaning between languages. This study demonstrates empirically the importance of examining both translation procedures and the conceptual dimensions of metaphor when investigating metaphor translation. This study did not address metaphorical shift.

Schäffner (2004) examined metaphor translation in political discourse and found that metaphors may be retained, replaced, paraphrased or omitted during translation. The study showed that such choices can affect the metaphorical meaning and communicative effect of the source text. However, it did not address English-Igbo metaphor translation and the systematic analysis of metaphorical meaning shift, leaving a gap that the present study seeks to fill.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study focuses on identifying, interpreting and comparing metaphorical expressions and their translations rather than testing a statistical hypothesis.

3.2 Sources of Data

The data consisted of English metaphorical expressions and their Igbo translations derived from secondary source. The expressions were classified according to conceptual metaphor type and degree of conventionality. The analysis also recorded the translation technique used and the status of metaphorical retention.

3.3 Data Analysis

Each metaphor was examined in relation to four principal elements:

The English metaphorical expression; its Igbo translation; the conceptual mapping underlying the source expression; and the extent of metaphorical retention in the target expression.

Translation outcomes were grouped into three broad categories for this article:

Full retention, the conceptual mapping and salient metaphorical imagery are substantially retained;

Partial retention or modification, the core meaning or conceptual structure is retained but some imagery or associations change; and

Metaphor loss, the source metaphorical imagery is removed and the meaning is rendered through a direct or non-metaphorical expression. For example, 'be all mouth' and 'be hard-hearted' are recorded as fully retained 'A lump in the throat' and 'fall head over heels in love' are recorded as partially retained and 'Finger on the pulse' as lost.

4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 Full Retention of Metaphorical Meaning

The first pattern identified is the successful transfer of metaphorical meaning and imagery from English into Igbo. In such cases, the target expression reproduces the major conceptual relationship established by the source expression.

Example 1:

English: be hard-hearted

Igbo: *nwee obi siri ike*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Ontological metaphor

The same conceptual mappings and metaphorical imagery thereby leading to full metaphor retention.

Example 2:

English: be all mouth

Igbo: *buru naanị ọnu*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Ontological metaphor

The same conceptual mappings and metaphorical imagery thereby leading to full metaphor retention.

Example 3:

English: Be all ears

Igbo: *Ntị dị gị nkọ*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Ontological metaphor

The metaphor maps attentive listening onto the body part responsible for hearing. The Igbo translation maintains the body-based representation and communicates the same conceptual

association. Additional information is added in the Target Language. The analysis therefore records full metaphorical retention.

Example 4:

English: Be two-faced

Igbo: *Nwee ihu abụọ*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Ontological metaphor

Here, deceit or hypocrisy is conceptualized as possessing two faces. Both languages employ the same body-part imagery. The close conceptual and imagistic correspondence permits the metaphor to be retained without major modification.

Example 5:

English: Words are weapons

Igbo: *Okwu ọnụ bụ ngwa agha*

Technique: Literal translation

Type: Structural metaphor

The conceptual mapping LANGUAGE IS WEAPON remains intact. The Igbo translation retains both the weapon imagery and the conceptual relationship between language and attack. This example demonstrates that a metaphor can sometimes cross linguistic boundaries with little conceptual disruption when the source and target cultures share an accessible conceptual mapping.

Example 6:

English: Weaponize information

Igbo: *Ozi e ji mere ngwa ọgụ*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Structural metaphor

The English expression conceptualizes information as a weapon that can be used to attack, manipulate or defeat an opponent. The Igbo translation preserves the same mapping. The metaphor is consequently fully retained.

These examples demonstrate that metaphorical meaning shift is not inevitable. Where source and target languages share sufficiently compatible conceptual mappings, the translator may preserve both meaning and imagery.

4.2 Partial Retention and Metaphorical Modification

A second pattern involves translations in which the central meaning remains but the source imagery is changed, reduced or replaced.

Example 7:

English: A lump in the throat

Igbo: *Ihe kodoro n'akpịrị*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Ontological metaphor

The English expression describes a strong emotional state through a physical sensation in the throat. The Igbo translation replaces lump with *ihe* ("something"), but the body-based conceptualization remains. The target expression therefore demonstrates that lexical substitution does not necessarily constitute conceptual loss. The metaphor is partially retained because the target expression continues to represent an emotional condition through a physical bodily experience.

Example 8:

English: Fall head over heels in love

Igbo: *Dabanye n'ihunanya kpam kpam*

Technique: Modulation

Type: Orientational metaphor

The English expression conceptualizes overwhelming love through physical falling and bodily loss of control. The Igbo translation retains the idea of falling or entering deeply into love but does not reproduce the specific image of being inverted “head over heels.” The analysis therefore describes the metaphor as partially retained.

This example demonstrates that conceptual transfer can occur at different levels. The target text may preserve the general conceptual schema while discarding particular lexical details.

Example 9:

English: Get on someone's nerves

Igbo: *Kpasue mmadu iwe bara n'okpukpu*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Ontological metaphor

The source expression conceptualizes annoyance as a physical effect on the nervous system. The Igbo translation maintains the bodily conceptualization of irritation but does not retain the specific nerves imagery. The data consequently classify the metaphor as partially retained.

The example shows that change in imagery does not necessarily erase all metaphorical meaning. It may preserve the broader conceptualization while eliminating a particular source-domain element.

Example 10:

English: Give someone the cold shoulder

Igbo: *Laghara mmadu anya*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Ontological metaphor

The English expression conceptualizes rejection through a cold body part deliberately presented to another person. The Igbo expression uses a different body-part association, involving the eyes, to express deliberate disregard. The referent changes, but the interpersonal meaning of rejection remains. Metaphor is partially retained because the Igbo expression is metaphorical even though the English imagery is replaced.

This is an important form of meaning shift because it illustrates metaphor-to-metaphor transfer with changed imagery. The target expression does not reproduce the English metaphor literally, but it does not abandon figurative conceptualization either.

Example 11:

English: Finger on the pulse

Igbo: *O chi gburugburu ya n'aka*

Technique: Modulation

Type: Novel structural metaphor

The source expression conceptualizes awareness or control through monitoring the pulse with one's finger. The Igbo translation moves towards a general expression of awareness or control and therefore loses the specific medical/body imagery. The underlying communicative meaning is retained, but the metaphor itself is partially retained

4.2.1 Cultural Substitution and Metaphor-to-Metaphor Transfer

One of the most interesting patterns in the data is the replacement of an English metaphor with an Igbo expression that provides a culturally more appropriate conceptual image.

Example 12:

English: Goat-hearted courage

Igbo: *Ebule ji isi eje ogu*

Technique: Modulation

Type: Novel structural metaphor

The source expression associates courage with the heart of a goat. The Igbo expression instead evokes a ram charging with its head. The source and target expressions consequently use different animal imagery but both associate courageous or reckless behaviour with an animal. The analysis identifies partial retention.

This example is particularly important because it demonstrates that cultural substitution can preserve metaphorical function even when source imagery changes. The translation is not a literal reproduction, but it is not simply a paraphrase either. It creates a target-language image capable of carrying a related conceptual meaning.

Example 13:

English: Fox among drums

Igbo: *Mbe ji oge mkpọtụ anafere*

Technique: Explicitation

Type: Novel structural metaphor

The English expression uses the fox as a symbol of cunning. The Igbo translation employs *mbe* (tortoise), a culturally meaningful animal image associated with cleverness in Igbo cultural expression. The data explicitly identify this as metaphor-to-metaphor transfer and partial metaphorical retention.

The example provides strong evidence that translation can involve reconceptualization rather than simple substitution. The translator recognizes the source conceptual function and searches for a culturally resonant target image.

4.3 Metaphorical Meaning Loss

A third and particularly important pattern is metaphor loss. Here, the target translation conveys the intended meaning but removes the source-domain imagery.

Example 14: Pain in the neck

English: Pain in the neck

Igbo: *Onye maq̣bụ ihe na-akpasu iwe*

Technique: Paraphrase

Type: Conventional ontological metaphor

The English metaphor conceptualizes annoyance as physical pain located in the neck. The Igbo translation simply identifies a person or thing that causes annoyance. The source metaphorical imagery therefore disappears.

Example 15: Busy bee

English: Busy bee

Igbo: *Onye anaghị ezu ike*

Technique: Paraphrase

Type: Conventional ontological metaphor

The source expression compares a hardworking person to a bee. The target expression describes the person directly as someone who does not rest. The meaning of industriousness is communicated, but the animal imagery is lost. Metaphor is also lost

Example 16:

English: Horse around

Igbo: *Ikpa aghara*

Technique: Paraphrase

Type: Conventional ontological metaphor

The English expression uses horse imagery to conceptualize playful or foolish behaviour. The Igbo translation expresses the disorderly behaviour directly. Again, communicative meaning is preserved at the expense of metaphorical imagery. Metaphor is also lost

Example 17:

English: Wave the white flag

Igbo: *Kwusi ogu maobu esemokwu*

Technique: Explicitation

Type: Conventional structural metaphor

The white flag is a conventional symbol of surrender. The Igbo translation explicitly states the action, ending a fight or conflict, without reproducing the symbolic war image. The metaphor is therefore lost although the communicative meaning remains.

These examples suggest that meaning preservation and metaphor preservation are not identical. A translator may successfully preserve what the source speaker intends while sacrificing the imagery through which that meaning is communicated.

4.3.1 Novel Metaphors and Greater Meaning Shift

The data provide particularly useful evidence concerning novel metaphors. Because novel metaphors are less conventionalized, their interpretation may depend more heavily on the source context and cultural knowledge. As a result, they may require explicitation, modulation, adaptation or paraphrase.

Example 18:

English: Glass jaw

Igbo: *Onye enweghi ume n'ahụ maobu n'obi*

Technique: Explicitation

Type: Novel ontological metaphor

The English metaphor conceptualizes vulnerability through the image of a fragile jaw. The Igbo translation makes the meaning explicit by describing a person who lacks physical or emotional strength. The source imagery is consequently removed and metaphor is lost.

Example 19:

English: Neck-deep in trouble

Igbo: *Nsogbu kodoro ya n'olu*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Novel ontological metaphor

Unlike glass jaw, this expression retains the body-based immersion imagery. The target expression maintains the association between being deeply involved in trouble and being immersed up to the neck. The metaphor is therefore fully retained.

This contrast between glass jaw and neck-deep in trouble demonstrates that novelty alone does not automatically result in metaphor loss. The possibility of retention depends on whether the target language can accommodate the source conceptualization and imagery.

Example 20:

English: Hyena laughter

Igbo: *Qchị nkịta ohia*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Novel ontological metaphor

The source metaphor associates laughter with the sound and perceived characteristics of the hyena (mockingly unpleasant laughter). The target expression preserves the animal image and the compact structure of the source expression. The metaphorical meaning is consequently retained. This is another useful evidence that novel metaphor does not automatically result to metaphor loss

Example 21:

English: Moth to cold fire

Igbo: *Onye na-asara ihe ga-egbu ya*

Technique: Explicitation

Type: Novel structural metaphor

The English expression conceptualizes irresistible attraction to danger through the image of an insect being drawn to fire. The Igbo translation removes both the insect and fire imagery and directly expresses the idea of being attracted to something harmful. The metaphor is therefore lost

Example 22:

English: Fox-minded wisdom

Igbo: *Amamihe mbe*

Technique: Adaptation

Type: Conventional ontological metaphor

This expression provides a contrasting outcome. The target expression retains the tortoise image and the association between the animal and wisdom. The data therefore classify the metaphor as replaced and meaning fully retained. ‘Fox-minded wisdom’ is a creative formulation drawing on a conventional ‘fox’ wisdom association in English.

Some of the examples demonstrate that novel metaphors are not uniformly resistant to translation. Rather, their translatability depends on the degree of conceptual and cultural compatibility between source and target languages.

4.4 War Metaphors and Conceptual Preservation

War is a productive source domain in the data. Expressions such as ‘weaponize information’, ‘words are weapons’, ‘undeclared war’, ‘zone of conflict’, ‘ticking time bomb’ and ‘ambushed by memories’ conceptualize abstract experiences through warfare or military action. Some war metaphors are easily transferred.

Example 23:

English: Undeclared war

Igbo: *agha zoro ezo*

Technique: Equivalence

Type: Conventional structural metaphor

In this example, the conceptual mapping is maintained and metaphor preserved.

Example 24

English: A ticking time bomb

Igbo: *ihe egwu na-eche oge o ga-etipu,*

Technique: Paraphrase

Type: Conventional ontological metaphors

Here the conceptualization of danger as an explosive device is retained, meaning preserved, time-bomb imagery removed leading to partial metaphor retention

Example 25

English: Ambushed by memories

Igbo: *ncheta wakporo ya na mberede*

Technique: Modulation

Type: Conventional structural metaphor

The English expression treats memories as an attacking force, and the Igbo translation *ncheta wakporo ya na mberede* maintains the idea of memories suddenly attacking the experiencer. The analysis identifies both the military imagery and emotional intensity as retained.

In contrast, several novel war metaphors undergo loss through explicitation. These are shown in the following examples

Example 26

English: Detonate the argument

Igbo: *mee ka esemokwu puo n'egwu*

Technique: Explicitation

Type: Novel structural metaphor

This conveys the escalation of conflict but removes the explosive-device imagery. Therefore meaning preserved, imagery altered then metaphor modified

Example 27

English: Fight from the trenches

Igbo: *Mmady idoga adoga*

Technique: Explicitation

Type: Novel structural metaphor

The Igbo expression retains the underlying meaning of persistent struggle under hardship but loses the trench-warfare imagery. This is a case of metaphor losing its force. The pattern demonstrates that war as a conceptual source domain may be transferable even where individual war images are not. Thus, the translation may preserve CONFLICT IS WAR while eliminating a specific element such as trench, battlefield, gunpowder or armour.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals that metaphorical meaning shift in English–Igbo translation occurs along a continuum rather than as a simple distinction between successful and unsuccessful translation.

At one end of the continuum are expressions in which both conceptual mapping and metaphorical imagery are retained. Examples include ‘be all ears’, ‘be two-faced’, ‘words are weapons’, ‘weaponize information’, ‘hyena laughter’ and ‘tortoise-minded wisdom’. These expressions demonstrate relatively strong compatibility between source and target conceptualizations.

At the middle of the continuum are expressions in which the central meaning is retained but the metaphorical imagery changes. ‘Goat-hearted courage’ and ‘fox among drums’ illustrate this pattern. The source animal images are replaced or modified, but the target expressions remain figurative and culturally meaningful.

At the other end are expressions in which the source metaphor is removed altogether. ‘Pain in the neck’, ‘busy bee’, ‘horse around’, ‘wave the white flag’, ‘finger on the pulse’ and moth to

cold fire’ demonstrate this pattern. In these cases, the translator prioritizes semantic clarity and communicative meaning over preservation of source imagery.

The findings therefore support the argument that metaphor translation involves at least two levels of equivalence: conceptual/communicative equivalence and imagistic/metaphorical equivalence. A translation can be communicatively successful even when it does not preserve the metaphor itself.

This distinction is important for evaluating translation quality. If evaluation focuses only on whether the target text conveys the dictionary or propositional meaning of the source expression, the loss of metaphorical imagery may remain invisible. However, from a cognitive and stylistic perspective, the loss may be significant because source-domain imagery contributes to how the reader understands and experiences the message.

The findings also reinforce the importance of cultural factors in metaphor translation. Kövecses (2005) emphasizes that metaphorical conceptualization varies across cultures because people differ in experience and cognitive preferences. The English–Igbo data demonstrate this principle through animal and body-part metaphors. The use of fox, goat, tortoise, hyena, bee, horse and other animal images does not necessarily evoke identical associations in English and Igbo. Consequently, translators may retain, replace or eliminate such images.

Another important finding is that translation technique and meaning shift are related but not identical. The same technique can produce different outcomes. For example, equivalence can result in full retention, as in ‘be hard hearted’, or partial retention, as in ‘a lump in the throat’ or ‘give someone the cold shoulder’. Similarly, modulation can result in partial retention or metaphor loss. This means that the name of a translation procedure alone cannot adequately describe the outcome. What matters is the relationship between the source conceptualization and the target realization.

The findings also demonstrate the usefulness of metaphor classification for translation analysis. Classification helps identify what is being transferred. For example, when ‘words are weapons’ is classified as structural, the translator and researcher can identify the mapping LANGUAGE IS WEAPON and determine whether that mapping survives in Igbo. When ‘fall head over heels in love’ is classified as orientational, attention can be directed to the spatial schema of falling. Classification therefore serves as a diagnostic tool for analysing translation rather than merely as an exercise in categorization.

5.2 Conclusion

The study achieved its objectives by identifying the major forms of metaphorical meaning shift in English–Igbo translation, including retention, modification, replacement, and loss of metaphorical imagery. It established that metaphorical imagery may be retained, partially modified or replaced, or lost while the communicative meaning is preserved. The study further showed that such shifts arise from differences in conceptual mappings and cultural associations between English and Igbo. It concludes that English–Igbo metaphor translation is a process of linguistic, cognitive, and cultural negotiation in which preserving communicative meaning may sometimes require modification or loss of the source metaphorical image.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

Translators should identify the conceptual structure of a metaphor before selecting a translation strategy. This will help distinguish between cases requiring literal transfer, cultural substitution, paraphrase or explicitation.

Metaphor translation should prioritize conceptual and cultural equivalence rather than lexical equivalence alone. Where direct transfer is unnatural in Igbo, a culturally meaningful target metaphor may provide a more effective solution.

Translator training should include cognitive approaches to metaphor. Translators should be trained to identify source and target domains and recognize the implications of metaphorical imagery.

Bilingual English–Igbo metaphor corpora should record metaphorical retention status. In addition to English expressions and Igbo translations, such corpora should indicate whether the metaphor was fully retained, partially retained, replaced or lost.

Further research should examine metaphor translation across other Nigerian languages. Such comparative research would reveal similarities and differences in the conceptualization of metaphor across Nigerian linguistic and cultural communities.

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