Exploring the Translatability of the Figures of Speech: The Case of the English Translation of Qabbani's *Letter from Under the Sea*

Mohammed Juma Zagood[1] (iD)

Corresponding Author:

Mohammed Juma Zagood

Department of English Language and Literature, Elmergib University, Libya. Email: mjzagood@elmergib.edu.ly

Abstract: Poetry is a form of literature that depends on artistic images to express emotions, feelings, attitudes, etc. It is, however, assumed that poetry is a difficult genre to translate, since some of the poet's feelings, emotions, and visualizations are untranslatable despite the translator's professionalism and experience. This study aims to shed light on the translatability of the figures of speech in Moore's English translation of Qabbani's Arabic poem, *'Letter from Under the Sea'*. The ST and its translation are compared, analyzed, and discussed to see how figures of speech are rendered. Moreover, twenty native speakers of English were surveyed to see how they perceive the aesthetic effect of the poem, taking into consideration that they had no idea that the poem was a translation from another language. Throughout the analysis, it is found that figures of speech are translatable, but the degree of the aesthetic effect is distorted, thereby affecting the poem's artistic and poetic images. The findings indicate that, while meaning is preserved in translation, the aesthetic effect of figures of speech is often diminished, underscoring the need for creativity-oriented, culturally informed translation strategies. The study highlights the partial un/translatability of figurative language in Arabic–English poetry and emphasizes the importance of sensitivity to aesthetic and imagistic dimensions beyond semantic equivalence. It also contributes to translation studies by providing insights into readers' aesthetic reception, with implications for translator training, literary translation practice, and future research.

Keywords: Aesthetic Effect, Figures of Speech, Poetry Translation, Qabbani, Literary Translation

1. Introduction

Literary translation, by no doubt, is one of the complex types of translation, especially when it comes to translating poetry (Ben Zid, 2016). Such complexity arises from the fact that some texts prioritize form over content, and poetry is a good example (Nida, 1964). According to Ollila and Janats (2006: 1), "Poetry is any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and is meant to tell a story, or express any kind of emotion, idea, or state of being." Therefore, translators of poetry face various types of difficulties, including linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic. Poetry is a difficult genre to translate because the emphasis is on conveying how it is said rather than what is said. Nida (1964: 156-157), however, argues that "even in this case, the outcome will mostly fall short of reproducing an equivalent emotional intensity and flavour to that of the ST". Taking this issue into consideration, it is essential to pay attention to the debate over 'translatability/untranslatability' as these notions are controversial among scholars and translators. Such debates "concern primarily the question whether translation from one language into another is possible at all, or in what sense or to what degree it is possible." (Hermans, 2009: 300). As Pym and Turk (1998: 273) put it, "translatability is mostly understood as the capacity for some kind of meaning to be transferred from one language to another without undergoing radical change". Untranslatability is the opposite notion.

The differences in cultural aspects and the use of figures of speech between Arabic and English pose a number of problems and challenges for translation. Both languages belong to two different families and different cultures. Therefore, each language has its own way of saying and describing things or expressing ideas and feelings. Such differences cause 'culture-bound' problems for translators. Culture-bound problems are related to social and cultural norms, which are usually unspoken rules or expectations of behaviour and thought based on shared beliefs within a specific cultural or social community. These norms set social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behavior, defining what is acceptable and what is not in interactions among people (WHO, 2009). This problem becomes even more pronounced when it comes to the translatability of figures of speech in poetic texts. Accordingly, a translator has to understand the poet's intention in using this figure of speech or that one.

The difficulties in translating figures of speech might be attributed to differences between the two cultures. Each culture has its own courtesies, values, practices, and manners of interacting. As it is emphasized by Nida (1964: 130), "differences between cultures may cause more serious problems for the translator than do differences in language structure. In addition, the shape of the poem may sometimes have an implicit meaning. Thus, conveying the same message in a different language while using the same shape is difficult for the translator. Moreover, maintaining the source text's aesthetic effect in the target language, such as attempting to replicate the rhyme scheme, would also pose difficulties.

---

[1] Department of English Language and Literature, Elmergib University, Libya

It is, therefore, essential to find an equal expression from the TL that carries the same effect as the ST on the reader. This process requires knowledge of the SL culture, including its practices, roles, courtesies, rituals, and manners of interaction. On the other hand, Newmark (1988) argues that the existing theories and techniques for translating figures of speech, particularly metaphors and similes, have been criticized for their limited ability to account for all figurative types.

Despite the extensive body of research on poetry translation, translatability, and cultural challenges, a noticeable research gap remains. Much of the existing literature is either theoretical in nature or focuses on European or Asian language pairs, while empirical studies examining the translatability of figures of speech in Arabic–English poetry remain relatively scarce. Moreover, few studies combine detailed textual analysis with target-reader reception to assess not only how figures of speech are translated but also how their aesthetic effect is perceived by target-language readers who are unaware that they are reading a translated poem. This gap calls for focused research that bridges linguistic analysis and reader response, particularly in the context of modern Arabic poetry translated into English.

Dealing with such a genre is sensitive, as the translator's mission is to choose the appropriate technique that preserves the same meaning and message of all the figures of speech in the ST, to achieve equivalence with the TT, and end up with a translation of high quality. Qabbani's رسالة من تحت الماء 'Letter from Under the Sea' is selected for analysis due to its dense and varied use of figurative language, which poses significant challenges for translation and makes it particularly suitable for examining the translatability of figures of speech. Accordingly, this study attempts to answer a two-fold question: how did Moore (2013) deal with the figures of speech in his English translation of Qabbani's (1972) رسالة من تحت الماء 'Letter from Under the Sea'? And how did TT readers perceive the poem's English version? By answering the aforementioned two-fold question, three main objectives are achieved namely; (1) identifying the figures of speech used by Qabbani (1972) in his رسالة من تحت الماء 'Letter from Under the Sea', (2) analyzing the English translation to see how Moore (2013) rendered the figures of speech into English, and (3) identifying how TT readers perceived the figures of speech in the TT.

2. Literature Review

Newmark (1988) suggests that the cultural expressions used in social, religious, geographical, political, literary, and media texts can also be found in proverbs, collocations, and phrasal verbs. Newmark (1988) recommends translating cultural expressions communicatively. He confirms that context should be taken into account to ensure translatability from the source culture to the target culture, thereby avoiding ambiguity and complexity. However, Catford (1965) proposes instances of cultural untranslatability, such as the names of institutions, clothing, foods, and abstract concepts. He confirms that all examples of cultural untranslatability address the impossibility of finding an equivalent collocation in the target language. Catford (1965) considers that this impossibility is a result of 'linguistic untranslatability' which he defines as: "failure to find a target language equivalent is due entirely to differences between the source language and the target language" (Catford, 1965: 98). Translatability of cultural nuances are dealt with by the appropriate use of translation strategies which have been described by Harvey (2003) as the techniques that are applicable to culture-based text translation, which aligns with the fact that terms such as translation procedures, techniques, and strategies are rather similar in concept and function. They, however, come in various dichotomies such as literal vs free, domestication vs. foreignization, overt vs. covert, semantic vs. communicative, etc.

De Pedro (1999) suggests two approaches to 'untranslatability': the Universalist approach, whose followers believe in universality and therefore consider 'translatability' a real indication of the existence of linguistic universals. This approach becomes the basis of Chomsky's generative grammar. The Monadist approach, whose followers believe that reality can be conveyed in different ways across linguistic communities, endangers the notion of 'translatability' (De Pedro, 1999).

Baker (1992) believes that the difficulty of translation stems from the fact that source-language terms may be entirely unknown in the target language. They may be religious concepts, social habits, customs, or even food. Baker (1992) states that common non-equivalents pose a critical challenge for translators, since the two languages have distinct cultures. Those aspects of cultural gap are ordered as the following: (1) Culture specific concepts, (2) The SL concept which is not lexicalized in TL, (3) The SL word which is semantically complex, (4) The source and target languages make different distinction in meaning; (5) The TL lacks a superordinate, (6) The TL lacks a specific term (hyponym), (7) Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective, (8) Differences in expressive meaning, (9) Differences in form, (10) Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms, and (11) The use of loan words in the source text[2].

Hervey and Higgins (1992), who study the connection between translation and culture, believe that cultural translation is more necessary than literal translation, despite the obstacles involved in transposing across cultures. The cultural transposition pays more attention to the target language and culture rather than the features of the source language. Hervey and Higgins (1992) find a scale between the source culture (exoticism) and the target culture (cultural transplantation). Their 'scale' is based on: (1) Exoticism: the translation conveys the cultural features from the source into the target, (2) Claque: that forms the target language words in the source language structure, (3) Culture borrowing: aims to transfer the source text terms verbatim into target text, (4) Communicative translation: adopts culture specific aspects such as idioms and proverbs. Cultural translation aims to create a similar impact on the target receptors. (5) Cultural transplantation aims at conveying the whole message in the target culture.

Wiersema (2004) asserts the significance of globalization in bridging the gap between nations and in improving the understanding of foreign cultures. Globalization enables translators to enrich the target text by incorporating new loanwords, making it easier to adapt to foreign cultures. Wiersema (2004) suggests three options that may be selected by the translator when translating cultural expressions: (1) Using a foreign word without elaboration, (2) Using a foreign word with elaboration, (3) Rewriting the original text to make it comprehensible and adaptable to the target receptors.

Matiu (2008) discusses contemporary theories of poetry and translation in his study 'Translating Poetry' by presenting three hypotheses about the translation of poetry. Matiu (2008) collected secondary data from books, articles, essays, etc. The researcher has determined that no gains, no losses is the basic concept of translation. The translation does not make the poem

---

complicated and incomprehensible by text-orienting the poem's root. Matiu (2008) concluded that the translated poem should look, sound, and render the original poem's same effect in terms of thoughts, feelings, and sound patterns.

Dastjerdi, Hakimshafaaii, and Jannesaari (2008) argue that although poetry's translatability is challenging, some poems might lose their aesthetic value. Using the right strategies and following the proper process play a role in translating beautiful poetry. They found out that translating an aesthetic poem is possible. In contrast, Czerniawski (1994) argues that the translation from native context into a work of literature, especially poetry, is a sensitive subject. Because all languages are distinct, no so-called direct or simple translation is available.

Hatim and Munday (2019) state that translatability is a relative notion that should focus on meaning rather than on linguistic structure. To attain this aim, meaning should be comprehensively understood not only in terms of what the source text contains, but also in terms of other factors such as communicative purpose, target audience, and purpose of translation.

Regarding the role of figures of speech, Regmi (2014) conducted a study on their analysis and use in flax-golden tales. Throughout the analysis, Regmi (2014) claims that figures of speech enrich language use and make it more colourful. Moreover, they are composed of two distinct vehicles that clarify the meaning of the text by comparing the figure of speech with the literal meaning. Finally, Regmi (2014) believes that language can be motivated by figures of speech, which are useful for language acquisition and for creating a conducive environment.

Moreover, in a recent study conducted by Sukmaningrum, Setyaji, and Hawa (2023), who investigated students' perceptions of the poetry translation process. Their sample consisted of 20 students assigned to translate an English poem into Indonesian. After the assignment, they were asked to complete a questionnaire about the translation process and the problems encountered. The findings of their study highlighted how student translators engage with the source text, including their strategies for selecting appropriate lexical items and the specific challenges they encounter during the translation task. The majority of participants reported that their primary difficulty stemmed from linguistic disparities between the source and target languages, particularly in relation to grammatical structures, lexical choices, and semantic ambiguity.

The study also reinforces the widely held view that translation experience plays a crucial role in determining translation quality, particularly for literary texts. According to their results, more experienced translators tend to produce translations that convey meaning more naturally, while less experienced translators are more likely to rely on literal or word-for-word renderings, often with limited consideration for the poetic or aesthetic dimensions of the original work.

Another recent diachronic study by Khasawneh, Moindjie, and Kasuma (2025) examines the translation of figures of speech from Arabic into English in Antara's Mu'allaqa, focusing on the procedures used by translators across different periods. The findings indicate that translators mainly employ strategies such as paraphrasing, compensation, adaptation, and literal translation. The study also highlights a tendency toward simplification in more recent translations, as shown by shorter sentences and lower lexical density, making them more functional than earlier versions.

From the above discussion of some literature, it is obvious now that the language of poetry is much more than a communication medium. It is also an expression of history, community, culture, and convictions. The translation of poetry, therefore, is more than just transferring the meanings of the SL terms/expressions into another language. It creates crossroads among cultures and helps one encounter cultural events that would otherwise be too alien and too distant for artistic purposes. However, poetry translation is not easy, as professional translators must build cultural bridges and transfer a poem's form (style) and meaning (content) from one language to another. This is because translation, according to Nida and Taber (1982: 12), "consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style". The following section, therefore, sheds light on poetry translation and the main challenges poetry translators face:

2.1. Poetry Translation

Poetry is "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility" (Wordsworth cited in Nayar, 2009: 194). It is a form of literature that relies heavily on artistic means to express emotions, feelings, opinions, and thoughts, and then turns them into a beautiful image. This expressive style is evident in the poet's tone. This tone is the mirror of the poet's attitude towards the poem. According to Lakoff and Turner (1989: xi), "poetic language is beyond ordinary language- that it is something essentially different, special, higher, with extraordinary tools and techniques like metaphor and metonymy, instruments beyond the reach of someone who only talks." The translation of poetry is challenging in many respects, as in dealing with the figures of speech, for example. This is because translators focus more on different aspects that affect the translation quality, which "demonstrates accuracy and fluency required for the audience and purpose and complies with all other specifications negotiated between the requester and provider, taking into account end-user needs." (Koby et al, 2014: 416).

Coming out with an acceptable translation of poetry with good quality requires lots of devoted effort, as the literary language is completely different from everyday language. There are many elements that one needs to focus on while translating poetry, for instance:

i.   Form: form in poetry refers to a poem's structure in terms of its line lengths and meters, lengths of stanzas, rhyme schemes (if any), and the systems of repetition (Glatch, 2021). There are many forms of poetry; the usual ones include sonnet, sestina, villanelle, blank verse, etc.

ii. Imagery: According to Literary Terms (2021), "Imagery is language used by poets, novelists, and other writers to create images in the mind of the reader. Imagery includes figurative and metaphorical language to improve the reader's experience through their senses."

iii. Rhythm: according to Merriam-Webster.com dictionary, rhythm is "an ordered recurrent alternation of strong and weak elements in the flow of sound and silence in speech.

iv. Rhyme: "Rhymes are words whose endings match, as in 'fly' and 'spy.' This is one of the most common techniques in traditional poetry and music, and most people can easily identify rhymes." (LiteraryTerms, 2008).

These elements work together to create the poem. In addition, they "usually have to be considered together because of their interdependence on one another. This interdependence is one of the main problems that translators face in translating literary language into other terms" (Khalifa, 2015: 315). Many studies assert that translating poetry sets lots of challenges in a translator's way. For example; Badawi, cited in Khalifa (2015: 316), "indicates that this job is very difficult since the translator's attention is shattered between form and content". Khalifa (2015: 316) adds that Badawi's statement shows clearly that a poem represents a fine balance of highly sensitive elements (form and content); the change of any one of which will upset that balance". Jayyusi, cited in Khalifa (2015), agrees with this claim but adds another source of difficulty represented in the big difference between the two languages and their cultures. She maintains that "the translations of poems, which are based on rhetorical expressions, are too difficult since these features are considered as a part of the poems' semantic signification". (Khalifa, 2015: 316).

Similarly, Ben Zid (2016) highlights three main problems encountered by translators while translating poetry from one language to another. These problems are linguistic, aesthetic, and cultural. This study investigates issues related to aesthetic problems, namely the translatability of figures of speech.

2.2. Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is "a form of expression (such as a simile or metaphor) used to convey meaning or heighten effect often by comparing or identifying one thing with another that has a meaning or connotation familiar to the reader or listener" (Merriam-Webster, 2006). In a like manner, Gautam (2014: 17) points out that "a figure of speech is a way of saying something other than the literal way. It adds extra dimensions to language and reveals one thing by relating it to something else. Figures of speech include simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and onomatopoeia. Each has its own definition, way of use, and aesthetic effect.

When attempting to understand figures of speech, what comes to mind first is the idea of thinking outside the box and, in one way or another, being far from the language's rules. The use of any type of figure of speech relies on imagination, which is a relative concept. Where each of these figures contains imagination to a certain level according to the author's intention and communicative function, whether in prose or poetry, it will definitely require the use of imagination. Literary language is naturally different from the language of everyday use; it is primarily an artistic expression in which the way the message is conveyed is more important than the message itself. When a writer or poet uses figures of speech, they focus on how it is said rather than on what is said.

In addition, figures of speech have a significant role in creating a literary language. Kennedy (1991: 584) states that "a figure of speech may be said to occur whenever a speaker or writer, for the sake of freshness or emphasis, departs from the usual denotations of words." This means that figures of speech in all types are related to the connotative meaning. The following are definitions of some figures of speech:

i.   Simile: is a comparison between two dissimilar things to give the characteristics of the compared to the compared employing connectives (as, like, than) or verbs (seems, resembles), e.g., he is like a fox.

ii. Metaphor: is a comparison between two dissimilar objects. It functions in visualising the invisible object and making it visible and sensible, e.g., he is a fox.

iii. Personification: In personification, human characteristics are usually attributed to nonhuman organisms to make them feel and think like humans, i.e., to give human characteristics to nonhuman objects, e.g., a rainbow's arch standing on the sea.

iv. Hyperbole: "is a figure of speech that contains an exaggeration, by exaggerating something or discussing in a style that contains an overstatement." Keraf (2001: 135), e.g., feels buried under a mountain of work.

Moreover, other figures that play roles in the aesthetic language of poetry, such as rhetorical figures and stylistic devices, are not discussed here.

3. Research Methodology

To collect data for this study, two main methods have been used: a comparative analytical approach to the two texts (poems) and a survey to assess the aesthetic effect of the target text. As far as the first approach is concerned, "the analysis of translated texts involves the textual comparison of a translation with its original" (Chesterman and Williams, 2007, 6). Of course, it is difficult, if not impossible, to compare a translation with its original text in every single word of the texts.

The corpus selected for analysis here is رسالة من تحت الماء *'Letter from Under the Sea'* by Nizar Qabbani (1972) and its English translation by Kevin Moore (2013). Nizar Qabbani is believed to be one of the most revered contemporary poets in the Arab World and is considered Syria's National Poet. He was born in March 1923 in Damascus and worked as a diplomat, poet, and publisher. His poetic style combines simplicity and elegance as he explores themes of love, eroticism, feminism, religion, and Arab nationalism. He received his primary education in Damascus between 1930 and 1941. Later, he studied law at Damascus University, which was known as the Syrian University until 1958. He graduated with a BA in law in 1945. While he was a law student, he began writing poetry and published his first collection, entitled قالت لي السمراء *'The Brunette Told Me'* in 1944. Many of Qabbani's poems have been translated into English and other foreign languages. He died in April 1998 in London. Moore, the translator, is an Arabic language enthusiast and is interested in Arabic-English translation, as well as in international and domestic politics of the Middle East and North Africa. He achieved a good command of Arabic and became able to translate Arabic texts after obtaining an MSc in Arab World Studies at the University of Edinburgh (2012-2014), in addition to intensive advanced Arabic courses at Al-Akhawayn University in Morocco and Middlebury College in Vermont, New England. The main reason for this selection was the passion for modern Arabic poetry and the position Qabbani held

among poets in the second half of the 20th century. In addition, this poem was sung by the great Egyptian singer Abdel Halim Hafez.

In this study, the ST (Arabic) and TT (English) are compared and analyzed. The comparison is limited to the figures of speech used by Qabbani (1972) in his poem رسالة من تحت الماء *'Letter from Under the Sea'* and their translations by Moore (2013). The data collection involves identifying the figures of speech in the original text (Arabic) and their counterparts in the translated text (English) and analyzing the strategies used in translation. The comparison is made to assess the extent to which the translator was successful in conveying the meanings and aesthetic effects of the Arabic figures of speech into English, and the techniques he used to translate them. In other words, this comparison examines the translatability of figures of speech from English into Arabic. This approach is therefore not intended to criticize the process undertaken by the translator, but rather to analyze the product, i.e., the translated text. The two texts are studied in terms of phrases, pictures, stanzas, structural patterns, literary machines, and poetic types, but the analysis is limited to the translatability of figures of speech. Accordingly, to analyze the translation of the figures of speech used in the poem, the following procedure was adopted:

i.   Reading the ST to identify the figures of speech and classifying them as metaphors, similes, personifications, and hyperboles (these are the only figures of speech found in the poem).

ii. Reading the TT to identify how the figures of speech are used in the poem.

iii. Tabulating the identified figures of speech of the ST and their translations (TT).

iv. Commenting on the translation produced. As far as this procedure is concerned, it is worth noting that this commentary is not an assessment. Therefore, it is essentially a commentary on the translation and the translation strategies used to transfer the figures of speech into the TL, rather than on the translation quality. In contrast, the assessment is left to the reader, and therefore, another approach to data collection is adopted.

The second approach is a survey sent to a number of native speakers of English to assess how they perceive the poem's aesthetic effect, focusing on the translation of figures of speech. It is worth noting that the surveyed participants were unaware that the poem was a translation from another language. In addition, they were all specialized in literature or related disciplines such as linguistics, cultural studies, or translation studies, and they have a passion for reading poetry. Accordingly, it is assumed that they were the right people to survey on poetic language and its aesthetic effect. The survey consists of two main parts: 10 Likert-scale items and two open-ended questions. The 10 statements that used the Likert scale mainly concerned the overall meaning and clarity of the poem, the poetic structure and stylistic choices, and the appropriateness and imagery of the figures of speech in the translated poem. The two open-ended questions, on the other hand, were designed primarily to allow participants to comment freely on the poem's poetic language and aesthetic effect. In fact, there are "three general approaches to (translation) quality assessment" (Chesterman and Williams, 2007: 8). These approaches are source-language oriented, target-language oriented, and translation effects on the reader. Ergo, the latter is adopted in this study to examine how the TT reader perceives the poem's aesthetic effect. The use of a relatively small sample is justified by the exploratory and reception-oriented nature of the study. The aim is not statistical generalization, but rather to gain an in-depth perspective into native readers' aesthetic perceptions of the translated poem. In literary translation research, particularly studies concerned with aesthetic effect and reader response, small samples are commonly employed to capture nuanced and subjective interpretations that may not emerge in large-scale quantitative surveys. Consistent with the reader-oriented approach to translation quality assessment outlined by Chesterman and Williams (2007), the selected sample is, therefore, adequate for examining how the translation is received by target-language readers.

4.   Data Analysis

The analysis below is divided into two main parts: part one examines the qualitative translatability of the figures of speech in the poem. It is, by no means, a translation quality assessment. In contrast, it is an analysis of the translation. It should be noted that, in some examples, the commentary reflects participants' responses to the two open-ended survey questions, capturing either their personal judgments or their implicit perceptions of translation quality, which supports the objectivity of the analysis. Part two presents a quantitative analysis of the survey to examine how native speakers of English perceived the translated poem.

4.1. The Analysis of Moor's (2013) Translation of the Figures of Speech

Applying the procedures mentioned earlier, the analysis was made by identifying the figures of speech in the ST and their translations in the TT, followed by a commentary on the translation of the figures of speech. Accordingly, the qualitative analysis expresses the researcher's views and the TT readers' perceptions and does not assess the quality of translation produced. It is limited to analyzing and comparing the figures of speech used in the ST and their translations in the TL. Below is a separate analysis of each figure of speech used in the poem:

4.1.1. Metaphor

The analysis of the poem showed that the poet used four metaphors. These metaphors and their translations are discussed and analyzed as follows:

Metaphor One: ST: "كي أشفى منك"

TT: "So that I can be cured of you."

Commentary: In this sentence, the poet uses a metaphor, making an indirect and implicit comparison. The poet compares the beloved one to a disease that he wants to be cured of. This type of figure of speech uses an identity to compare, rather than a comparison tool. The translator conveyed the same meaning of the ST, keeping the same metaphor in the TT. However, the use of this metaphor in the ST is well-known and commonly used in SL literary works, whereas the metaphor in the TL reads/sounds bizarre. English does not usually use an expression like this one in such a context. It is unusual to compare your beloved one with a disease that you want to get cured from. Thus, to produce a translation of high quality, the differences between the languages' use of such metaphors need to be taken into consideration.

Metaphor Two: ST: "كيفَ أقُصُّ جذورَ هواكَ من الأعماق"

TT: "How to cut the roots of love from the depths."

Commentary: The poet uses this metaphor, comparing his love, passion, and relationship with his beloved to a plant or tree that is deeply rooted in the ground, yet he seeks her help to cut it off. In other words, he wants to end this relationship and these feelings of love, and never to think about them again. However, by this comparison, he tries to prove that ending these powerful feelings is as difficult as cutting the deep roots of a plant. This metaphor shows that cutting a plant's roots is like ending or stopping these feelings. Here, the translator used a literal translation, transferring the same meaning of each word in the sentence literally. As a result, the metaphor's aesthetic effect in the TL has disappeared.

Metaphor Three: ST: "الموج الأزرق في عينيك"

TT: "The blue waves of your eyes."

Commentary: The poet addresses his beloved in this stanza using a metaphor to paint an imaginary image of her eyes by saying that they are a sea that is full of blue waves, 'الموج الأزرق في عينيك'. The translator preserved the same meaning and used a literal translation, rendering the metaphor "blue waves of your eyes" as such. This metaphor is usually used in the TL, and consequently, the effect is preserved.

Metaphor Four: ST: "في الحب... ولا عندي زورق"

TT: "In love, and I do not have a boat."

Commentary: The poet uses a metaphor in the ST referring to love as if it were a sea, and he is in the middle of this sea without a boat. The translator used word-for-word literal translation to render the meaning by using a metaphorical image: "In love, and I do not have a boat. By doing this, the aesthetic effect is lost, as the translator focuses on conveying the meaning (content) rather than the line's aesthetic effect.

4.1.2. Personification

As in metaphors, the analysis of the poem showed that the poet used four personifications. These personifications and their translations are discussed and analyzed in the following:

Personification One: ST: "تنتحرُ الأشواق"

TT: "yearning ends."

Commentary: The poet uses personification when he attributes human characteristics to a non-human object. Here, the poet gives the quality of committing suicide, which is usually a characteristic of a human being, to the yearnings that are non-human. The translator interpreted the word 'تنتحر' as 'ends', yet the word 'تنتحر' used in the ST means that someone ends their life by themselves: 'suicide'. So the message is affected because the word 'ends' in the TT does not have the same meaning. Accordingly, the translation has neither conveyed the meaning nor the aesthetic effect.

Personification Two: ST: "كيف تموتُ الدمعةُ في الأحداق"

TT: "How tears perish in eyes."

Commentary: In this personification, the poet compares the tears to a living creature that could die. In the ST, a characteristic of a human being (death) was assigned to a non-human object (tear). A literal translation has been used here, but not for the whole line, as the translator has translated the word 'أحداق' (pupil) into eyes. In the ST (Arabic), the word 'الأحداق' carries an emotional meaning and affects the reader more beautifully than the word 'eyes' does in the TT. However, using the word 'pupil' in English might sound ambiguous if not used in a scientific context. Accordingly, the translation here is acceptable and conveys the same meaning and effect as that of the ST.

Personification Three: ST: "كيفَ يموتُ القلبُ"

TT: "How the heart dies."

Commentary: The poet uses a personification here by giving a characteristic of a human being to a non-human object, the heart. This analogy visualizes the heart as a living creature with life and the potential to die. This is an indirect comparison, with no comparison tool used. The poet no longer wants to fall in love with his beloved. He wants to learn how to stop these feelings, and wonders if it is possible to do that by the death of the heart. The translator rendered it literally as the TT expression is well-known in the TL and usually used by the TT audience.

Personification Four: ST: "يجرجرني نحو الأعمق"

TT: "Drag me to the depths."

Commentary: The poet uses personification in the ST by referring to 'his beloved one's eyes' as a strong creature (e.g., a man) who drags him into the depths of the sea. 'يجرجرني' is derived from the word 'يجرجر', which literally means 'dragging'. The translator rendered the meaning using personification too by giving the quality of dragging to a non-human object, the blue colour of the beloved one's eyes, as if the waves of this blue colour are dragging him into the depths of the sea. The literal translation technique is used here, but the tense is changed from the present continuous to the simple present.

4.1.3. Simile

Throughout the analysis of the poem, it is found that the poet used only one simile, whose translation is analyzed as follows:

Simile One: ST: "حبك كالكفر... فطهرني"

TT: "Your love is blasphemy, so cleanse me."

Commentary: the poet uses a simile 'كالكفر' in the ST referring to love as disbelief. In this simile, the poet uses a comparison tool (connective) "ك". The translator transferred the same meaning using a different form in the TT. The translator translated the simile into a metaphor, yet it could have been translated as a simile in the TT, too, as something like 'Your love is like a blasphemy'. The change here is acceptable and could be attributed to maintaining the poem's metre and rhythm. If translated into a simile, the rhythm might have been affected.

4.1.4. Hyperbole

The analysis of the poem showed that the poet used hyperbole in three cases. These hyperboles and their translations are discussed and analyzed in the following:

Hyperbole One: ST: "إن كنت نبياً ... خلصني"

TT: "If you are a prophet, free me."

Commentary: The poet in the ST uses exaggeration when addressing his beloved, asking whether, if she were a prophet, she could free him from her love. Here, the poet reflects on the pain he feels because of her love, and he wants to be free of the deep emotions. The translator used the literal translation technique and conveyed the same meaning and questioning.

Hyperbole Two: ST: "فأنا عاشقةٌ من رأسي ... حتى قدمي"

TT: "I love from head to toe."

Commentary: the ST uses a hyperbolic image, referring to the depth of her emotions and feelings for the lover who adores him from head to toe, which might simply mean that all parts of her body are filled with his love. The translator conveyed the hyperbolic image but altered the stanza's structure. He used the transposition/shift technique by changing the noun in the ST 'عاشقة' into a verb in the TT 'I love'. The translation is acceptable as the TT readers are familiar with the expression 'I love from head to toe'. It is worth mentioning here that in this stanza, the poet uses a female's tongue (عاشقة) as if he were embodying a lady when he composed this poem.

Hyperbole Three: ST: "إني أتنفس تحت الماء"

TT: "I am breathing under the water."

Commentary: The poet uses a hyperbolic image and exaggeration in the ST by referring to himself as if he were drowning in the sea of love and able to breathe under the water 'إني أتنفس تحت الماء'. The translator, adopting literal translation, conveyed the meaning of the stanza and the hyperbolic imaginary image 'I am breathing under the water'. The stanza has neither lost the effect nor the meaning as it reads naturally in the TL because such hyperbolic expression is usually used in the TL.

4.2. Analysis of the Survey

The quantitative approach is used to analyze the closed-ended questions in the survey. The analysis is presented in simple form as a table. Using a Likert Scale, the survey included 10 closed-ended questions, and participants had to choose among five options: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. Due to the small sample size (20 participants) and the exploratory nature of the study, Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was not calculated. The questionnaire items were designed to provide descriptive insights into readers' perceptions rather than to establish a standardized measurement scale. Table One below shows the results obtained; i.e., the answers to each statement are numbered to determine the percentages.

Table 1: The results of the closed-ended questions used in the survey

No.	Statement	Strongly agree	%	Agree	%	Undecided	%	Disagree	%	Strongly disagree	%
1	The overall meaning of the poem is clear and unambiguous	6	30	14	70	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	The overall structure of the poem makes it easy to read	8	40	10	50	0	0	2	10	0	0
3	The overall stylistic choices of the poem are effective	8	40	10	50	0	0	2	10	0	0
4	The poem includes some figures of speech such as similes and metaphors	12	60	8	40	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	The figures of speech are beautifully used and add a poetic flavor to the poem	10	50	6	30	2	10	2	10	0	0
6	The message of the poem is conveyed well through the figures of speech	2	10	16	80	2	10	0	0	0	0
7	The analogies of the figures of speech used are easily understood	4	20	16	80	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	The figures of speech used in the poem read natural and authentic	4	20	6	30	6	30	4	20	0	0
9	The language is natural and free from any weakness	4	20	10	50	4	20	2	10	0	0
10	The poem produces deep and vivid impressions on the reader	8	40	6	30	4	20	2	10	0	0

Source: By the author

4.2.1. Interpretation of the Findings of the Survey

The table above shows that 30% (strongly agree) and 70% (agree) of participants found the poem's overall meaning clear and unambiguous, indicating the translator's ability to convey a clear, meaningful poem in the TL. 40% (strongly agree) and 50% (agree) of participants found the poem well-structured and easy to understand. Only 10% (disagree) were unhappy with the structure of the poem. 40% (strongly agree) and 50% (agree) of participants found the poem's stylistic devices well chosen and effective. Only 10% (disagree) were unhappy with the poem's stylistic choices. All participants (60% (strongly agree) and 40% (agree)) were able to identify the use of figures of speech in the poem. 50% (strongly agree) and 30% (agree) of the participants found that the figures of speech were beautifully used in the poem. 10% were undecided, and 10% were unhappy with the use of figures of speech in the poem. Most of the participants (10% (strongly agree) and 80% (agree)) understood the message of the poem through the use of figures of speech. Only 10% were undecided about whether they understood the message through the use of figures of speech. All participants (20% (strongly agree) and 80% (agree)) found that the figures of speech and analogies were clear and easy to understand. Half (20% (strongly agree) and 30% (agree)) of the participants read the figures of speech naturally, saying they were authentic. 30% were undecided, while 20% argued that the figures of speech used were unnatural and inauthentic. Just above two-thirds (20% (strongly agree) and 50% (agree)) of the participants found the language natural and free from any weaknesses. 20% were undecided, and 10% found it unnatural. More than two-thirds (40% (strongly agree) and 30% (agree)) of the participants found that the poem produced deep and vivid impressions on them. 20% were undecided, and 10% disagreed.

In their responses to the two open-ended survey questions, the participants mostly agreed with the answers to the closed questions shown above. As mentioned earlier, the participants were given the freedom and space to comment on the poem's poetic language and aesthetic effect. Accordingly, and for the sake of objectivity, three samples of the participants' answers (representing 15% of the total answers) have been randomly selected and quoted below:

The poetic language of the poem:

Participant 1: "*I would say that the poem conveys a clear message, and the language is effective. It leaves no doubt about the meaning, which is, to my view, slightly overdone. I prefer poetry which is not so obviously stated and which requires the reader to picture and slightly subtl*er."

Participant 2: "*The poem seems to have been translated, rather than originally written in English. It reminds me of some of the poetry from Al Andalus during the Islamic Golden Age. I think the metaphorical aspect does not convey as effectively as it would in its original form. The line about the prophet is somewhat confusing and does not make sense in that context.*"

Participant 3: "*The language reads easily and has effective use of metaphors and similes.*"

The aesthetic effect of the poem:

Participant 1: "*As above, although there is depth to the poem, to my taste, aesthetically, I am left feeling that I am being served food on a plate. For me, poetic beauty allows me to imagine, be lost, and then discover. So, while the language used paints a vivid picture, for my taste, it lacks a level of blur, and it is in the blur that I find the beauty and the fulfillment. This is only my opinion, and it may be totally different from a more informed analysis.*"

Participant 2: "*The form adds to the aesthetic effect and creates an image of waves. The poem would be more aesthetically pleasing if it were shorter, as it belabours its point and the style becomes repetitive.*"

Participant 3: "*It is very effective and emphasizes the themes of the poem, creating a clear poem.*"

4.3. Findings of the Study

Having analyzed the translation of figures of speech and investigated how TT readers perceived them, it was found that the overall message of the TT and the translation is clear and unambiguous. To achieve translation equivalence in poetry, factors to consider include cultural acceptability, poetic elements, and TT readers' perceptions. In fact, this requires dedicated effort and extensive study and research into the TL and its culture, its common expressions, lifestyle, values, the aesthetic effects of poetry, etc. As far as Moore's (2013) translation of the figures of speech used by Qabbani (1972) in his رسالة من تحت الماء '*Letter from Under the Sea*' is concerned, the findings are summarized as follows:

Qabbani (1972) used four kinds of figures of speech in the ST, namely, metaphors, similes, personifications, and hyperboles. Moore (2013) translated these figures of speech into equivalent ones in the TL, reproducing metaphors, similes, personifications, and hyperbole in the TT. In many cases, Moore (2013) opted for the literal translation technique. As a result, some figures of speech were translated eloquently while others were not. Although the meanings of the figures of speech in the TT are clear, some TT readers found them unnatural in the TL for several reasons, such as cultural mismatch and lexical awkwardness. Although the TT readers were not informed that the TT was a translation from another language, some of them believed it to be a translation.

5. Conclusion

This study has investigated the transability of the figures of speech used by Qabbani (1972) in his poem رسالة من تحت الماء '*Letter from Under the Sea*' and translated by Moore (2013) into English. In fact, two data collection tools have been used to investigate the translatability of the Aalignsfigures of speech into English. The first was a comparison between the ST (Arabic) and the TT (English) to see how the translator transferred the figures of speech when used in a poetic text. This comparison requires analyzing the translated text to determine how the poem's intended message was conveyed in the TL. The second tool was a survey given to some native speakers of English to see how they perceived the aesthetic effect and naturalness of the figures of speech used in the translation, taking into consideration that they were not informed that the TT is a translation from another language. The analysis revealed that the figures of speech are translatable, but sometimes the aesthetic image is affected in a way that destroys the intended message and the naturalness of the language of the translated poem. It is also found that although many figures of speech have been reproduced in the TT, they were unusual to the TT readership. In addition, the translator relied heavily on literal translation, resulting in some unnatural expressions in the TL. Likewise, the survey findings

show that the meaning of the TT is clear, well-structured, and creates vivid impressions on the reader. As far as figures of speech are concerned, some survey participants were unsure about the naturalness of some figures of speech in the TT. This, obviously, goes in line with the findinganalysis's analysis that some figures of speech, when translated literally, were unusual to the TT readership. To answer the twofold question previously highlighted, Moore (2013) dealt with the figures of speech in his translation of Qabbani's (1972) رسالة من تحت الماء *'Letter from Under the Sea'* by adopting literal translation. Although he was successful in some cases, some TT readers found some figures of speech bizarre and unnatural in the TT. It is, therefore, recommended that although the figures of speech are translatable, they need special emphasis when it comes to translating them in poetry; in addition, of course, to the other elements of poetry such as rhyme scheme, rhythm, etc.

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. The small sample size of the survey restricts the generalizability of the findings regarding readers' perceptions of the translated poem. Nevertheless, the study makes a valuable contribution to translation studies by highlighting the challenges of rendering Arabic figures of speech into English and by providing empirical insights into how these translations are perceived by target readers. For further research, it is recommended to conduct similar studies with larger, more diverse samples and to explore the translation of other literary elements in Arabic poetry, such as rhythm, rhyme, and sound patterns, to develop more comprehensive strategies for preserving the aesthetic and artistic effects in translation.

References

Baker, M. (1992). *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203133590

Ben Zid, M. (2016). Unknown problems of poetry translation from the perspective of translation students. *English Language and Literature Studies, 6*(4), 51–61. https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v6n4p51

Catford, J. C. (1965). *A linguistic theory of translation*. Oxford University Press.

Chesterman, A., & Williams, J. (2007). *The map: A beginner's guide to doing research in translation studies*. St. Jerome Publishing.

Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika, 16*(3), 297–334. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02310555

Czerniawski, A. (1994). Translation of poetry: Theory and practice. *The Polish Review, 39*(1), 3–19.

Dastjerdi, H., Hakimshafaaii, H., & Jannesaari, Z. (2008). Translation of poetry: Towards a practical model for translation analysis and assessment of poetic discourse. *Journal of Language & Translation, 9*(1), 7–40. https://doi.org/10.22425/jul.2008.9.1.7

De Pedro, R. (1999). The translatability of texts: A historical overview. *Meta: Journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal, 44*(4), 546–559. https://doi.org/10.7202/003808ar

Merriam-Webster. (2026). *Figure of speech. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved February 26, 2026, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/figure%20of%20speech

Gautam, K. R. (2014). *Figures of speech in Flax-Golden tales* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Tribhuvan University.

Glatch, S. (2021, September 3). What is form in poetry? 10 poetic forms to try. *Writers.com*. Retrieved from https://writers.com/what-is-form-in-poetry

Harvey, M. (2003). A beginner's course in legal translation: The case of culture-bound terms. In *Proceedings of the VII International Forum on Legal Translation, Court Interpreting and Comparative Legilinguistics* (pp. 1–18). Retrieved from https://www.tradulex.com/Actes2000/harvey.pdf

Hatim, B., & Munday, J. (2019). *Translation: An advanced resource book for students* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429266348

Hermans, T. (2009). Translatability. In M. Baker & G. Saldanha (Eds.), *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies* (2nd ed., pp. 300–303). Routledge.

Hervey, S., & Higgins, I. (1992). *Thinking translation: A course in translation method, French to English*. Routledge.

Imagery. (2021). *LiteraryTerms.net*. Retrieved October 7, 2021, from https://literaryterms.net/imagery/

Kennedy, X. J. (1991). *Literature: An introduction to fiction, poetry, and drama* (5th ed.). HarperCollins.

Keraf, G. (2001). *Diksi dan gaya bahasa* [Diction and style of language]. PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

Khalifa, A. (2015). Some problematic aspects of Arabic poetry translation. *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research, 19*(1), 314–324.

Khasawneh, R. R., Moindjie, M. A., & Kasuma, S. A. (2025). Diachronic translation of figures of speech in Antara's Mu'allaqã. *World Journal of English Language, 15*(3), 290–302. https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n3p290

Koby, G. S., Fields, P., Hague, D. R., Lommel, A., & Melby, A. (2014). Defining translation quality. *Tradumàtica*, (12), 413–420. https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/tradumatica.76

Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (1989). *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*. University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226470986.001.0001

Matiu, O. (2008). Translating poetry: Contemporary theories and hypotheses. *Professional Communication and Translation Studies, 1*(1–2), 127–134.

Nayar, P. K. (2009). *A short history of English literature*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/UPO9788175968851

Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. Prentice Hall.

Nida, E. A. (1964). *Toward a science of translating: With special reference to principles and procedures involved in Bible translating*. E. J. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004495746

Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1982). *The theory and practice of translation*. E. J. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004669147

Ollila, B., & Jantas, J. (2006). *The definition of poetry*. Retrieved from https://joejantas.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/the-definition-of-poetry1.pdf

Pym, A., & Turk, H. (1998). Translatability. In M. Baker (Ed.), *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies* (1st ed., pp. 273–277). Routledge.

Qabbani, N. (1972). رسالة من تحت الماء [Letter from under the sea]. Retrieved March 20, 2021, from https://www.nizariat.com/poetry.php?id=77

Qabbani, N. (2013). Letter from under the sea (R. Moore, Trans.). In *Nizar Qabbani: Selected poems* (pp. 45–50). Saqi Books. (Original work published in 1972). Retrieved from https://translationsbykevin.wordpress.com/2013/05/30/letter-from-under-the-sea-nizar-qabbani-arabic-english-translation/

Regmi, L. (2014). Analysis and use of figures of speech. *Journal of NELTA Surkhet, 4*, 76–80. https://doi.org/10.3126/jns.v4i0.12864

Literary Terms. (2018, October 8). *Rhyme: Definition and examples*. https://literaryterms.net/rhyme/

Merriam-Webster. (2026). Rhythm. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved February 26, 2026, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhythm

Sukmaningrum, R., Setyaji, A., & Hawa, F. (2023). Students' challenges in translating poetry. *Borneo Educational Journal (Borju), 5*(2), 192–203. https://doi.org/10.24903/bej.v5i2.1314

Wiersema, N. (2004). Globalization and translation. *Translation Journal, 8*(1).

World Health Organization. (2009). *Changing cultural and social norms supportive of violent behaviour* (Series of briefings on violence prevention: The evidence). World Health Organization.

About the author

Mohammed Juma Zagood is an Associate Professor of Contrastive Linguistics and Translation Studies at Elmergib University in Libya. He earned his PhD from Durham University in the UK in 2012. He also holds two Master's: one in Translation and Interpreting Studies from the Academy of Graduate Studies in Libya and another in Applied Linguistics for TESOL from Northumbria University, UK. Since 2012, Dr. Zagood has participated in numerous local and international conferences and published book chapters and articles in various journals and conference proceedings, as well as translated works. Dr. Zagood has taught Translation and Interpreting courses in Libya, Oman, and the UAE. In addition, he participated in the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program in the US in 2013. Dr. Zagood's research interests include Translation Theory and Methodology, Interpreting Theory and Methodology, Literary Translation, Translation and Interpreting Teaching, and Contrastive Linguistics.

Appendix One: Source Text

رسالة من تحت الماء

نزار قباني

إن كنتَ صديقي...ساعِدني
كَي أرحَلَ عَنك...
أو كُنتَ حبيبي...ساعِدني
كَي أشفى منك
لو أنّي أعرفُ أنَّ الحُبَّ خطيرٌ جِداً
ما أحببت
لو أنّي أعرفُ أنَّ البَحرَ عميقٌ جداً
ما أبحرت...
لو أنّي أعرفُ خاتمتي
ما كنتُ بَدأت...

إشتقتُ إليكَ...فعلِّمني
أن لا أشتاق
علِّمني كيفَ أقُصُّ جذورَ هواكَ من الأعماق
علِّمني كيف تموتُ الدمعةُ فى الأحداق
علِّمني كيفَ يموتُ القلبُ وتنتحرُ الأشواق

إن كنت نبياً...خلصنى
من هذا السحر...
من هذا الكفر
حبك كالكفر...فطهرني
من هذا الكفر...

إن كنتَ قوِيَّاً.. أخرجني
من هذا اليَمِّ...
فأنا لا أعرفُ فنَّ العوم
الموجُ الأزرقُ في عينيك...يُجرجِرُني نحوَ الأعمق
وأنا ما عندي تجربةٌ
في الحُبِّ...ولا عندي زَورَق

إن كُنتُ أعزُّ عليكَ فَخُذ بيدِيّ
فأنا عاشِقةٌ من رأسي حتَّى قَدَمَيّ
إني أتنفَّسُ تحتَ الماء...
إنّي أغرق...
أغرق...
أغرق...

Appendix Two: Target Text

Letter From Under the Sea – Nizar Qabbani translated by
Kevin Moore

If you are my friend, help me,
To leave you.
If you are my lover, help me,
So that I can be cured of you.
If I knew that love was so dangerous,
I would not have loved.
If I knew that the sea was so deep,
I would not have set sail.
If I knew my end,
I would not have begun.

I desire you, so teach me
Not to desire.
Teach me
How to cut the roots of love from the depths.
Teach me
How tears perish in eyes.
Teach me
How the heart dies and yearning ends.

If you are a prophet, free me
From this enchantment,
From this disbelief.
Your love is blasphemy, so cleanse me
From this disbelief.

If you are strong, pull me out
Of this open sea.
I do not know the art of swimming.
The blue waves of your eyes,
Drag me to the depths.
I do not have experience
In love, and I do not have a boat.

If I am precious to you, take me in your hands.
I love it from head to toe.
I am breathing under the water.
I am drowning,
Drowning.