

Qur'anic Metaphors and Their English and Persian Translations: Dead or Alive?

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Abstract

The present study aims at discussing whether metaphors in the Qur'an, revealed more than 1400 years ago, are dead, moribund or live and how these three types of metaphors have been translated in three English and three Persian translations of the Qur'an. The results reveal that among 70 metaphors examined, while only about 32.85% are live metaphors, about 67.14% are moribund, but none of the cases are completely dead. Furthermore, based on Newmark's (1988a) classification of procedures for translation of metaphors, there is no image in 15.21% of the procedures used in the English and Persian translations of live metaphors while there are images in 84.78% of them. On the other hand, 43.26% of the procedures used in translations of moribund metaphors transfer the images whereas 56.73% of them omit the images, although these metaphors are not dead. Yet the point is that when the majority of Qur'anic metaphors, that are moribund, had been considered by translators as dead metaphors and their images had been omitted, the translations fail to represent one of the important aspects of the original text's literary style that is its metaphorical and literary language.

Keywords: Dead Metaphor, Moribund Metaphor, Live Metaphor, Translation Procedure

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1. Introduction

According to Soskice (1985) since antiquity, metaphor has been recognized as of the main tropes and as Robinson (1991) maintains it has been called the super trope containing or implying all the others. Soskice (1985) also adds that the study of metaphor begins with the study of language itself and in almost all traditions religious language is closely connected with metaphorical talk. He continues that no philosophical account of religious language will be either complete or sufficient if it fails to take account of the ways forms of figurative discourse, like metaphor, function in the task of saying that which cannot be said in other ways.

In the text of the Qur'an also metaphors and other rhetorical devices are considered as a necessary component (Heath, 2003). Besides, translation of metaphor is the most important problem (Newmark, 1988b) and this question gains special significance in rendering scriptures, especially the Qur'an in which the use of the Arabic language is unique and worthy of special study at a variety of levels (Boullata, 2000), not least being that of literary structure and the matter of imagery with which this study is concerned.

Furthermore, in discussions of metaphor a good deal of space is given to examination of the difference between dead and live metaphors. Generally live metaphors are defined as those that people are aware of, whereas dead metaphors are so conventional that they are not obviously recognized as metaphors anymore. However, some metaphor scholars go beyond this simple classification and present more detailed accounts which will be discussed in the next part.

2. Review of Related Literature

One of the main dichotomies in studying metaphor is between being live metaphor and dead metaphor. According to Larson (1984), in dead metaphors, the person using it no longer thinks of the comparison on which it is based. In fact, when a dead metaphor is used, the person listening or reading does not think about the primary sense of the words but s/he directly thinks about the idiomatic sense. Idioms are, thus, dead metaphors. On the other hand, Larson (1984, p. 249) defines live metaphors as the ones understood only after paying special attention to the comparison which is made and “constructed on the spot by the author or speaker to teach or illustrate”.

Baldick (2004) also agrees with Larson (1984) in this regard and contends that the metaphorical words and phrases which pass unnoticed are called dead metaphors. This feature of “unconsciousness” is also mentioned by Fowler (1926), Cooper (1986), and Newmark (1988b).

Metaphor in Fowler’s (1926, p. 349) typology is divided into live and dead. The former is defined as the one that is offered and accepted with consciousness of its nature as substitutes for its literal equivalence while in the later “the speaker and hearer have ceased to be aware that the word used is literal”. Cooper (1986, p. 119) also believes that “the more we forget that it is being used instead of a literal equivalent, the deader is the metaphor”.

In Newmark’s (1988b) classification, dead or fossilized metaphors are defined as metaphors in which one is hardly conscious of the image and they are related to universal terms of space and time, the main parts of the body, as well as the main human activities. He also refers to original metaphors which are created or quoted by the source language author and they contain the core of an important writer’s message, his/her personality, and his/her view of life.

Among the theorists, Black (1993, p. 25) is critical of classifying metaphors as dead and alive and claims that dead metaphors are not metaphors at all mentioning that “I shall be concerned hereafter only with metaphors needing no artificial respiration, recognized by speakers and hearers as authentically ‘vital’ or ‘active’”. He also introduces a more finely grained classification distinguishing extinct, dormant and active metaphors. He labels the expressions whose etymologies suggest a metaphor beyond resuscitation as “extinct”; those whose original, now usually unnoticed metaphor can be usefully restored as “dormant”, and those that are perceived to be actively metaphoric as “active” metaphors.

Black’s stance is explicitly questioned by the Conceptual Metaphor Theory with argument that it is precisely that which is deeply entrenched that is the most active in the conceptual systems of language users (Muller, 2008). In fact, the well-established classification of metaphors as dead and live is challenged by Lakoff and Turner (1989) who believe that a huge number of so-called dead metaphors are alive. Goatly (2007, p. 22) also states that if we call conventional metaphors “dead” or “inactive”, this is because they are old and their interpretation does not demand as much conscious activity on our part, but this does not mean to say that they have less effect on our cognition. In fact, it is precisely because they are conventionalized that they may achieve the power to subconsciously affect our thinking without our being aware of it.

Lakoff and Turner (1989, p. 128) use the term “entrenched” verbal metaphors instead of the established terms “dead” or “conventionalized” verbal metaphors. In fact, they change the traditional equation between vitality and consciousness and through a cognitive linguistic view maintain that those linguistic structures that are highly conventionalized provide basic structural frames for the organization of thought. Thus they oppose the traditional view

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that all conventional metaphors are dead and no longer metaphors. They contend that this view “fails to distinguish between conventional metaphors, which are part of our live conceptual system, and historical metaphors that have long since died out”. They also add that

The mistake derives from a basic confusion: it assumes that those things in our cognition that are most alive and most active are those that are deeply conscious. On the contrary, those that are most alive and most deeply entrenched, efficient, and powerful are those that are so automatic as to be unconscious and effortless (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 129).

In addition to “consciousness”, another point discussed by theorists in elaborating dead and live metaphors is “lexicalization”. As Goatly (2007) contends traditional metaphor studies made a distinction between original or live metaphors and dead metaphors, the conventional ones that have become clichés and part of the lexicon of the language.

For Larson (1984, p. 249), dead metaphors are those that are “a part of the idiomatic construction of the lexicon of the language”. Levin (1993) expresses the same idea in differently and states that, to the extent that items are conventionally fixed within the lexicon their meanings are normalized, and thus rendered stable. Metaphors that have undergone this process are standardly referred to as dead not alive.

However, Alm-Arvius (2006) contends that lexicalization does not only mean that a particular use has become a conventional part of a language system but it also means that a secondary sense has acquired sense relations within the language and it will be connected with certain idiomatic constructions. She continues that a lexicalized metaphor is not strictly dependent on its source sense but it is itself stored in the vocabulary of a language. Thus, as long as a

use retains a polysemous relation with its source, it can be revived; it means its metaphorical character is obvious on closer scrutiny or “when this secondary use is compared to a more basic application of a lexical word or multi-word idiomatic expression. In short, such lexical uses are at the most moribund” (Alm-Arvius, 2006, p. 9). But a dead metaphor is introduced by her as one that is not connected with a more basic source meaning. In fact, it has become literalized and its metaphorical origin is only revealed if one looks at its history or etymology. In other words, the difference between dead and merely moribund metaphors is that the latter retain a polysemous connection with some source contents, while this historical semantic link has been deleted in the former. On the other hand, all incidental metaphors are completely alive because “they must be interpreted in relation to the source meanings that they have extended and generalized in an imaginative way” (Alm-Arvius, 2006, p. 8). Goatly (1997, p. 32) also distinguishes between dead and inactive metaphors by proposing that:

The dead ones are perceived by language users as homonyms, as though there are no wires connecting them at all, no possible grounds for a metaphor, e.g., pupil as a young student and as a circular opening in the iris. But with inactive metaphors the metaphorical connections are in place and may be switched on, in which case the user perceives the word as polysemous.

In fact, inactive metaphors become lexicalized and find their way into the dictionary through acquiring a second conventional meaning. To Goatly (1997), inactive metaphors can be divided into two categories of sleeping and tired ones; the former has a second conventional meaning, whereas with the latter the connection linking form and meaning is slightly less well established. At the two extremes of the scale of metaphors suggested by him there are also

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dead and buried ones at one side and novel and original ones at the other. He defines the former as metaphors the meanings of which remains opaque because for most English speakers, unless they are certain scholars, there is no opportunity for a metaphorical connection. However, in the latter, no second meaning can be listed in the dictionary.

Alm-Arvius (2006) adds that even if lexicalization is a necessary condition both for moribund and dead metaphors but only the loss of the connection with a historical source meaning is a sufficient condition for a metaphor to be labeled dead. Actually her ideas correspond with those of Shipley (1970) who defined dead metaphor as one in which the sense of a transferred image is not present such as the word “money” which is called so because it was first minted at the temple of Juno Montea. Yet, he defines active or live metaphor as one that is relatively new and has not become part of everyday linguistic usage. He also adds the category of dormant metaphor in which its contact with the initial idea it denoted has been lost.

As more recent scholars, Gentner and Bowdel (2008) also go beyond a simple dichotomy between live and dead metaphor and define four stages of conventionalization starting from novel metaphor to conventional, dead₁, and dead₂. In a novel metaphor, the base concept (image) has no standard metaphorical category attached to it, although the comparison between base and target will promote the formation of such a category. In a conventional metaphor, the base refers simultaneously to a literal concept and to a metaphoric category and the relationship between the senses is typically recognizable; for example the term river in “time is a river” has two associated senses: namely, “a large stream flowing water” and “anything that moves continuously forward” (p. 118). Gentner and Bowdel (2008, p. 118) continue that “metaphors often evolve further, to the point where the metaphoric sense

seems to stand on its own, with only a tenuous relation to the literal sense. These are often called frozen metaphors or dead metaphors". But in dead₂ metaphors the base term refers only to the derived abstract sense which is now taken as a literal sense and the original specific sense does not exist anymore. On the way from conventional metaphor to dead₂ metaphor, there is an intermediate stage called dead₁ metaphor which resembles conventional metaphors in having both a literal and a metaphorical sense but for dead₁ metaphor the relation between literal and metaphorical has become obscure (Gentner & Bowdel, 2008).

In the present study, the researchers focus on the criteria of lexicalization and classify the metaphors into three types of live, dead, and moribund or inactive using Alm-Arvius's (2006) and Goatly's (1997) terminology respectively. In analyzing the seventy metaphoric items if no second meaning is listed in the dictionary and the reader needs to interpret it via the vehicle concept, the metaphor is considered as live; if the word is perceived as a polysemouse one and its metaphoric meaning has found its way into dictionaries as a second sense it is regarded as inactive or moribund metaphor; but when the metaphoric item is perceived as homonym and its metaphoric origin is only revealed if one looks at its history or etymology, it is classified as dead.

3. Research Questions

The study is motivated by the following research questions:

- 1) Are Qur'anic metaphors live or dead?
- 2) What is the frequency of presence and absence of the images in English and Persian renderings of Qur'anic metaphors?

4. Method

In this study, seventy cases of metaphors in Meccan surahs which are best suited for literary investigation (Mir, 1988 cited by Zahnise, 2000) were investigated. It is worth mentioning that in Qur'anic studies the term *isti'ara* 'metaphor' has a wide field of application, namely any type of figurative usage (Heinrichs, 1998); however, in this study the word 'metaphor' is not used in this liberal fashion and other figures in the theory of imagery like *kinaya* 'periphrastic expression', *majaz mursal* 'metonymy', *tashbih* 'simile', and *tamthil* 'analogy' are excluded.

First to check that all the items are metaphors, Sabbagh's book (1943/2005) titled *Metaphors in the Qur'an* was referred to. Then Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* (1968), *Arabic-English dictionary of modern written Arabic* by Hans Wehr (1971), as well as a Persian translation (1981) of an Arabic-Arabic dictionary titled *Monjed al-Tollab* by Bostani were used as resources to investigate whether the metaphors are live, moribund or dead. After determining the percentage of live, moribund and dead metaphors, three English and three Persian translations of them were studied to see how the translators in these two languages have handled their rendering based on Newmark's (1988a) proposed procedures for translation of metaphors. The three English translations under focus were by Nikayin (2000), Saffarzadeh (2001), Qarai (2004) and the Persian ones are by Saffarzadeh (2001), Aminiyan (2006) and Ansariyan (2007).

For the purpose of analyzing the translations, procedures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 from Newmark's (1988a) framework in which there is an image either through the reproduction of the original image (procedures 1 and 7) or creation of a new one (procedure 2), or retaining the original image with a simile or metaphor (procedures 3 and 4) were considered in one category while

conversion of metaphor to sense (procedure 5) and deletion of metaphor (procedure 6) were taken as the second category in which there is no image. Afterwards the number of procedures used by each translator was calculated to determine the percentages of the two aforementioned categories of procedures in rendering live and moribund metaphors separately.

5. Results and Discussion

As it is shown in Table 1, among 70 cases examined, while 23 cases (about 32.85%) were live metaphors, 47 cases (about 67.14%) that is about twice as much were moribund or inactive, and none of the cases were completely dead.

Table 1. The Cases of Live, Moribund, and Dead Metaphors and Their Numbers and Percentages

Different types of metaphors	Cases found among the 70 cases	Number	Percentage
Live metaphors	<i>مَثْقَلَةٌ / وَزَّرَ / لَا تَزُرُ / أَنْقَالَ / الْمَوْتَى / الصَّمَّ / زَهْرَةٌ / عِشَاوَةٌ / غِطَاءٌ / سِرَاجًا / مَصَابِيحَ / شَهِيقًا / يَكْوَرُ / حَصِيدٌ / كُشِبَتْ / الْخُرْطُومُ / لَعْفِيَّةٌ / النَّجْدِيْنَ / الثَّوْرِ / أَعْلَالٍ / سَكْرَةٌ / أَكْبَهَةٌ / تَشْتَرُونَ /</i>	23	32.85%
Moribund metaphors	<i>رَهِيئَةٌ / إِخْوَانٌ / مُنِيرٌ / اشْتَعَلَ / بِيَمُوجٍ / دَلُولًا / نَسْلَخُ / زَهَقَ / يَدْمَعُ / زَانَ / عَمِيٍّ / تَنْجَاوَزُ / حَتَمَ / تَطْبَعُ / نَقَلَبُ / أَفْرَعُ / صَدَبُ / لَا تَيْلَى / زَيْنٌ / تِيْبُورُ / رُحُونَ / أَصَابَ / أُمَّ الْفَرَى / زُخْرُفٌ / حَرَتْ / اِضْرُ / الظَّلْمَتِ / الثَّوْرِ / عَمْرَةٍ / الْأَكْبَرِ / فَنِيْلًا / الْعَمَى / عَمِيثٌ / دَلُوْ / يَخُوْضُونَ / سَكَتَ / أَنْرَمُوا / تَرْكَبُنَ / أُمُّ / آيِنَ السَّيْلِ / أُنْحَتَ / رُحْنُ / قُرْشٍ / حَوْضُ / أَضْعَاثُ / اِنْسَلَخُ /</i>	47	67.14%
Dead metaphors	—	0	0

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After analyzing all the translations the researchers found out that only 15.21% of the procedures used in both English and Persian translations of live metaphors ignored either the literary device or its image (the second category of the procedures as classified above) while 84.78% preserved it either through reproduction of the image or creation of a new one (the first category of the procedures). The number of each procedure used by each translator in rendering live metaphors is presented in the following tables:

Table 2. The Number of Each Procedure in the First Category Used by Each Translator in Rendering Live Metaphors

Translators procedures	Saffarzadeh	Qarai	Nikayin	Saffarzadeh	Ansariyan	Aminiyan
P1	6	17	15	5	13	13
P2	0	0	1	0	0	1
P3	1	0	1	4	1	1
P4	0	0	0	3	2	0
P7	11	4	2	6	6	4
total	117= 84.78%					

Table 3. The Number of Each Procedure in the Second Category Used by Each Translator in Rendering Live Metaphors

Translator Procedures	Saffarzadeh	Qarai	Nikayin	Saffarzadeh	Ansariyan	Aminiyan
P5	5	2	4	4	1	4
P6	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	21= 15.21%					

On the other hand, 43.26% of the procedures used in English and Persian translations of moribund metaphors were from the procedures of the first category in which an image is used whereas 56.73% of them were from the second category procedures in which there is no image. The number of procedures used by the translators in rendering moribund metaphors is displayed in the following tables:

Table 4. The Number of Each Procedure in the First Category Used by Each Translator in Rendering Moribund Metaphors

Translators Procedures	Saffarzadeh	Qarai	Nikayin	Saffarzadeh	Ansariyan	Aminiyan
P1	11	16	17	5	11	7
P2	2	1	3	2	4	3
P3	1	0	1	1	1	0
P4	0	0	0	1	0	0
P7	6	3	4	6	8	8
Total	122 = 43.26%					

Table 5. The Number of Each Procedure in the Second Category Used by Each Translator in Rendering Moribund Metaphors

Translator Procedures	Saffarzadeh	Qarai	Nikayin	Saffarzadeh	Ansariyan	Aminiyan
P5	27	27	22	32	23	26
P6	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	160 = 56.73%					

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To clarify the beauty of these Qur'anic metaphors here three examples, one form live metaphors and the two other from moribund ones, are presented along with their translations. The first case is live metaphor *yukawwiru* that is the present tense of *takwir* and the only meaning brought for it in dictionaries is “to wind or coil something (e.g., a turban)”. In surah *Az-Zumar* verse 5, ... *yukawwiru al-layla ‘ala al-nahar wa yukawwiru al-nahara ‘ala al-layl...* “...He winds the night over the day, and winds the day over the night,...”, the continuous coming of night and day after each other due to the Earth's diurnal movement is referred to¹ (Qarashi, 1973; Tabatabaei, 1985). In fact, the night and day are likened to a turban or a piece of cloth that are coiled and wound around each other. What is of significance is the circular movement implied in the original verb that is also important in the creation of night and day as a result of daily rotation of the earth² (Qarashi, 1973). In Table 6, the English and Persian translations of this verb are presented:

Table 6. Translation Procedures Used for Translation of “*Yukawwiru*”

Translator Metaphor	Saffarzadeh	Qarai	Nikayin	Saffarzadeh	Ansariyan	Aminiyani
<i>yukawwiru</i>	<u>wraps</u> the night in the day and <u>wraps</u> the day in the night	<u>winds</u> the night over the day, and <u>winds</u> the day over the night	<u>makes</u> the day be <u>covered by</u> the night and lets the night be <u>covered by</u> the day	Shab ra dar ruz <u>mipichad</u> “winds” va ruz ra dar shab	Shab ra be ruz <u>darmipichad</u> “winds” va ruz ra be shab <u>darmipichad</u>	Be ham bar shab va ruz ra <u>gostarid</u> “spread”
Translation Procedure	P1	P1	P2	P1	P1	P2

¹ Authors' translation

² Authors' translation

In the English translations, Saffarzadeh (2001) and Qarai (2004) use the verbs “to wrap” and “to wind” respectively and in both of these English verbs there are images. Nikayin (2000) uses the verb “to cover” which lacks the implication of circular movement but it conveys one of the sense components of the original that is “covering”. In fact, the image of day being covered by night and vice versa can be taken either as a relatively new one (Procedure 2), or as an incomplete original image reproduced. The researcher preferred to opt for the former since throughout the whole study only the exact reproduction of original image was considered as the first procedure proposed by Newmark (1988a).

In Persian translations, Saffarzadeh (2001) and Ansariyan (2007) reproduce the original image while Aminiyan (2006) replaces the original metaphor with a new one, that is, the verb *gostardan* which denotes “to spread”. Yet, it should be taken into consideration that like Nikayin’s translation this image is not a totally novel one and shares the sense component of “covering” with the original verb.

The next case is the verb *damagha* which is a moribund metaphor because of the presence of both its non-figurative and figurative meanings in the dictionaries. The first meaning of this verb is *to break the head so that the wound reaches the brain* and its figurative or second meaning is “to overcome or prevail” (Bostani, 1981; Lane, 1968). This verb is mentioned in verse 18 of surah Al-Anbiya where God states that in confrontation of falsehood and truth, the latter invalidates the former: *bal naqzifu bi al-haqqi ‘ala al-batili fa yadmaghahu* ‘rather we hurls the truth against falsehood, and it crushes its head...’. In Table 7, the English and Persian renderings of this word are presented:

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Table 7. Translation Procedures Used for Translation of “*yadmaghahu*”

Translator \ Metaphor	Saffarzadeh	Qarai	Nikayin	Saffarzadeh	Ansariyan	Aminiyan
<i>yadmaghahu</i>	and Falsehood becomes crashed	and it crushes its head	smites	<i>Motalashi va nabud mishavad</i> “breaks into pieces and destroys”	<i>Dar ham shekanad (vaaz ham bepashad)</i> “breaks into pieces”	<i>Foru kubim hagh ra be (fargh)batel, an ra be ham shekafad (va angah gardad 'atel)</i> “we strike the truth on the head of falsehood, it tears it apart (and then it becomes useless)”
Translation Procedure	P2	P1	P2	P2+sense	P2	P7

In the translations, Qarai (2004) and Aminiyan (2006) very beautifully preserve the original metaphor while the latter adds the sense of it too; Saffarzadeh (in both English and Persian translations), Nikayin (2000) and Ansariyan (2007) seem to have replaced the original image with a new one when they use “crash”, *motalashi shodan* ‘to break into pieces’, “smite” and *dar ham shekanad va az ham bepashad* ‘to break into pieces’, respectively. The English words “crash” and “smite” denote “to hit something or somebody hard” (Wehmeier, 2003) while “falsehood” as an abstract entity cannot be hit; in Persian language the two verbs mentioned above are used here again for something abstract. It is likely that in these four translations efforts are made to keep the original image as they share the sense component of “blow” with the source language image but they do not convey the precise sense of *damagha*. The last point is that Saffarzadeh in her Persian translation adds the sense

nabud shodan ‘to be destroyed’ too and this combination of procedure 2 plus adding the sense falls out of Newmark’s (1988a) classification of procedures for metaphor translation due to the fact that a translator’s thoughts cannot be limited to a special and definite framework; various ideas may occur to him/her that go beyond the scope of a theoretician or researcher’s classification.

The last case discussed is the noun *umm* ‘mother’. In verse 9 of surah Al-Qariah, *fa ummuhu haviyah* ‘his home will be the Abyss’, the hell is ironically and figuratively called mother since in the same way that a mother is her child's refuge, in the Resurrection the sinners have no other refuge except the fire and hell³ (Makarem Shirazi, 1978; Tabatabaei, 1985). According to Qarashi (1973) also, hell is the sinner's home in the Resurrection; in the same way that a child sits besides his/her mother or on her lap, the sinner is amid the fires as well⁴. The translations of this word are tabulated below:

Table 8. Translation Procedures Used for Translation of “*umm*”

Translator	Saffarzadeh	Qarai	Nikayin	Saffarzadeh	Ansariyan	Aminiyan
Metaphor						
<i>umm</i>	Home	Home	Home	<i>Maskan va jaygah</i> “home and place”	<i>Jaygah va panahash</i> “his place and refuge”	<i>Ma’va</i> “abode”
Translation Procedure	P5	P5	P5	P5	P5	P5

The first meaning brought in all dictionaries for “*umm*” is mother while in Lane dictionary the other meaning listed is “a place of habitation or abode” and because this sense was brought there the metaphoric item was considered

³ Authors’ translation

⁴ Authors’ translation

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as a moribund one. However, as it is displayed above, none of the translators preserved the image while in some dictionaries like Hans Wehr and Monjed al-Tollab even this second meaning is not mentioned and the translators could have considered this metaphor as a live one and preserved the image.

6. Conclusion

As it is obvious from the results, none of the Qur'anic metaphors under focus in this study are dead and their readers do not need to refer to their etymology to grasp that once they were metaphors. However, in 160 cases of translated moribund metaphors (56.73%), they were treated as dead ones and their images were not retained by any means. However, once the metaphors were identified as live the images were preserved and only in 21 cases of translated live metaphors (15.21%) in both languages the images were deleted while in 117 cases (84.78%) the images were retained.

Yet the point worth considering is that the majority of the Qur'anic metaphors in this research are moribund or inactive nowadays, about 14 centuries after Qur'an's revelation. When these metaphors are treated as dead ones, the omission of images in this large number leads to diminishing the literary style in the target texts in comparison with the original text that, as Ayoub (2000) maintains, can be appreciated as pure literature of a high order containing all the elements and qualities of good classical literature like poetic imageries, metaphors and similes.

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