Metaphors with Translingual Dimensions in the Novels of Khaled Hosseini

Abdul Wadood Khan
Department of English Language and Translation
College of Languages and Translation
King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Abstract
This study addresses the phenomenon of literary bilingualism by investigating the simultaneous interplay of multiple discourses and languages in Khaled Hosseini’s novels. It primarily focuses on metaphors in his fiction, which lend a unique sense of translingualism and multiculturalism to his work. Hosseini’s overt and covert use of metaphors reveals an allegiance to several languages that are spoken in Afghanistan and the region, including Pashto, Persian, Arabic and Urdu. His double cultural and discursive belonging suggests a case for post-structural translingualism, a fluid bilingualism belonging simultaneously to all the languages in one’s repertoire. These metaphors, along with his characteristic narrative and linguistic strategies, give Hosseini a unique linguistic persona. This study addresses, inter alia, the self-translating aspect of Hosseini as an author whose works remain marvels of interwoven languages and identities.

Keywords: khaled hosseini, metaphor, multiculturalism, multilingualism, translingualism

Metaphors with Translingual Dimensions in the Novels of Khaled Hosseini

“...to Haris and Farah, both the noor of my eyes...”
(Appearing in the dedication of each of Khaled Hosseini’s novels)

Introduction
Metaphors are key elements of literature that provide literary content in a work of prose or poetry, lending it uniqueness and subjective insinuation. Authors who intend to deliver poise and explicitness in presenting their characters and scenarios use metaphors in their work (Lodge, 2015). Metaphors are recognized as a literary tool that enables readers to both access the author’s vision and perceive an experience. Many past authors have fascinated literary scholars and critics alike with their ability to symbolize conceptual ideas using an intimate mix of words, views, and culture (Yu, 2008). The meanings and connotations of metaphors tend to differ along with variations in language and cultural perceptions. Therefore, ambiguity toward metaphors increases with variation in the social and linguistic attributes of people experiencing a piece of writing in different languages (Moje et al., 2009). Hence, cultural variables have been regarded as a significant factor in determining both the viability of metaphors and the level at which they can be comprehended. Furthermore, diverse assumptions can be derived from the same metaphorical structure, leading to variations in its perception (Deignan, 2003; Talebinejad & Dastjerdi, 2005). Globalization emerged alongside the need and imperative to comply with the world and its erratic perceptions. Efforts to do so can enable both authors and readers to produce and perceive original ideas with efficiency to appreciate different cultural nuances and enjoy the linguistic lucidity associated with metaphors. It can be argued that whereas metaphors have a strong association with culture; they are deeply ingrained in language. Although much has been said about Khaled Hosseini as a multicultural writer, his translingual standing has yet to be properly recognized.

Khaled Hosseini
Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul in 1965. His father worked in the Afghan Foreign Ministry, and his mother taught Farsi and history at a local high school. His family moved to Paris in 1976 when his father was assigned there. In 1980, just as the Hosseinis were happily planning a journey back home, there was a communist coup in Afghanistan, and Kabul was almost taken over by the Soviet army. Seeing no future in Afghanistan, the Hosseinis applied for asylum in the United States. The request was granted, and they moved to San Jose, California, in September of 1980.

Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and continued his education, completing his bachelor’s degree in biology in 1988. The following year, he went to medical school, and after graduation, he completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. He worked as an internist from 1996 to 2004. Meanwhile, he began writing his first novel, The Kite Runner, in 2001. The novel was released by Riverhead Books in 2003. This maiden effort proved to be an international blockbuster and became a classic, finding its way to more than 70 countries and spending more than 100 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list (Stuhr, 2009).

His next novel, A Thousand Splendid Suns (2009), debuted at number one on the New York Times bestseller list and remained there for 15 weeks, spending about a year on the bestseller list. The two books jointly delivered sales of more than 10 million copies in the United States and more than 38 million copies worldwide. Hosseini’s third novel, And the Mountains Echoed, was released in 2013 and proved to be equally successful.
Khaled Hosseini has emerged as one of the best storytellers in the world today. Like his Amir in *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini was interested in telling stories from a very young age (Stuhr, 2009). As a child, he enjoyed reading classical Dari poetry and translating works such as Alice in Wonderland into Farsi. Like Amir, Hosseini has always been an ardent Anglophile, loving and adulating Western people and culture, although he neither learned nor practiced the English language in a formal manner until he moved to the United States. He deliberately learned and mastered the essentials of storytelling (*daastaan gui*) in the East, and in many ways, his novels are versions of *daastaans* in English for the new millennium. With a native flair for not only English but also many Eastern languages, Hosseini is never at a loss for the *mot juste* for every character and situation. This is reminiscent of Ezra Pound, who tells us in *How I Began*, (1913)

“I would know what was accounted poetry everywhere, what part of poetry was ‘indestructible,’ what part could not be lost by translation and – scarcely less important – what effects were obtainable in one language only and were utterly incapable of being translated. …I learned more or less of nine foreign languages.” (p.707)

As the writing of an émigré, Hosseini’s novels have always displayed a double cultural and discursive belonging, with mastery of English on the one hand and a high degree of expertise in other languages such as Pashto, Persian, Urdu and Arabic on the other hand. Indeed, his multilingual repertoire provides him with a unique linguistic personality.

**Translingualism vs. Bilingualism or Multilingualism**

Early studies on multilingualism and creativity, such as those by Grosjean (1996) and Vildomec (1963), claim that bilingualism is an obstacle in writing practice. However, new evidence shows that multilingualism actually increases the potential for creativity, as it arms the polyglot author with a higher number of linguistic strategies.

More recent studies have highlighted that multilingualism greatly improves polyglots’ cognitive flexibility (Schneiderman & Desmarais, 1988), providing them with an enhanced ability to develop more “discriminating perceptual distinctions” (Ben-Zeev, 1977) and even greater intelligence (Peal &Lambert, 1962). In *Mirror of Language*, Kenji Hakuta presented further evidence of bilinguals’ greater cognitive flexibility (Hakuta, 1986). In his book *The Translingual Imagination*, Steven G. Kellman thoroughly analyzed writers who switch languages and found that they made significant literary contributions in more than one language (Kellman, 2000).

Khaled Hosseini’s works, particularly *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, present an interesting case of how bilinguals acquire, store and process figurative language and how their expressions embody interactions across languages. To quote Cacciari (2015),

“…one may argue that by definition, idiomatic expressions reflect cultural motives and habits, pieces of local history and so forth that are grounded in tradition and culture underlying a specific language.” (p.7)
Thus, it can be asserted that translingualism is the fluid language practice of bilinguals operating under different social constructions. As was rightly noted by Garcia and Wei (2014),

“Translingualism is an approach to the use of language, bilingualism and the education of bilinguals that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages”. (p.19)

Although the phenomenon of literary bilingualism has never been discussed as widely as it is today, it is not something new. Literary bilingualism has emerged as an independent discipline with recent mass migrations, the aesthetics of alienation in the 20th century and the translingual literature produced by émigrés. Some commonly used terms to describe translingual writers include polyglot, multilingual, plurilingual or simply a writer who uses literary diglossia (Al-Rfou et al., 2013; García, 2013). In Translingual Imagination, Kellman (2000) favors the term translingual, and he makes a distinction between ambilingual and monolingual translinguals. In The Poet’s Tongues, Leonard Foster introduced the term equilingual in his study of multilingual poets (Forster, 1970).

Traditionally, linguistic studies have sought to distinguish between bilinguality (the psychological state of an individual having access to more than one linguistic code) and bilingualism (more often referring to a linguistic community). The term translingual is considered more appropriate for addressing a context that involves multiple languages because such a context can refer simultaneously to either one language or many languages. Thus, instead of using many smaller categories of bilingualism, translingualism can be defined as a broad term referring to a phenomenon that is relevant to more than one language. The term can refer to literary traits or styles that reflect a simultaneous affiliation with more than one language. It can help us emphasize the fact that Hosseini is a writer who capitalizes on the interplay of multiple Eastern languages and cultures in his repertoire.

The Choice of Language(s)
A multilingual writer chooses the language used for a particular work based on numerous micro- and macro-level considerations. Many writers, such as Milan Kundera, Samuel Beckett and Vladimir Nabokov, switched to another language after establishing themselves in their native language. Conversely, other writers, such as Joseph Conrad, Kazuo Ishiguro, Andrei Makine, Nancy Huston and others, hardly ever published in their first language. Khaled Hosseini’s name appears on the latter list. Apart from those mentioned above, some famous writers who chose to write in their second languages include Agota Kristof (1935-2011), Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916), Andre Brink (1935-), Elif Shafak (1971- ), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), Ana Kazumi Stahl (1962- ) and Ronaldo Hinojosa-Smith (1929- ).

Language preference can play a decisive role in the quality of creation. In medieval times, the choice of language was generally determined by the genre. However, no such restrictions exist today, and writers are free to choose any language. The selection of a language for a particular piece of work by a bilingual writer is a fascinating subject. Much has been written about why
Conrad chose to write in English (Coolidge, 1972), despite the fact that Conrad himself had not left much room for such debate: “… my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude…. if I had not written in English, I would not have written at all.” (p. v-vi)

There is no doubt of Hosseini’s faculty to write naturally in English. However, his choice to write in English was based purely on a market calculation. He began writing when material about terrorism and the Taliban was selling like hotcakes. Considering his readership, Hosseini has always maintained a Western point of view in his writing. However, because his heart is with his own native languages, he switches to those languages whenever the situation demands verisimilitude or a display of personal feelings. This explains why he refers to his children as the noor (light) of his eyes and not as the “apple of his eye,” as an English writer would. Personal feelings can be best expressed in one’s mother tongue. Here, we find him in parallel with Franz Kafka, who has asserted that Czech holds more affection to him than his preferred language. He says (Kafka, 2015),

“German is my mother tongue and as such more natural to me, but I consider Czech more affectionate, which is why your letter removes several uncertainties: I see you more clearly, the movements of your body, your hands, so quick, so resolute, it is almost like a meeting.” (p.14).

Afghanistan’s various ethnic groups speak as many as 40 dialects, most of which are related to the Farsi, Pashto and Tajik languages. In addition to Pashto, Hosseini is well-versed in Dari, a Persian dialect spoken mainly by the Hazaras, Tajiks and the Farsiwan. If Hosseini were to write poetry, he would likely do so in Farsi, the language closest to his heart (the opposite was true for Kamala Das, however, who wrote her novels in her first language, Malayalam, and her poetry in English.)

Language and Culture
We have recently witnessed a shift in approach in studies related to language and culture, particularly with the advent of globalization. With the change in paradigms, contemporary scholars find it pointless to study either language or culture in isolation. Culture can be defined as a summation of the evolved beliefs, connotations and perceptions of a given language as they relate to a society. Metaphor remains, among so many linguistic devices and tools, the most prominent modality reflecting the peculiarities of a culture. A thematic study of metaphors across languages confirms that culture is a critical variable in forming metaphors. The meaning and wisdom created by a metaphor differ across languages or cultures.

Metaphors
Metaphors have a strong potential to structure abstract ideas, and this may occur differently in different cultures. Notions that are difficult to portray can be conveniently transformed into an interactive process through symbolic expression. They are considered an essential component of the linguistic assets that add to the quality of one’s language ability. Metaphors are common features of language and are frequently used in the modes of communication, whether written or spoken. They are employed by all writers to achieve uniqueness of meaning and creativity.
Referring to the use of metaphors, Stafford (2000) notes, “Metaphors may help to cover new situations or to elucidate new aspects of already familiar ones.” (p.152)

**Characteristics of Metaphors**

The use of metaphors is not limited to figurative literary pieces. Metaphors express free play within communication, either verbal or written, which can be related to scientific, legal, political or any other social discourse. Ever since Aristotle, philosophers, linguists and literary scholars have debated the topic of metaphor and produced associated studies (Taverniers, 2002). However, the more answers that are attempted, the more unanswered questions remain.

Although some scholars have generalized this notion by counting any figurative expressions as metaphors, rhetoricians have established two (metaphor and metonymy) or three (metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche) distinct classes of tropes. Serious attempts have been made to distinguish these three classes, but they are interrelated. Thus, there are metaphors that are living and those that are dead, along with deceptive metaphors that might be either, depending on whether they are weak or strong. That said, there is no agreement on the exact linguistic phenomenon that causes an expression to qualify as metaphorical. As has rightly been noted by Mooij in his classic, *A Study of Metaphor* (1976), vocabulary has never been “comprehensive and detailed enough to cover in advance all our feelings”. (p.13)

Whenever writers feel that mere vocabulary is not sufficient to express either a thought or the beauty or mystery associated with an object or situation, they seek recourse in symbols to provide a picture or vision of what they feel or perceive. These allegories, symbols or images are deemed metaphors, which, in theory, can be classified as dualistic, monistic or intermediary approaches. According to the majority of studies, a metaphor is an abridged or implicit comparison. Aristotle, Quintilian, Beardsley, Blair Rudes, Hegel and Vendryes all held a similar view (Crystal, 2004).

Two leading researchers in the literary field, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, presented a conceptual metaphor theory that has revolutionized thinking about metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) differentiate the three main types of metaphors, namely, structural, orientational and ontological. They state that structural metaphors are instances in which subjects are metaphorically structured with one concept in terms of another. Metonyms are cases in which one entity refers to another in terms of their inter-relation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Whereas metaphor is based on similarity, the function of metonymy is referential.

**The Kite Runner**

*The Kite Runner* (2003) is Khaled Hosseini’s first novel. Although Hosseini refers to it as a pure love story, *The Kite Runner* has been interpreted in many ways, mostly autobiographical. It is essentially a love story about two friends who happen to be a master and servant. The story also portrays the love between a father and a son, husband and wife, and parent and child. The canvas of the novel extends across generations and continents, exploring the ethnic and ideological realities of Afghanistan. Hosseini peppers the work with vocabulary from Pashto, Persian, Arabic, Urdu and Hindi, providing verisimilitude to the Afghan cultural environment.
A deep and thorough study of the character of Farid reveals a metaphorical quality in his delineation. Hosseini’s lamb is not so different from that of William Blake in the episode in which Farid tells Amir that “the only people in Kabul who get to eat lamb now are the Taliban.” (p.247). Amir instantly recognizes this rationale. As anyone can understand, the lamb represents the “innocent,” whereas the Taliban represent the experience of the “tiger.” Thus, it is not only the literal lamb the Taliban have come to monopolize; on a metaphorical level, the “lamb” is now subjected to the dangers of the “tiger.” Furthermore, Amir reads the features of a “lamb” in Hassan, who is another casualty of the Taliban. Many such metaphorical expressions have been observed throughout the novel. Some of these are provided below as examples:

“Ali, Lion of God” (Hosseini, 2003, p. 10)
Ali, as one of the ahal-al-bait (members of the prophet’s house) remains one of the most beloved and venerated figures in Islam. No wonder Hosseini refers to him more than once.

“On a high mountain I stood,
And cried the name of Ali, Lion of God
O, Ali, Lion of God, King of men
Bring joy to our sorrowful hearts!” (Hosseini, 2003, p.10)

Because Amir, the novel’s protagonist, sees his father as a hero, he refers to him again and again, employing different rhetorical devices.

“My father was a force of nature, a towering Pashtun specimen with a thick beard, a wayward crop of curly brown hair as unruly as the man himself. …hands that looked capable of uprooting a willow tree, and a black glare that would drop the devil to his knees begging for mercy.” (Hosseini, 2003, p. 11)

Or,
My father “was called Toofan Agha or Mr. Hurricane.” (Hosseini, 2003:11)

Or,
“My father moulded the world around him to his liking.” (Hosseini, 2003:14)

Or,
“A person who wastes his God-given talents is a donkey.” (Hosseini, 2003:28)

Again,
“…attention shifted to him like sunflowers turning to the sun.” (Hosseini, 2003:11)

And again,
“Real men didn’t read poetry- and God forbid they should ever write it.” (Hosseini, 2003:17)

Because his mother died while giving birth to Amir, he always feels guilty and thinks he has robbed his father of his beloved wife:

“I had killed his beloved wife, his beautiful princess.” (Hosseini, 2003:17)

Amir’s father appears as a hero, fighting and defeating every enemy until in the end, the enemy comes in the form of death—the only enemy he cannot defeat:
Metaphors with Translingual Dimensions in the Novels of Khaled Hosseini

“In the end, a bear had come that he couldn’t best.” (Hosseini, 2003:152)

This is the end of his father, a proud Afghan who will never betray his feelings, particularly those related to love. Amir has never seen him missing his only love, his wife, who is gone:

“Did he ache for her, the way I ached for the mother I had never met?” (Hosseini, 2003:6)

Good examples of Afghani linguistic and cultural milieu are found in the following quotations:

“My door is and always will be open to you.” (Hosseini, 2003:28)
Rahim Khan writes in his letter to Amir,
“Children aren’t coloring books.” (Hosseini, 2003:19)
Hosseini often uses animals as very effective symbols:
“I was the snake in the grass, the monster in the lake.” (Hosseini, 2003:92)
Or,
“They are hunting ducks.” Ali said in a hoarse voice. “They hunt ducks at night.”
(Hosseini, 2003:31)

The Hazara are an ethnic group in Afghanistan and neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan. Because of their religious beliefs (mostly Shia), cultural identities (mostly Farsi-speaking) and physical traits (close to Asian), they were the prime target of the Taliban regime.

Here is an example of how the Hazara were perceived by the Taliban (and even mainstream Pakhtoons):

“People called Hazaras mice eating, flat nosed load carrying donkeys.” (Hosseini, 2003:8)

The following chilling passage sums up the Taliban’s hatred for the Hazaras and how they attempted their ethnic cleansing:

“We left them for the dogs. Dog meat for the dogs.” (Hosseini, 2003:243)

As the name suggests, the novel is replete with kite flying and the emotions associated with it:

“If the kite was the gun, then tar, the glass coated cutting line, was the bullet in the chamber.” (Hosseini, 2003:44)

In Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Islamic world, a dear person or object is referred to as the “noor” (an Arabic/Persian word for light) of one’s eyes. Mention has already been made of how the writer used this expression about his children in the prefaces of all his novels. In The Kite Runner, the General also describes his daughter as “noor of my eyes” (Hosseini, 2003, p.146).

Hosseini is an Afghan-American writer. In his novels, however, he comes across as more American than Afghan. Whether out of pure love or diplomacy, he never tires of praising America:
“While Russia was the source that turned Afghanistan into a hell, America was different. America was a river roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom.” (Hosseini, 2003:119)

We have a classic example of love for America and hatred for Russia in the scene in which Amir’s father refuses to be treated and operated on by a surgeon (who is as American as himself) because of his Russian background:

“I don’t care where he was born, he’s Roussi, Baba said, grimacing like it was a dirty word. His parents were Roussi, his grandparents were Roussi. I swear on my mother’s face I’ll break his arm if he tries to touch me.” (Hosseini, 2003:135)

In this same spirit, he describes the Afghan clergy as a most loathsome class in a manner that many people will find in bad taste:

“Piss on the beards of all those self-righteous monkeys. They do nothing but thumb their rosaries and recite a book written in a tongue they don’t even understand. God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into their hands.” (Hosseini, 2003:235)

The following quotation includes an Afghani idiom meaning “life goes on.” This is, in a nutshell, the philosophy that has left the Afghans humbled but never broken by various adversaries.

“After all life is not a Hindi movie. Zindagi mizgara, Afghans like to say. Life goes on, unmindful of beginning, end, kamyab, nahkam, crisis or catharsis, moving forward like a slow dusty caravan of Kochis.” (Hosseini, 2003:312)

In one of the most touching scenes in The Kite Runner, Amir comes across a beggar who was once a teacher and a colleague of his late mother. Here is how he describes her tragic premature death:

“The desert weed lives on, but the flower of spring blooms and wilts. Such grace, such dignity, such a tragedy.” (Hosseini, 2003:218)

Sometimes Hosseini translates local expressions, as with the following beautiful song in which a newlywed groom wishes the night could be longer:

“Go slowly my lovely moon, go slowly (Ahesta boro, Mah-e-man, ahesta boro).” (Hosseini, 2003:99)

The novel has many very expressive passages. For instance, one scene that depicts Kamal’s death is much more poignant and ironic than the others. Kamal had been a member of the gang that brutally raped Hasan, and he did not imagine that he would meet the same fate. His father described this incident as follows:
“Should have never let him go alone… always so handsome, you know… four of them… tried to fight… God… took him… bleeding down there… his pants… doesn’t talk any more… just stares…” (Hosseini, 2013: 105)

Some other metaphorical expressions with translingual implications are the following:

“*Oh gung bichara.*’ Oh, poor little mute one.” (Hosseini, 2003: 318)

“*Baboresh! Baboresh!* Cut him! Cut him!” (Hosseini, 2003: 57)

Other local expressions in *The Kite Runner* include *kofta* (minced meat preparation), *nan* (baked bread), *sherganji* (battle of poems in Persian), *namaz* (Islamic prayers), *mashaallah* (said about something good), *inshaallah* (said when somebody intends to do something), *bas* (enough), *watan* (nation), *quwat* (power), *kaseef* (dirty), *tashakor* (thanks), *qurma* (a meat preparation), *tar* (string), *azan* (the call to prayer), *bakhshinda*, (forgiven), *amen* (amen), *mareez* (a patient), *chi?* (what?), *saughat* (a souvenir), *pari* (a fairy), *salam* (salutations), *rakat* (a unit of prayer), *bismillah* (in the name of Allah), *rafiq* (a companion), *wah wah* (bravo!), *bolani gabuli* (food items), *padar jan* (dear father), *khoda hafez* (in God’s protection), *mohtaram* (respected), *ayatul kursi* (an important prayer recitation), *qawali* (a spiritual song), *pakeeza* (pious), *tashweesh* (anxiety), *qaom* (a nation), *rasti* (true), *jai namaz* (the prayer rug), and *khasta* (tired).

**A Thousand Splendid Suns**

The associations and relationships in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are more intricate and diverse than those found in *The Kite Runner*. While the latter dealt with relationships of a father and a son, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a saga of two women belonging to entirely different worlds who come together in affliction, supporting each other. The two women, although opposites, connect through their common misery, and over time they develop an unusual bond. Hosseini uses foreign words extensively to provide effective metaphoric touches. In the opening sentence of the novel, Hosseini uses the word *harami*, an Arabic word, common in almost all Eastern languages, meaning “illegitimate.” Readers in the Western world will likely have to guess at its meaning and connotations. However, the implications of the word eventually become clear as the word is repeated again and again contextually.

“You are a clumsy little harami.” (Hosseini, 2009, p. 2)

The word *kolba* (Hosseini, 2009, p. 3) is also used in the beginning of the novel; it accentuates the de-familiarizing technique, whereby the reader must gauge what it could mean. The writer prudently places the word in ways that help give the reader a glimpse of its possible connotation. The novel describes how Jalil and two of his sons, Fahad and Mohsin, constructed the small *kolba* where Mariam opened her eyes and remained in confinement for her first fifteen years. Built with sun-dried bricks, plastered with mud and handfuls of straw, the *kolba* has “two sleeping cots, a table made of wood, two straight-backed chairs, a window, and shelves that were nailed to the walls in which Nana kept clay pots and her much-loved Chinese tea cups and saucers.”
This description indicates an implicit difference between a *kolba* and a hut. The following excerpt helps us understand what it is:

“So, your father built us this *rathole.*” (Hosseini, 2009, p. 9)

Another good example of the translingual implications of the novel embedded in Afghan nationalism is the author’s reference to a popular old Pashto song by Ustad Awal Mir.

*Da ze ma ziba watan, da ze ma dada watan,* this is our beautiful land, this is our beloved land.” (Hosseini, 2009:165) The use of local language in the following excerpt demonstrates how it provides traditional Afghan color:

“You have to (stay), said his mother. I am making *shorwa.*”
“I don’t want to be a *mozahem.*” (Hosseini, 2009:127)

In another instance, Hosseini writes *zendabaad* Taliban before giving its translation: “On it, someone had painted three words in big, black letters: *zenda baad Taliban!* Long live the Taliban!” (Hosseini, 2009:246)

Sometimes, Hosseini uses the local language to give authenticity to the atmosphere of the story, providing the translation afterward:

“You woke up the baby.” Then, more sharply, “*Khosh shodi?* Happy now?” (Hosseini, 2009:213)
“No, *na fahmidi,* you don’t understand.” (Hosseini, 2009:41)

In another instance, Hosseini writes *zendabaad* Taliban before giving its translation: “On it, someone had painted three words in big, black letters: *zenda baad Taliban!* Long live the Taliban!” (Hosseini, 2009:246)

In the novel, through the widespread and concentrated use of words from other languages, Hosseini reveals himself to be a multilingual writer who uses extensive original cultural nuances with skillful mastery. In passages of cultural declaration such as the following, Hosseini displays his Afghan-ness:

“...I am your husband now, and it falls on me to guard not only your honor, but ours, yes, our *nang* and *namoos.*” (Hosseini, 2009:217)

The phrase *nang o namoos,* referring to one’s honor, is the only motto by which an Afghan will live or die. No wonder we come across this expression repeatedly in Hosseini’s novels.

Hosseini has comprehensively compared English with the local expressions of Afghan life. He has often employed Pashto and Persian expressions to highlight cultural elements of Afghan society. Some of examples from the novel are as follows:

“His in-laws swore *blood would flow.*” (Hosseini, 2009:6)

In the following quote, the word *dil* (heart) metaphorically means courage:

“He didn’t have the *dil,* the heart for it.” (Hosseini, 2009:7)
A Thousand Splendid Suns is a tale of oppressed women in Afghanistan. No wonder the only lesson Nana has for Mariam is as follows:

“A man’s accusing finger always finds a woman.” (Hosseini, 2009:7)
“I was the poker root. A mugwort.” (Hosseini, 2009:8)

Hosseini uses a special jargon for Jalil’s wives. Explaining why she preferred living in the “rathole” to Jalil’s big mansion, she says

“For what? To watch him drive his kinchini wives around town all day?” (Hosseini, 2009:8)

Kinchini (meaning mischievous, scheming) is not a standard word but a register used by women of the lower strata. If an author can use this word so aptly, he is quite adept in the local lingua.

If Mariam had believed what Nana said about Jalil and the world, the story of A Thousand Splendid Suns would have been altogether different. It is a subtle irony in which a loving and doting mother explains to her daughter, pleading and threatening, what is good for her in the world and what is not. She begs her not to leave:

“I will die if you go. The jinn will come and I will have one of my fits. You will see I will swallow my tongue and die.” (Hosseini, 2009:26).

The tragedy is that the daughter won’t listen to her mother. She is blind about her father’s pretentious affection for her:

“She believed that she would always land safely into her father’s clean, well-manicured hands.” (Hosseini, 2009:21).

There are many other translinguistic metaphors in the novel:
“Sultan of my heart.” (Hosseini, 2009:41)
“Nah fahmidi, you don’t understand?” (Hosseini, 2009:44)
“Fahmidi? Is that understood?”
And,
“Happiness rushed in like a gust of wind blowing a door wide open…” (Hosseini, 2009:87)

Sometimes Hosseini will write correctly in English, but the construction of a sentence will show that he is actually self-translating thoughts from his native language into English:

“The parchment on which Mammy meant to ink their legends.” (Hosseini, 2009:140)

Mammy, Laila’s mother, is a tragic character who, having lost her son Noor (a Mujahid under Commander Massoud), lives either in the past or in an ideal future. Because of her wishful
thinking, she still hopes that “the lion of Panjshir” (Hosseini, 2009:141) will eventually win and Afghanistan will be liberated from evil forces. She is completely resigned, but sometimes she admits that she is tormented:

“Like someone’s stepping on my heart.” (Hosseini, 2009:141)

She categorically refuses to leave Afghanistan. To her, leaving would mean betraying her shaheed (martyred) son. She explains why she cannot leave Afghanistan:

“The only solace I find is knowing that I walk the same ground that soaked up their blood.” (Hosseini, 2009:149)

The following is a translation of a local saying:

“A stubborn ass needs a stubborn driver.” (Hosseini, 2009:199)

Rasheed is the villain of A Thousand Splendid Suns, but his love and indulgence of his son, Zalmai, shows a brighter side of his character:

“His patience with Zalmai was a well that ran deep and never dried.” (Hosseini, 2009:289)

And the Mountains Echoed

When the Americans decided to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan, the locale of Hosseini’s last novel shifted from Kabul to Paris to San Francisco and then to the Greek island of Tinos. This novel celebrates relationships between parents and children, brothers and sisters, cousins and caretakers belonging to many different cultures. Unlike Hosseini’s previous novels, And the Mountains Echoed does not aim to provide much local color and culture or feature any considerable use of bilingual metaphors. Below, its translingual metaphors with lexical and grammatical schemes are analyzed.

“…he walked until the sun was a faint red glow in the distance. Nights, he slept in the caves as the winds whistled outside.” (Hosseini, 2013: 7)

“I suspect he will touch many lives with his kindness and bring happiness to those trapped in sorrow.” (Hosseini, 2013: 11)

“Eric. Eric! Ecoute-moi. I’m going to call you back. I need to hang up now.” (Hosseini, 2013: 226)

“---‘D’accord, d’accord.’ Isabelle slings her purse over her shoulder, grabs her coat and keys. ‘But I’ll have you know I’m duly intrigued…’” (Hosseini, 2013: 234)

“Winter, Bibi Saheb. It descends on these villages and takes a random child or two every year.” (Hosseini, 2013: 91)

The translingual metaphors in this particular novel are from European languages, mostly French.
“She grinned. ‘Parfois je pense que tu es mon seul ami, Nabi.’ ….”It means ‘Sometimes I think you are my only friend.”’ (Hosseini, 2013: 99)

Some other translingual metaphors in the novel are quoted below.

“All I am saying is that its crass to plaster your good deeds up on a billboard.”
(Hosseini, 2013: 141)

“What was I supposed to be… A seed of hope? A ticket purchased to ferry you from the dark? A patch for the hole you carried in your heart? I was no balm to your pain, only another dead end, another burden…” (Hosseini, 2013: 221)

Apart from the metaphor-related data presented above, Hosseini has made a commendable use of action verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs that are often repeated, affecting the storyline and engaging the reader. He has also made use of parallelism in that the equivalent structure, more so than ordinary structure, gives the story dramatic effect.

“Abdullah thought back to the winter before last, everything plunged into darkness, the wind coming in around the door, whistling slow and long and loud, and whistling from every little crack in the ceiling....” (Hosseini, 2013: 29)

Conclusion

This study sought to analyze and identify metaphors with translingual implications in the novels of Khaled Hosseini. We can conclude that through his novels, Hosseini has asserted both his individual and his cultural selves. Given that the contemporary world is a global village, we should be ready and willing to welcome and appreciate unfamiliar metaphorical expressions from unfamiliar parts of the world. Through textual manifestations of multilingualism, which should be recognized as an integral part of Hosseini’s corpus, this study has revealed the linguistic and cultural identity that Hosseini has created for himself.

Throughout the study, the experiential information and interpretations asserted that appreciation of metaphors used in different languages provide us with a comprehensive understanding of associated cultural aspects. It must be ascertained that the reader also verifies the common connection occurring among words, society and thoughts.

It can be proposed through this analysis that cultural and individual skills from experience, together with rational impressions of the world, have a tendency to offer leading contribution to the comprehension of unknown metaphorical terms. In addition, some other general tactics and methods concerned in the understanding of metaphors require continuous interaction with literary discourse. Moreover, the conclusion discloses several variables that have provided us with the comprehension of metaphors that considerably include the spiritual faith, appropriate clues, and resemblances between the first language of writer and the foreign language. One hopes, this paper leads to further studies in the field so that this particular bilingual phenomenon is further dealt with and appreciated from different socio-linguistic perspectives.
Metaphors with Translingual Dimensions in the Novels of Khaled Hosseini

About the Author:
Dr. Abdul Wadood Khan
Born and educated in India, Abdul Wadood Khan has performed academic responsibilities in various capacities since 1981. He is presently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Translation, at College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia. The main areas of his interest remain the Literary Linguistics of Modern British Fiction and ESP for engineering students in an EFL context.

References


