The Translation of Metaphors in Malay Pantuns into English

Krishnavanie Shunmugam
Monash University

The objective of this paper is to explore the strategies translators employ when shifting metaphorical language in Malay pantuns (a popular form of classical Malay poetry that has a most unique form) into the English language. For this purpose, three love pantuns have been selected for the analysis here. Each of these pantuns has more than two translated versions in English. This will allow for a comparison of the various options open to a translator when translating metaphors and a discussion on the range of interpretations that the translators represent in the target language as well as the possible reasons that influence the particular choices made by each of the translators concerned.

Keywords: metaphor translation, Malay pantuns

1 Introduction

Metaphors are the most versatile of tropes in the human language. Lakoff and Johnson, in their groundbreaking book *Metaphors We Live By*, establish this as a fact. They illustrate how “[our] ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3) and as such, our everyday language is often permeated with all sorts of metaphorical use. In *More Than A Cool Reason*, a later cognitive study on metaphors in poetry, Lakoff and Turner make evident that in the context of poetry, metaphors serve as a dynamic semantic and conceptual tool in the poet’s hands.

In *A Grammar for Metaphor*, Brooke-Rose shows how metaphors in literary texts and especially poetry can manifest themselves in varied syntactical forms and grammatical categories and can be drawn from an infinite range of source domains. This ability of the metaphor to take varied forms makes meaning interpretation not always the easiest task. As such, these affective and oftentimes ambiguous figures of speech when considered within the context of poetry translation can give rise to various challenges and this is particularly so, if the metaphors in the source language are profoundly culture-bound. Owing to this, the modes of transferring metaphors often need to be assessed case by case with the main influencing factor being the receptivity of the target language and culture.
2 Translating Poetry

Ramanujan, in his paper *On Translating a Tamil Poem*, discusses the “hazards, the damages in transit, the secret paths and lucky bypasses” (47) that he had to traverse when translocating poems from the highly intricate classical Tamil into modern English. His experience aptly represents the experiences of all translators of poetry. Such encounters ranging from the frustrating to the exhilarating are largely due to the unique nature of poetic language and form.

Oser's mentions Aristotle's early observation of poetic language as that which “deviates” (159) from ordinary language. Although this is not always true, the poet’s sure avenue to creating newness is by violating the norms of the semantic and syntactic system of the language he/she writes in. From time to time, poets take their readers off-guard with the oddest structures, awkward collocations and sometimes even venture to stray from grammaticality to achieve their intended purposes. Metaphors likewise, amongst other poetic devices also avail themselves to much experimentation.

The licence to create via deviation, the ‘law-breaking’ produces only apparent disorder – it is not anarchic; the deviations if skilfully worked out often create a rich harmony of meaning. For the translator however, such creative strangeness if it turns up once too often as part of the poet’s style and if crucial meaning is contained in the ‘abnormality’ of such language use, will restrict his choices and become a tedium. The assignment becomes more difficult if there is a stark linguistic and cultural chasm between the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL).

Despite the uphill task involved in poetry translation, it is not an art doomed to failure. Raine’s comments on translation in general and poetry translation in particular best describe what the task is to the enduring practitioner:

Translation, like politics, is the art of the possible – with all the inevitable compromise implicit in that parallel with politics.

... Famously, pithily, undeniably, Robert Frost long ago found that poetry is what is lost in translation. And it was many years before D. J. Enright made his pragmatic rejoinder that even more is lost if you do not translate. Translation, then, is better than nothing.

As a matter of fact, when one considers the fair amount of literary translations that have survived the test of time, the translation of major poetical works has not just been something that is “better than nothing” but an invaluable contribution that has enriched cultures outside the source culture.
3 Metaphor Translation

In the context of poetry translation, there has hardly been any proper study on the transfer of metaphors. On the general issue of the translatability of metaphors however, the late twentieth century saw several papers on translation studies that touched on this subject in one way or another. The contributors include linguists and translation scholars like Eugene Nida (1969), Rolf Kloepfer (1967 in Dagut 1976), Katharina Reiss (1971 in Dagut 1976), Menachem Dagut (1976) and Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darblenet (1995) of which Dagut explores the subject the most. But, the three main conflicting views that arose from these studies that is, that i) it is not possible to translate metaphors ii) metaphors can be translated literally and iii) there are metaphors that can be translated and those that cannot, is today, no longer a matter of contention. It is obvious that the first, largely pessimistic view on the impossibility of translating metaphors is clearly unacceptable given the voluminous evidence of such a possibility. The second opinion, which is obviously a carelessly exaggerated view, is also not entirely valid. It is difficult to imagine how metaphors that are acutely culture-specific can be literally transported into another language without causing a fair amount of confusion. It is the last view that comes closest to the reality in actual practice. The main proponent of this view was Dagut. Among those who, on the whole, subscribed to this view were Ian Mason, Peter Newmark and Raymond van den Broeck.

Dagut’s logical measure for the translatability of metaphors is the degree of shared traits or common ground between the SL and TL cultures involved. With this view, he went on to distinguish between ‘real’ metaphors and derived ones. Dagut set apart the ‘real’ metaphors from other related forms of transferred meaning by tracing the journey of a freshly minted metaphor from the domain of ‘performance’ to the domain of ‘competence’. As the new metaphor becomes more and more familiar among its users, it joins the ranks of the semantic stock of the language. If it is a simplex metaphor, consisting of one lexical item, it matures into a polyseme in the lexicalized group of items and if it is a complex metaphor, comprising more than one lexical item, it develops into an idiom. Both polyseme and idioms can further evolve into formators like in view of, not withstanding and so on.

Dagut states that is pertinent to make the above distinctions because they will pose different problems to the translator and thereby would probably require different methods of translation. It is his belief that ‘real’ metaphors which are ‘semantic novelties’ would in theory not have any equivalents in other languages and so would have to be recreated while polysemes, idioms and formators being institutionalized items in a language system would more readily find equivalents in other languages.
While Dagut did not venture further to describe or prescribe strategies in transferring this figure of speech, Newmark, who also grouped metaphors into particular types, went a step further to put forth a set of prescriptions on the methods of translating metaphors. His framework was based on a categorization of metaphors into five types: dead metaphors, clichés, stock metaphors, original and recent ones. Newmark’s formulation being the most elaborate normative scheme has become a frequent reference point in most of the recent descriptive studies on metaphor translation. Below is a summary of his methods:

1. **Dead metaphors** – Newmark says they can be disregarded since these are “no part of translation theory, which is concerned with choices and decisions, not with the mechanics of language” (94).

2. **Clichés** – in formative and vocative texts these can be discarded but should be preserved or simplified in expressive texts, authoritative statements, laws, regulations, notices, etc. (94).

3. **Stock metaphors** – seven main procedures are listed according to his hierarchy of preference (95-97).
   a) Reproducing the same image in the TL. Newmark sees this method as most applicable with one-word metaphors which are entities and also generally with abstract concepts that are universal.
   b) Replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image, which is acceptable in the TL culture.
   c) Translation of metaphor by simile. This helps to retain the image while aiding to soften the shock effect of a metaphor in the TL text.
   d) Translation of metaphor (or simile) by simile plus sense. This method, a combination of communicative and semantic translation is intended to serve both layperson and expert.
   e) Conversion of a metaphor to sense. This is preferred to any substitution of an SL by a TL image, which is not close enough to the sense of the original.
   f) Deletion. This decision should be made only if it can be justified empirically that the metaphor’s function is fulfilled elsewhere in the text, that it is not a mark of the writer’s personality or style and after weighing the more and less important elements in the text in relation to its intention.
   g) Same metaphor combined with sense. This occurs when the translator feels he needs to add a gloss to ensure the metaphor is understood.
4. Recent metaphors, normally neologisms – where there are no equivalents in the TL, the image needs to be described or a translation label in inverted commas has to be resorted to. Some recent complex metaphors can be transferred in the same way as stock metaphors.

5. Original metaphors – the more original the metaphor, the stronger the case for a semantic translation as the TL reader is as likely to be puzzled or shocked by the metaphor as the SL reader.

Besides Newmark, van den Broeck (77-78) also systematically explores the possible methods of metaphor translation. While Newmark’s is an instructive list, van den Broeck proposes a descriptive, hypothetical scheme. The following is his description of the three main modes for metaphor transfer:

1. Translation ‘sensu stricto’. This he sees as possible whenever both the SL ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’ are transferred into the TL. For lexicalized metaphors, this mode might give rise to two situations:
   a) if the ‘vehicles’ in the SL and TL correspond, it will result in a TL metaphor that is idiomatic. This is literal translation.
   b) if the vehicles in the SL and TL differ, the resulting TL metaphor could be either a “semantic anomaly or a daring innovation”. This he also labels as an onomasiological translation.

2. Substitution. The SL ‘vehicle’ is replaced by a different TL ‘vehicle’ with more or less the same ‘tenor’. In other words, a translational equivalent for the metaphor in the Source Text (ST) is used in the Target Text (TT). Van den Broeck calls this a semasiological translation.

3. Paraphrase. An SL metaphor is translated in the TL with a non-metaphorical expression. He sees this as ‘plain speech’, discursive translation or a process resulting in “a commentary rather than …actual translation.”

The analysis of the strategies applied in shifting metaphorical language in Malay pantuns into English will be based on Dagut’s views on the translatability of metaphors as well as on both Newmark’s normative framework and van den Broeck’s more open-ended, generative propositions on metaphor translation styles.

4 Translating Pantuns

The pantun is the most outstanding form of poetry in the collection of Malay oral literature. Winstedt in his introduction to Pantun Melayu states that “no one can estimate the mental scope of the Malay
without an understanding of the pantun, the love verse and lampoon of the Indonesian peoples” (Wilkinson and Winstedt 3).

The rural Malays of the past created pantuns to express an endless range of emotions. Pantuns were used to give advice, to poke fun, to outwit one another with verbal excellence, to make advances to someone, to satirize, to express sadness, disappointment and so on. The pantun, like other traditional, oral poetic expressions in Malay, was a means of drawing together the close-knit peasant community and so, members of the community understood well how its sounds worked, how many syllables went into a line, how to banter in matching pantuns and how to clinch the hanging lines of a pantun. There was no individual ownership of this versicle.

The generic pantun is a poem of four lines with four words per line and with an ABAB or AAAA or a slightly different combination of end-rhymes. The first two lines of the quatrain are known as the pembayang or sampiran “foreshadower” while the next two lines are called the maksud “meaning”. The pembayang is often a reference to the flora or fauna or the environment at large while the maksud is where the real intent of the pantun lies. While in some pantuns the pembayang is closely related to the message in the maksud, in others it is weaved together solely to create phonie harmony that is, in keeping with the assonance in the next two lines.

The language of the pantun is sententious as it predominantly employs various forms of figurative language. Wan Akmal Wan Semara in his book Unsur Puitika dalam Puisi Melayu Tradisional highlights the metaphors, similes, symbols, personifications, eponyms, allusions, idioms and proverbs that abound in the elegantly compacted Malay pantuns. The pantuns of old demanded at one and the same time a fusing together of words that were pithy and precise and highly rhythmic. For the translator of pantuns, such richness in the often skilfully interwoven word and sound-play poses the biggest challenge.

Malay pantuns have come to be known beyond their native home through translations carried out especially into the English language since the late nineteenth century. From the early days till the present time, translations of pantuns have been mostly the work of non-native speakers of Malay. This paper will study a sample of translations by five of these foreign scholars of Malay.

William Marsden, an Irishman who had come to work with the East India Company in Sumatra is the earliest known individual to have translated a handful of pantuns into English. The translations appear in his Dictionary & A Grammar of the Malay Language (1812). They were included in the dictionary to illustrate the idiomatic aspect and the musical quality of the Malay language. More significant contributors in this respect were British colonial scholars of Malay like A.W. Hamilton, R.O. Winstedt and R.J.Wilkinson who served at high administrative levels in
Malaya since the early twentieth century. Their translations were intended to be a source for educating the British civil service officers on the Malay people’s way of life.

Katherine Sim was yet another British citizen who took a great interest in the Malay language and culture during her stay in Singapore with her English husband, a civil servant. She wrote her small but much-read, compact book entitled *More Than A Pantun: Understanding Malay Verse* (1953/1987) which provides English translations of about a hundred and fifty pantuns.

Like Sim, the French planter, Henri Fauconnier was also much drawn to the petite and vibrant Malay pantuns. His fascination with this verse form is evident in the snatches of pantuns included in many chapters of his autobiographical French novel, *Malaisie* (1930). On having read *Malaisie*, Francois-Rene-Daillie, who was interested in all things Malay, was greatly inspired to explore this versicle. This led him to the task of translating pantuns into French and later in *Alam Pantun Melayu: Studies on the Malay Pantun* (1990) he went on to produce almost two hundred versions in English.

Daillie devotes an entire chapter to discussing the intricacies involved in translating this “strict and dense verse form” (172). As he rightly points out, each pantun is “an isolated jewel of a fixed shape, with a fixed number of characters which make it a pantun specifically” (172) and thus needs microscopic attention especially if its formal features are to be rendered in translation. His detailed discussion reveals the uphill task of such an endeavour. Winstedt finds that “the magic of inevitable phrase” in the best pantuns that is, in the “simple, sensuous and passionate” ones, is “hard to reproduce…especially when half the charm of a quatrain depends on assonance” (Wilkinson and Winstedt 20). But, he believes translation can still “preserve the sentiment” (20).

The pantun, as a performance genre very familiar to Malay listeners, also appears within the contexts of other classical Malay texts like the *syair* (a lengthy linked narrative verse form) and *hikayat* (ancient tales or legends in prose). Millie in commenting on his experience in translating pantuns embedded within the *Syair Bidasari* in his book *Bidasari: Jewel of the Malay Muslim Culture* (2004) also points out the “special problems” (19) it can present to translators. He speaks of three choices, all of which he finds “far from satisfactory” (19). As his second option of leaving them in the original form within a *syair* does not apply to pantuns that stand on their own, only his first and third choice are quoted below:

Firstly, these stanzas can be literally translated into English. The negative consequence is that the first two lines in the English translation will signify nothing, when in fact the first two lines of the Malay pantun, by virtue of the assonance created by them, signify to the fullest the humour and creativity of the Malay wordsmith...[t]he third option is to translate the pantun into English, but strive to maintain internal rhymes between the first and third and the second and fourth lines. Not only does this strategy require skill in composing from the translator, it
necessarily results in liberal rendering. The negative result of this is that the verses may appear incongruous in English, and constitute a pale imitation of the original on all counts.

(19-20)

And so, Millie clearly settled for the first option, not too happily of course, but with the assurance that the reader, “even if she knows no Malay…[can] examine the Malay text [placed alongside the translation] to discover the treasures evident in the pantun stanzas” (20).

On the whole, the intention of the analysis of the translations of the three pantuns here is to observe which of the two options above is generally applied by the translators when shifting metaphors - a literal or a more liberal rendering.

5 The Translator’s Choice

Before a craftsman sets his tools to his task, he would most certainly begin with a vision of that which he wishes to create and aspire to leave it with his own unique stamp. With each of the translators of pantuns referred to in this study this has been clearly the case. The four translators who have been most represented here that is, Winstedt, Hamilton, Sim and Daillie each have taken on their assignment with a generally clear sense of what they wished to achieve and based on that purpose, had set the mode to labour through. As such each of their versions of the three pantuns shows up the personal trait of their translation style and priority. This is what Robinson rightly advocates for the translators’ lot – the abandoning of the notion that translators are “neutral, impersonal transferring devices” so that translators’ choices of TL words/phrases are not governed by normative rules, which “alienate translators from their best intuitions about texts”(259). It must be stressed here that translators’ “personal experiences- emotions, motivations, attitudes, associations” (259) are invaluable to the formation of a working TL text. Robinson’s stance in other words, is that the translator should exercise his rights as an author or poet, for translating (and particularly translating poetry) among many other things is a re-birth of ideas, emotions and themes seen through the eyes and mind of the unique, irreproducible being of the translator.

Winstedt in his foreword to the anthology of pantuns compiled by Wilkinson and himself makes evident his main concern with regard to the task of translating pantuns. He sees it as extremely necessary to point out how the opening “cryptic couplet”(17) with its frequent “conundrum of clipped idioms” (11) needs to be explored and understood in the context of the Malay world before the meaning in the next couplet can be fully appreciated and so translates as he does based on this conviction.

In Malay Pantuns / Pantun Melayu (1941/1982) where the English versions have been placed alongside a selection of a hundred and fifty original Malay pantuns, Hamilton says he has attempted
in his translations “to reproduce in English verse the jingling rhythm and direct diction to be found in the original, departing nor further from the meaning than the exigencies of rhyme or language demand” (7). This being his priority, Hamilton is the most outstanding in his efforts to imitate the end-rhymes of the original pantuns. Hamilton is also interesting in that he provides titles for his English versions (very obviously as a tool to aid comprehension) though the original pantuns are all untitled, having begun as an oral tradition. He also provides explanatory notes at the end of the book to explain metaphors or matters of general interest that turn up in the verses. A glossary is also attached of all the Malay words used. This he says is to enable “the interested reader to make out their meaning for himself” (7). So, like Winstedt, Hamilton’s concern is also for clarity of meaning but he applies a set of different methods (as mentioned above) to fulfil this intention.

Sim in *More Than A Pantun: Understanding Malay Verse* also speaks of her translation purpose and method: “On the whole I shall try to translate more or less literally so that the use of similes and proverbs can be clearly seen, and also to retain something of the essence and feeling of each pantun, which I personally, perhaps mistakenly, think can be better expressed in plain simple English, rather than in customary somewhat stilted rhyming translation” (13). The purpose of Sim’s book on pantuns was to provide “an insight into Malay customs, superstitions and modes of living” (Owen qtd. in Sim: back cover) and so she seeks to be as literal as possible in the translations so as to not distort any thought or expression that would hinder the unveiling of the Malay philosophy of life contained in these pieces of poetry.

Daillie, a writer and literary translator, discusses in his chapter entitled *Translating Pantuns* (131-185), his experiences in translating Malay pantuns into French. *Alam Pantun Melayu* was written he says, in his foreword, as “an attempt to put together the various aspects of a personal experience regarding this poetic genre”. As the book is targeted towards an English-speaking readership, he provides English translations alongside the Malay originals. Of Sim’s translations, he says though there was little attempt to preserve any regular metre or rhyme, they were “unpretentious and as faithful to the originals as she could manage”, which he finds “much better than Hamilton’s maniere exertions.”(11).

Some of Daillie’s main thoughts in the chapter *Translating Pantuns* are summarised below:

1. He says that since the language of poetry is plurivocal, there will always be several readings or versions of the same original text; the ideal translation is therefore never immediately achievable but must be constantly pursued.
2. He believes in “literality” which does not mean a word-for-word translation, which he sees as “always the crassest betrayal” (182), but rather the practice of not leaving “one
word unturned to see what lies beneath” before translating. He says “the literality of the original should be the guardian of its spirit”, and this is why one must revisit the poem again and again to “listen to it attentively whenever in doubt and the right words and phrases do not form satisfactorily” in the translator’s mind (168).

3. He maintains that as a writer he is only interested in translating a literary work of art as a literary work of art. As such, his intent is not only to represent the semantic and syntactic contents of the original in the translation but also as much as possible the “poetic resonance” (171) or the “respiration” (169) of sounds and rhythms which is an outstanding, visible feature of the pantun. He believes that the translator “must try to do with [the] “foreign” words what the poet has achieved in his mother tongue”(182).

On the last point above, Daillie seems somewhat contradictory for he calls Hamilton’s efforts to echo the rhyme and rhythm that is unique to the pantun a kind of tiresome contrivance but he himself believes that the preservation of “poetic resonance” is crucial. Though there are rhymes in certain pantuns that seem forced, there are a good number where Hamilton has achieved a smooth naturalness with his end-rhymes while keeping well within the confines of the contextual meaning. Daillie should pay more credit to such skilful achievements.

While the translation principles of each of the above translators seem to speak of the translation of a pantun as a composite whole and not specifically on its metaphorical uses of language, it is clear that these principles apply to the transference of metaphors as they form the very core of this tight verse form. The pantun is oftentimes the metaphor and the metaphor, the pantun.

6 English Translations of Three Love Pantuns

As Malay pantuns predominantly touch on the theme of love, three love pantuns have been selected for the analysis here. The original versions for the first and third pantun were taken from Hamilton’s collection while the second sample comes from Wilkinson and Winstedt’s larger collection of the same title, *Pantun Melayu*. A transliteration will be provided for each of these pantuns followed by the translated versions in English. Below is the first one:

1) *Apa guna pasang pelita*
   *Jika tidak dengan sumbunya?*
   *Apa guna bermain mata*
   *Kalau tidak dengan sungguhnya?*
Transliteration:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malay Text</th>
<th>English Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apa guna pasang pelita</td>
<td>what use light lamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jika tidak dengan sumbunya?</td>
<td>if not with wick + its(nya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apa guna bermain mata</td>
<td>what use play eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalau tidak dengan sungguhnya?</td>
<td>if not with much effort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Translations:

Hamilton (22) *Meaningless Encouragement* (Pantun 23)

Why attempt to light a lantern,
If the wick should not be in it?
Why attempt to smile and wanton,
If you do not really mean it?

Winstedt (22)

If there’s no wick within the lamp
To light it toil is thrown away
And what reck I loving looks
Except as fuel for love’s play

Sim (49)

What’s the use of lighting a lantern,
If the wick’s not in it?
Why do you flirt your eyes at me,
If you don’t mean it?

Daillie (43)

Why attempt to light a lamp
If the lamp has not a wick?
Why look at me like a vamp
If it’s only for a trick?

Even before looking specifically at the transfer of the metaphorical use in the pantun above, it is very evident that as a whole each of the translators exhibits a style of his/her own which is dependent upon a certain personal hierarchy of priorities. This certain individual choice in the mode of translating appears to be consistent in the next two pantuns as well.

The metaphor in the first pantun resides in the reference to lighting a lamp (*pelita*) without a wick (*sumbu*) as a parallel to a desire without action. The persona is apparently frustrated by one who seems to make visible her interest in the persona but is not committed to go all the way to engage in a more active relationship. The second couplet which throws light on the metaphor suggests the
advances made are a mere trifling or toying with the persona’s emotions without any real intentions for a serious commitment.

The _pelita_ in the Malay household in past times would have been the paraffin or kerosene lamps. On Malay festivals, the _pelita_ was often flat tin bases with wicks soaked in kerosene mounted on wooden stands lighting up the peripheries of the _kampung_ house. To be extremely accurate with this reference would obviously create clumsiness in the translation, upsetting the metre, rhyme and rhythm. And so while Winstedt and Daillie have chosen the generic term “lamp”, Hamilton and Sim have settled for “lantern”, a somewhat imprecise representation of the Malay _pelita_. Wilkinson’s _A Malay-English Dictionary_ has “lamp” for _pelita_ while “lantern” which is _tanglung_ in Malay more specifically refers to the Chinese lantern of paper or oiled silk.

In terms of the general structure of the metaphor, Hamilton, Sim and Daillie maintain the rhetorical question form of the original and thereby evoke that certain degree of peskiness felt in the persona’s tone. Winstedt stands apart in departing from this syntactic layout; he chooses to present the two couplets originally in question form in two declarative statements. With the exception of Winstedt, the other three translators stay close to the sequence of thought in the first couplet of the ST. Winstedt merges the first two lines of the foreshadower into a single first line and moves on to supply an explanation of his own in the second line in an attempt to make clearer the allusion of lighting a lamp without a wick – that it is wasteful toil (“To light it toil is thrown away”). With regard to the second couplet however, where the tenor or real intent of the verse lies, Hamilton, Winstedt and Daillie come up with some interesting literary translations that give rise to many more nuances not quite expressed by the ST. Only Sim seeks to lay it out as literally as possible that, her “Why do you flirt your eyes at me” ends up somewhat awkward in English. Since in Malay flirting is expressed in the idiom _bermain mata_ (literally “playing eyes”) she attempts to capture this idiom thus producing the phrase “flirt your eyes”, which does not quite qualify as a proper English construction.

Hamilton and Daillie’s interpretation of _bermain mata_ “stealing or throwing glances as a way of flirting” take on an added vividness as the flirting individual is described in definite terms as the female. The original does not make clear the gender of the addressed. Hamilton’s use of “wanton” and Daillie’s reference to the frivolous party as a “vamp” suggest that it is a lady who is making indirect passes and playing games with the persona’s feelings. The early use of “wanton” was always in reference to women. Both the verb and noun produce that similar effect of the apparent coquettishness of the lady. They suggest a certain looseness or lack of character, of women who intentionally attract men with the ulterior motive of exploiting them. These are nuances not evoked by the ST. The complaint in the original does not possess as strong an accusatory tone as felt in the use of “wanton” and “vamp”. Why such liberties were taken can only be surmised, but one possible
reason appears to be the translator’s intention to echo the ABAB rhyming pattern of the pantun. And so, “wanton” serves as a good choice for Hamilton because it rhymes nicely with “lantern” as “vamp” does with “lamp” in Daillie’s case.

Winstedt’s “[a]nd what reck I loving looks / [e]xcept as fuel for love’s play” presents the original with his own flourish of creativity. The metaphor of flame or fire in the first couplet is extended in the use of “fuel” which is not there in the second couplet of the original poem. Winstedt is clearly the most free or innovative in his translation style with that practice of often building on the main metaphorical core. Such attempts at semantic unitedness or crystallization make the translation richer in degrees from the original and serve as a compensatory tool for whatever else is lost in the translation of such pantuns.

From a pantun on amorous dalliance, the analysis will move on to a pantun about the biting pains of unrequited love. The quatrain reads like this:

2)  *Kerengga di-dalam buloh*  
    Serabi berisi ayer mawar.  
    Sampai hasrat di-dalam tuboh,  
    Tuan sa-orang jadi penawar.

Transliteration:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Kerengga</em> di-dalam buloh,</td>
<td>big red ants in/inside bamboo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Serabi</em> berisi ayer mawar.</td>
<td>decanter filled water rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sampai</em> hasrat di-dalam tuboh,</td>
<td>offer/arrive/achieve desire in/inside body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tuan</em> sa-orang jadi penawar</td>
<td>Lady/Sir a person become cure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Translations:

Marsden in *Malay Grammar*, 1812 (qtd. in Winstedt 199)

Large ants in the bambu-cane,  
A flasket filled with rose-water;  
When passion of love seizes my frame,  
From you alone I can expect the cure.

Sutton (qtd. in Fauconier 81, first English translation published in 1931)

Red ants in the hollow of a bamboo,  
Vessel filled with the essence of roses…  
When lust is in my body  
Only my love can bring me appeasement
Winstedt (199)

Fire ants in a bamboo – the passion
That tortures my frame is like you;
But like flask of rose-water in fashion
Is the cure thy dear flame can bestow.

Daillie (23)

Red ants inside a bamboo cane,
Rose-water full a long-necked flask,
When burning desire fills my frame,
From her alone the cure I ask.

The first two lines, the foreshadower, which refers to red ants in a bamboo shoot and rose water in a flask though apparently look unconnected to the meaning in the last two lines is in fact the metaphor for the state of love expressed in the second couplet. Of the four translators, again as with the previous pantun, it is Winstedt who steadily believes that it is important to explicitly show this connection. Unlike Mardsen and Daillie who translate the lines in the original without disturbing or rearranging the order in which it is set, Winstedt brings together the “vehicle” and “tenor” (terms borrowed from Richards) in an attempt to elucidate the point that passion like fire ants in a bamboo-cane “tortures” the persona’s “frame” and that only when the one pursued reciprocates the persona’s love, will his love-lorn heart be cured. The healing balm of love is likened to the sweet-smelling rose-water. The rose-water is actually not known to have any curative powers. Owing to its sweet fragrance, the Malays sprinkle it over a bride and groom at a wedding ceremony or over the body of the deceased at a funeral. The reference to rose water in the love pantun is symbolic – rose referring to a lady love and water as life-giving.

Winstedt in keeping with his freer mode of translating has not produced a line by line translation let alone a word-for-word rendition. It has been clear from the start that his priority is achieving clarity for the reader and so, the relevant connections are quickly established. Winstedt’s attempt for clarity however does not mean that he lays out the pantun too plainly or renders it insipid. The aesthetics of the poem are certainly not unduly compromised. Daillie however does not on the whole approve of Winstedt’s attempts to make connections between the first and second couplet. He says:

…since this connection may happen to be invisible or even non-existent, it is so in the original text and we have to take it as it is into the translation. If something has to be elucidated, the question arises on reading or hearing the original and the enigma, or the riddle, should be transferred as such into the translation. Any attempt to explain the poem from within makes it no longer a poem but amounts to an interpretation [and not a translation].

(183)
Daillie however acknowledges the need for the English speaking reader to “master the Malay language of fruits, flowers, plants…proverbial idioms…symbols…to see through phrases which otherwise may sound like mere conundrums or jingles in the apparent disconnection of the two halves” (183-184). He suggests that this knowledge be supplied by way of footnotes to enlighten the foreign reader. And so, Daillie’s retains the lines as they are in the original leaving the readers to puzzle out for themselves the foreshadower in relation to the meaning. Marsden does likewise. While Daillie’s point on the need to leave the enigma intact is taken, it is also very probable that only the deeply engaged reader would be diligent enough to look up the footnotes or glossary to make sense of the contents of the first couplet in order to work out its links with the second couplet. Those who skip the foreshadower to quickly get to the meaning would be missing a significant amount of the poetry.

With regard to kerengga, a species of big red ants with a stinging bite and which often infest fruit trees like the rambutan tree, each translator has interestingly highlighted different aspects of this ant. Wilkinson in his Malay-English dictionary has “tailor-ant” or “red ant” as the English equivalent for kerengga. He also mentions its painful bite and the fact that its unique nest-building was of scientific interest. In translation, Marsden focuses on the largeness of these ants, Daillie on the fact that they are red and not black or white ants while Winstedt’s choice stands out as he settles on a creative option – “fire ants”– fire was probably chosen because passion is conventionally expressed in the fiery symbol and the ants are red like fire and their vicious bite too is perhaps likened here to the pain fire can cause. It might also be useful to consider here the fact that in the Tamil language, the kerengga is in fact literally referred to as “fire ants”– whether Winstedt had picked this up from the Tamil speaking immigrants whom he would have had contact with in his time, is a possibility that needs to be explored.

Wilkinson notes in his dictionary that hasrat in Persian and Arabic is “a longing” but in Malay it refers to an intense desire of any sort. In current use it refers to any type of intentions. While the hasrat “intent/desire/longing” expressed by the persona in the original pantun is not so distinctly marked in terms of intensity, it is heightened in all three translations. The declaration of a deep desire residing in the persona’s tubuh “body” is expressed in a measured tone and is certainly less emotive than in the translations. Mardsen translates this line as the passion of love “seizes” me, Winstedt “the passion that tortures my frame” and Daillie “burning desire fills my frame”. All three use the very familiar and standard verb/adjective collocations that appear with passion or desire in the English language and thus we have “seizes”, “tortures” and “burning”. These evoke the stereotypical image of the insatiable pangs of a love that yearns for appeasement.
Sutton working on Fauconnier’s French translation has translated *hasrat* as “lust”, a word which suggests an uncontrollable sexual desire not quite felt in the noun in the original text. If it were “lust” or “passion”, the Malay equivalents would be *ghairah, berahi, nafsu seks* or *hawa nafsu yang kuat* according to *Kamus Dwibahasa Oxford Fajar*. The English versions on the whole are far bolder and more direct than the Malay in their expressions of sensual desire.

The third pantun in this analysis begins with the line *Permata jatuh ke dalam rumput*. In this poem capricious love is likened to the passing dew upon the grass.

3) *Permata jatuh di dalam rumput,*  
   *Jatuh di rumput bergilang-gilang.*  
   *Kasih umpama embun di hujung rumput,*  
   *Datang matahari nescaya hilang.*

Transliteration:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Permata</th>
<th>jatuh</th>
<th>di dalam</th>
<th>rumput,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gems/jewels/precious stones</td>
<td>fall</td>
<td>in/ into</td>
<td>grass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jatuh</th>
<th>di rumput</th>
<th>bergilang-gilang.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fall</td>
<td>on grass</td>
<td>sparkling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kasih</th>
<th>umpama</th>
<th>embun di hujung</th>
<th>rumput,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>like/as</td>
<td>dew</td>
<td>at end/tip</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Datang</th>
<th>matahari</th>
<th>nescaya</th>
<th>hilang.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>come</td>
<td>sun</td>
<td>surely/certainly</td>
<td>lost/disappear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Translations:

Hamilton  (33) *Impermanence of Love* (Pantun 44) (first published in 1941)

- Gems may fall to earth, alas!  
- Scintillating on the lawn.  
- Love is dew on blades of grass,  
- Bound to fade when comes the dawn.

Wilkinson  (Wilkinson and Winstedt 4)

- I lose a pearl, amid the grass  
- It keeps its hue, though low it lies  
- I love a girl, but love will pass,  
- A pearl of dew that slowly dies.

Winstedt (Wilkinson and Winstedt 4)

- You drop a pearl, ‘t will keep its hue  
- Above sward and gleam the same  
- You drop a girl. For fleet as dew  
- Love melts before a never flame.
Sim (29)¹

A jewel falls into the grass,
Falls into the grass glittering, gleaming,
Love is like dew on the end of a blade,
Bound to melt in the heat of day.

Daillie (84)

Gems may fall amid the grass,
Yet keep glittering in the sun.
Love’s like dew on morning grass,
Bound to vanish in the sun.

While the obvious metaphor in the original poem is in the second couplet that is, a simile about love, the first couplet too presents a metaphor but not of the usual kind. The reference to gems falling to the ground is what could be termed as a contra metaphor as it presents the opposite state to the one that is the actual focus in the poem. The image of permanence provided by the contra metaphor of gems that gleam though fallen amidst the grass brings into sharp contrast the transience of fleeting love, that is, the dew that vanishes in the heat. The reference to *permata* “gem/jewel” in this love pantun brings to mind that Malay proverb *cincin dengan permata* “the ring with its gems” which is a reference to a well-matched couple. In this pantun the love is not a steadfast one like the permanent gem, and as such this suggests an ill-matched pair of lovers.

Winstedt’s mode of translating pantuns has been clearly consistent. His foremost aim has been to draw connections between the foreshadower and the meaning. So, as with the earlier two pantuns, here too, he renders the translation somewhat differently from the other translators. He draws the parallel between dropping a pearl and dropping a girl which, perhaps is or is not the analogy the original pantun directly intends but Winstedt goes ahead to make these links and in doing so says that while the pearl in whatever state keeps its hue, the matters of the heart being more fragile like the morning dew, are doomed to ‘death’ when they are trifled with.

In terms of semantic choice, Wilkinson and Winstedt give a specific name to the jewel that falls to the ground that is a “pearl” while Hamilton, Sim and Daillie stay with the generic terms, either “gems” or “jewel” which is what *permata* means in the original. The specific choice of “pearl”, a very English choice symbolising a thing of rare beauty, adds further nuances not intended by the original pantun.

Sim’s choice of ending with “blade” unlike Hamilton’s “blades of grass” in the line “[l]ove is like dew on the end of a blade”, is very effective; the pun on the word leaves the line with a sharp image of pain as “blade” connotes a cutting implement or weapon of some sort besides the denotative

¹ In the earlier edition of Sim it was titled *Flowers in the Sun.*
meaning of a blade of grass. This image of sharpness works well with the pain often associated with love. Also, instead of literally translating *matahari* as “sun”, she settles for the phrase “heat of day”, once again a good choice as it allows for other nuances to be evoked with regard to love and its troubles suggested by “heat”. Again these images and nuances do not exist in the original text but it is such fine additions that make up for other losses in the translation.

7 Conclusion

The analysis here has only highlighted and discussed parts of the metaphor in each of the pantuns. While there is a lot more that could be analysed, what has been discussed thus far is sufficient to show that firstly metaphors can be translated and especially so when they are not strictly culture-specific as postulated by Dagut and his supporters. Though the metaphors of lighting a lamp without a wick to compare with frivolous advances or ant-bites to represent the pains of unrequited love might be new or unfamiliar to the English knowledge of metaphorical use, it is not difficult to absorb it into the English idiom in poetry because underlying these local Malay expressions are the universals of the flame or fire of love (as with the first metaphor) and pain constantly associated with love pangs (as with the second metaphor). And, with the third metaphor of fleeting love compared to the dew upon the grass, it is a commonly used metaphor in the English literary culture. The dew has been often used in English poetry to represent impermanence of life, love and so on.

The metaphors in this analysis fall into Dagut’s definition of ‘real’ metaphors or ‘semantic novelties’ and so would not usually have equivalents in other languages. This means their contextual meaning can be recreated in the receiving language through a generally literal rendering. In Newmark’s terms they would be original metaphors (which with the native Malay speakers could have become stock metaphors over frequent use in time) and so there is a high degree of semantic translation that is possible. Even if the metaphors in this study are viewed as stock metaphors in the Malay culture, they would fall under the first procedure in Newmark’s seven procedures for translating stock metaphors, that is the image in the original is reproduced in the TL. As mentioned earlier the metaphors here have conceptual universals at the core of their meaning so, an overall literal carry over would not cause confusion, shock or awkwardness to the receiving culture.

Seen against van den Broeck’s hypothetical scheme for modes of metaphor transfer, the strategy used by all of the translators clearly does not fall under the strategy of substitution or paraphrase but generally under an idiomatic literal translation. This does not mean a word-for-word rendering but a representation of meaning that stays close to the original while in terms of lexical choices in constructing this meaning, there is a manifestation of the translator’s individual creativity, style and taste. In other words, while meaning has been generally maintained through a literal transfer
of the metaphors, a more liberal or literary mode has been applied in terms of word choices and the structuring of these metaphors. This has been clearly evident in the case of each of the translators studied here.

Then, a comment on Millie’s belief that an attempt to strive at imitating the formal features in the pantun, which also form part of the metaphorical structure, might result in an “incongruity in English, and constitute a pale imitation of the original on all counts”(19-20). This to an extent is proven wrong by Winstedt’s and Daillie’s occasional dexterity at producing a version that does reflect both the meaning, rhyme and rhythm of the original pantun in an effective way without causing any oddness in English. Daillie’s translation of the first pantun in this study and Winstedt’s version of the last one are rather masterfully done.

Finally, as Zdanys aptly points out art by definition is “subjective, relative, and personal” and because it relates “closely on issues of the undefinable and often the undefendable “taste”… [which] are not readily or easily open to pronouncements or dismissals”, it cannot be subjected to “theories which exist as predetermined entities”(1). It would be unwitting to apply any such impositions to translating poetry as it would only restrict and distort an art that needs constant freshness and flexibility of skill and artistry; recasting poetry into another language demands in an almost equal measure or perhaps even more the creativity exercised by the poet in producing the original. And so, with the translators of pantuns here, we have seen individual creativity applied to add freshness to this verse form transported into the English language while preserving the general intent of the pantun and the local flavour of the Malay metaphor.

Works Cited


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Shunmugam, Krishnavanie

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