

A cognitive approach to translating English health and illness business metaphors into Arabic

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This study investigates how English health and illness metaphors are translated into Arabic, using examples from the *BBC*, *Project Syndicate*, and the *Financial Times* within the context of economic discourse. Applying cognitive metaphor theory, it examines metaphorical expressions related to health and illness in financial texts, exploring how these metaphors shape economic ideas and assessing the effectiveness of their Arabic translations. The research highlights the crucial role of health and illness metaphors in expressing complex economic conditions and their importance in both English and Arabic economic discussions. The results show that while literal translations often preserve the metaphorical meaning, some translators choose non-metaphorical equivalents, which can alter the metaphor's impact and diminish clarity. The findings also emphasize the need for cognitive equivalence in metaphor translation and support approaches that improve mutual understanding of economic phenomena across languages, ensuring the original meaning of the metaphors is maintained. The study concludes that successful translation of these metaphors depends on understanding their cognitive functions and the genre's context; strategies should aim to preserve the conceptual core of metaphors to facilitate clear communication with both expert and general audiences.

Keywords: metaphor translation, cognitive metaphor, cognitive equivalence, health and illness metaphors

1. Introduction

Within translation studies, a cognitive view of metaphor shifts the focus of “translatability” from isolated wordings to the shared — or not — conceptual systems of source and target cultures (Hong and Rossi 2021; Garelo 2024). Based in cognitive linguistics, this approach considers metaphors not just as decorative figures

but as core structures of thought. Following Lakoff and Johnson's explanation of conceptual metaphor (2008), business language often uses health schemas to frame complex economic conditions. For example, phrases like *the company is sick* or *the economy is suffering* project the source domain of bodily health onto a target domain of markets and institutions; likewise, *a healthy market* and *strong growth* symbolize vitality and strength (Lakoff and Johnson 2020; Luri, Schau, and Ghosh 2024).

Using this perspective, the current study explores how metaphors influence perceptions of economic reality and how translators either reproduce or reshape that framing in Arabic. It builds on Reema Nazzal (2017) by integrating a clearer cognitive rationale with a thorough evaluation of translation decisions and their effects on readers' inferences. The corpus includes in-text metaphors taken from real business articles in *Financial Times*, *BBC*, and *Project Syndicate*, sources that target both general and expert audiences.

A persistent challenge is balancing cognitive fidelity and traditional fluency in Arabic economic prose (Gebbia 2023; Dickins 2005). Literal translations can preserve the metaphor's conceptual meaning but may seem unusual in the target culture; common Arabic metaphors or simple paraphrases often read smoothly but risk reducing emphasis or altering interpretation (Dickins 2005; Nazzal 2017). The analysis shows how professional translators manage this balance and argues that focusing on conceptual accuracy — based on genre norms and audience needs — most effectively maintains the metaphor's communicative function across languages.

2. Research questions

Metaphor in English economic discourse is not just a stylistic choice but a key tool for explaining ideas. Its main purpose is to clarify complex concepts, making it essential in business writing and a major challenge for translation into Arabic.

The challenge is twofold. First, the meaning of these metaphors depends on context, requiring the translator to analyze each instance anew. Second, an incorrect translation can confuse the reader, undermining the metaphor's goal of clarity. Translators must decide whether to replicate, substitute, or paraphrase the metaphor.

This study addresses these issues by asking:

1. How can a cognitive analysis deepen our understanding of business metaphors?
2. Which translation strategies are most effective for rendering these metaphors in Arabic, and why?

3. Significance of the study

Research on metaphor has expanded beyond literature to include non-literary fields, with business metaphors now a major focus. This study builds on that trend by examining how health and illness metaphors function in English economic journalism and how they are translated into Arabic, using a cognitive linguistics approach. Using data from *Project Syndicate*, *BBC*, and *Financial Times* – publications serving both specialists and general readers – it explores techniques and challenges in metaphor translation, providing practical insights for translation studies and cross-linguistic economic discourse.

4. Methodology

4.1 Corpus and data selection

The data for this study includes ten distinct instances of health and illness metaphors used in economic discourse. These examples were systematically gathered from a corpus of about 20 business articles published between 2015 and 2016 on the websites of the *Financial Times*, *BBC*, and *Project Syndicate*. The choice of these sources was based on their global readership, which encompasses both specialists and the general public, as well as their established practice of providing high-quality, parallel Arabic translations on affiliated platforms (*Al-Iqtissadia*, *BBC Arabic*, and *Project Syndicate Arabic*), offering a reliable foundation for comparison. (See Appendix for transliteration). The selection of each metaphorical expression was guided by two criteria:

1. The expression had to be a clear instance of a metaphor from the HEALTH/ILLNESS source domain used to conceptualize an economic situation or entity (the target domain).
2. An official, professionally produced Arabic translation of the source article had to be available, allowing for a direct comparison of translation choices.

4.2 Analytical framework and procedure

The analysis is based on Cognitive Metaphor Theory, which offers the essential framework for understanding how metaphors serve as cognitive tools. Each English-Arabic pair undergoes a multi-stage process designed for a thorough analysis. First, the source text metaphor is identified and examined from a cognitive perspective to determine its underlying conceptual metaphor (for example,

A Company's Financial State Is a Body's Health), along with its source and target domains, functions, and conventionality within the specific business context. Then, the Arabic translation is analyzed to identify the strategy used, classifying the solution mainly as either metaphor into the same metaphor or metaphor into a non-metaphor, based on the data collected. Finally, a comparative conceptual analysis is performed to objectively assess how the translator handled the conceptual transfer. This phase goes beyond simple classification to explore how the message from the source text is reconceptualized for the target audience, examining whether the original conceptual mapping is maintained, changed, or replaced, and considering the influence of various factors – including linguistic, textual, and sociocultural elements – that likely influenced the final decision.

4.3 Methodological stance and limitations

This study recognizes that translation data from professional media outlets reflects factors beyond just language transfer. These can include institutional style guides, editorial policies, or the individual translator's choices and interpretations. Therefore, the goal of this study is descriptive, not prescriptive. It does not aim to critique individual translators or recommend a single "correct" approach. Instead, it focuses on identifying and describing patterns in how a specific category of metaphors is handled in a professional context. By examining how translators bridge conceptual frames, this study aims to provide objective insights into the complex decision-making process involved in translating metaphorical language in economic discourse.

5. Literature review

5.1 Metaphor in business texts

Recent scholarship highlights the essential role of metaphor in economic writing. Deirdre McCloskey (1995) argues that metaphors are fundamental to economics, even if economists are unaware of their use, stating, "Economists are poets but do not know it" (219). This importance also applies to teaching: Mihaela Vasiloaia, Gaisoa-Issa, and Vergara-Issa (2011, 231–240) emphasize the significance of metaphor in economic textbooks, especially for non-native English speakers, noting that "insights into metaphor in general will hopefully be of assistance to students... in their struggle to understand economic texts" (232). Furthermore, they (2011) identify two main functions of these metaphors: as a language necessity and as a cognitive tool, rather than merely decorative. Similarly, Shehab et al.

(2022a; 2022b) affirm that business metaphors support understanding by aiding cognition rather than simply decorating texts. Skorczynska and Deignan (2006) demonstrate that metaphor use varies based on audience and purpose, with popular business discourse employing metaphors more frequently and differently than scientific texts.

Building on Willie Henderson's (2006) work, they proposed a functional classification of business metaphors, identifying three main types:

1. *Illustrating*: Metaphors used as simple textual decoration.
2. *Generic*: Metaphors that serve as textual organizing devices.
3. *Modelling*: Metaphors that conceptualize economic situations.

They also added a fourth function, "filling a terminological gap," where a metaphor becomes a standard term out of linguistic necessity (e.g., "cash flow"). Their results showed that popular discourse favors "generic" and "terminological gap" metaphors, while scientific discourse avoids generic metaphors, opting for "illustrating" and "modelling" types instead. They concluded that these choices are influenced by the readership, purpose, and the audience's level of subject matter knowledge.

Similarly, Michael White (1997, 242) examined the powerful effects of metaphor in press coverage of a currency crisis. He argued that extensive use of metaphors improves a text's cohesion through interconnected expressions and semantic connections. Additionally, a metaphor's structural logic strengthens the overall coherence by supporting the arguments. White highlights that the frequent use of metaphor in journalism arises from its role as a "contributor to ease of perception on the part of the readers." He concludes that its widespread use clearly shows its "essential communicative role in journalism."

5.2 Metaphor translation

Peter Newmark (1981) considers metaphor translation inherently complex due to the vivid brevity metaphors provide. He distinguishes between simple (single-word) and complex (idiomatic) metaphors and describes seven procedures for translating them. His preferred approach is to recreate the same image in the target language (TL), especially when it is culturally equivalent. If that is not possible, translators can replace it with a common TL image, turn it into a simile, or explain its meaning to ensure understanding. When there is significant cultural difference, conveying only the metaphor's sense might be most effective, but it requires careful analysis of its emotional and factual elements. Newmark also permits removing unnecessary metaphors or merging them with their meaning when they are repeated in the text.

In business translation, preserving the metaphor's communicative role is essential. Jeremy Munday (2008), criticizing the functionalist views of Katharina Reiss, Christiane Nord, and Hans J. Vermeer (2014), argues that business metaphors need attention to both expressive form and content. Annette C. Sjørup (2013) also emphasizes the importance of recognizing metaphor salience and stylistic differences across languages. Stefano Arduini (2007) elaborates by classifying strategies as source-oriented (e.g., metaphor-to-metaphor) or target-oriented (e.g., adding a metaphor), noting that target-oriented approaches show the translator's "compensatory mechanisms."

5.3 Cultural conceptualizations in metaphor translation

Beyond universal cognitive processes, metaphor interpretation and translation are also influenced by culture-specific thought patterns (Raymond Boers, 2003). Farzad Sharifian (2003) introduces the idea of cultural conceptualizations — shared schemas, categories, and metaphors within a culture — that shape how people understand the world. Therefore, a metaphor that is clear in one culture may be confusing or have different meanings in another if it triggers different cultural schemas (Sarah Jabarout, 2016; Andreas Musolff, 2016). Translators need to evaluate whether these conceptualizations are maintained, changed, or unfamiliar in the target language (Sharifian, 2003).

Sharifian (2003) illustrates this with the English metaphor *Argument is War* (e.g., he shot down my argument), which resonates in cultures where argument is seen as competition but may confuse those where it's viewed as a collaborative process. Rema Nazzal (2017) notes that literal translation in such cases can miss both meaning and emotional nuance.

In our study, while the *Health/Illness* domain has physiological universality, cultural variations influence how health and illness are understood — affecting metaphor use and translation. Although the main focus is on general cognitive metaphor theory, acknowledging cultural conceptualizations enhances the analysis. It indicates that translators' metaphor choices are not only based on cognition or language but are also shaped by culture — an aspect that, although beyond this study's scope, remains essential for understanding translation decisions.

6. Cognitive theory of metaphor

The cognitive theory of metaphor challenges the traditional view that considers it just a rhetorical device. Instead, this theory suggests that metaphor is a core cognitive tool shaping our daily experiences, claiming that our conceptual system itself

is inherently metaphorical. Lakoff and Johnson argue that “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (2008,3). According to their framework, the human mind does not simply *use* metaphor; it is built upon it, making the existence of conceptual metaphors a necessary condition for linguistic ones. They define the core of this cognitive process as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (5). Therefore, metaphor is presented not as a feature of language, but as a cognitive mechanism through which one conceptual domain is understood by, or mapped onto, another.

Cognitive metaphor theory makes an important distinction between the core conceptual metaphor and its surface linguistic expressions. As Zoltán Kövecses (2010,3) explains, a conceptual metaphor is the mental process of “understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another,” where a conceptual domain is any “coherent organization of experience.” In contrast, metaphorical linguistic expressions are the specific “words or other linguistic expressions” borrowed from the more concrete domain to describe the abstract one. This relationship is clearly shown by the conceptual metaphor *Argument is War*. From this single idea, many linguistic expressions develop, such as “Your claims are indefensible,” “He attacked every weak point of my argument,” and “His criticism was right on target” (6). In each case, our view of an argument is shaped by our knowledge of war.

This framework is based on the core components of source domain, target domain, and mappings (Colston 2023; Ashurova and Galieva 2024). The target domain is the abstract idea to be understood (e.g., *Argument*), while the source domain is the more concrete concept from which we draw understanding (e.g., *WAR*). In the expression “you should defend your point,” the abstract target (argument) is understood through a quality (“defend”) derived from the concrete source (war) (Kövecses 2010, 4).

The connection between these domains is established through mappings, which Kövecses (2010, 8) defines as the “set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target.” This mapping is essential to the theory. To highlight that understanding flows from the concrete to the abstract, the notational convention is reversed from target-source to source-target. As Kövecses (2010, 8) notes, “We adopt this convention to emphasize the point that understanding typically goes from the more concrete to the more abstract concept,” as seen in conceptual metaphors like *Social organizations are plants*.

- a. He works for the local *branch* of the bank.
- b. Our company is *growing*.
- c. They had to *prune* the workforce.

- d. The organization was *rooted* in the old church.
- e. There is now a *flourishing* black market in software there.
- f. His business *blossomed* when the railways put his establishment within reach of the big city.
- g. Employers *reaped* enormous benefits from cheap foreign labor.

Figure 1 briefly explains how we can see the source domain, target domain, and their mappings with the relationships between them Kövecses (2010):

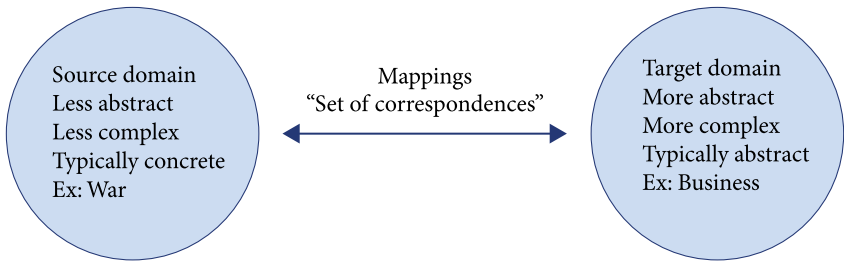


Figure 1. Source domain, target domain, and mappings with the relation between them

6.1 Economy as a target domain

In cognitive linguistics, the concept of economy is viewed as a target domain. Kövecses (2010,28), in his discussion of common target domains and their key sources, argues that the economy is understood through metaphors where “buildings,” “plants,” and “journey” are the most frequently cited source domains. He presents several conceptual metaphors related to business, including *that economic systems are buildings, careers are buildings, social organizations (such as companies) are plants, and a company is a person.*

These target domains, “economic system,” “career,” “social organization,” and “company,” are all grouped under the broader concept of an “abstract complex system,” which is described as an abstract arrangement of entities. These complex systems have key properties that influence the language used to describe them: “function, stability, development and condition.” To understand these properties, four main source domains are highlighted: “building,” “plant,” “machine,” and “human body” Kövecses (2010,12).

Other scholars expand the metaphorical toolkit. Eva Kovacs (2006), for example, suggests several other influential conceptual metaphors in business discourse.

- a. *Business is war*: Drawing on battles, strategies, and victory, mapped onto business negotiations and outcomes.
- b. *Business is a game and sport*: Emphasizing competition, rules, players, winners, and losers.
- c. *Business is marriage*: Using romantic and marital stages to describe corporate mergers and partnerships.
- d. *Business is acting/dancing*: Framing businessmen as performers in theatrical or choreographed settings.

Kövecses (2010, 33–34) also emphasizes the conventional nature of conceptual metaphors, distinguishing between highly conventional ones – common in business discourse – and more creative or poetic types. This conventionality applies not just to language but also to the conceptual metaphors themselves. The following are examples he provides of conventional conceptual metaphors and the typical linguistic expressions they produce.

Social organizations are plants: The company *is growing fast*

Life is journey: He had *a head start* in life

Argument is war: I *defended* my argument

Theories are buildings: We have *to construct* a new theory (Kovecses 2010, 23)

In a similar way, the conceptual metaphor this study is built on, *Business is Health/Illness*, is a good example of a common metaphor (Miles 2024). Its commonness comes from its role as a natural and widely accepted way to understand and talk about business. This is clear in the widespread use of specific metaphors within economic language; terms like “player,” “major players,” “collapse,” “recovery,” and “health” have become so frequently used that they are now standard parts of the field (Miles 2025). A thorough judgment of ‘naturalness’ would require a large-scale analysis of a corpus, which is beyond the scope of this paper; however, the frequent appearance of these terms in specialized journalism strongly suggests their conventional status.

A metaphor’s level of conventionality plays a crucial role in determining its translation. When a metaphor is common in the source language, translators should find its most established and accepted equivalent in the target language (Abdi 2024). In Examples 8 and 9, translating “health/healthy” into nonmetaphorical Arabic terms may suggest an underestimation of the metaphor’s conventionality and communicative function in the target culture.

The metaphor “financial maneuvers” further illustrates this point. While it is common in English, its literal Arabic equivalent, *مناورات مالية*, (*munawarat maliyya*), is less usual. However, as it becomes more common in Arabic, it may gradually become more accepted and effective over time.

7. Discussion

7.1 Business is health and/or illness

The Health/Illness source domain is a key framework for understanding the economy, as established by scholars like Kövecses (2010,19) and Kovacs (2006,71). Far from just being stylistic, these metaphors play an important cognitive role: they convey specialized, business-related concepts and help make abstract economic ideas more understandable. This functional role is a notable and significant characteristic of the economic discourse examined in this study.

Mohammed Nader’s (2013) research on *Financial Times* articles provides extensive evidence for this phenomenon. Her work shows a systematic mapping of linguistic metaphors from the Health/Illness domain onto the target domain of the economy, identifying a high frequency of terms like “contagion,” “healthy,” and “recovery,” which are now integral to economic terminology. She identifies four predominant conceptual metaphors structuring this discourse: *economy is a disease*; *economy is a patient*; *economic issues are illnesses and/or diseases*; and *economic slowdown is a state of physical health*. Nader concludes that these metaphors are not only helpful but also highly functional, especially in “expressing the process of restoring the health of the economic system” (133). Their pervasiveness has led them to become “strongly entrenched cognitively in the English culture” (138), a testament to how “terms from the domain of medicine have enriched economic discourse” (133).

The established importance of this metaphorical system informs the current analysis. This section now focuses on examining the translation strategies used for these metaphors in English to Arabic business texts. From a cognitive perspective, the analysis will emphasize the role of the metaphor in business communication and assess the effectiveness of the translation choices. The data shows that health and illness metaphors are key to clarifying business concepts, which directly impacts the best translation approach. Table (1) summarizes the strategies employed and their frequency.

We should note here that 6 out of the 9 metaphors used in our study are genre-specific metaphors. The generic and genre-specific metaphors of the Health ess/source domain are:

- a. Generic metaphors: poison, schizophrenia, falls
- b. Genre specific metaphors: healthy levels, health, collapse, recovery, contagion, and underweight

Table 1. Translation strategies used in translating health/illness metaphors

Translation strategy	English metaphor	Arabic translation	Frequency of translation technique
Metaphor into same metaphor	contagious financial turmoil...	الاضطرابات المالية المعدية ...	8
Metaphor into non-metaphor	cut its rating of its shares to “underweight”.	خفض التصنيف الائتماني ... لأسهم الشركة إلى غير آمن	2

7.2 English metaphor into Arabic same metaphor

In Example (1), the metaphorical expression “healthy levels” is taken from an article on Petrobras, Brazil’s largest oil company, which is struggling with serious financial difficulties, especially concerning debt repayments it must meet.

Example 1 “Lucas Aritizabal of Fitch Ratings says Petrobras has the money to meet the near-term obligations, given it has a bout 26bn of cash in hand. To maintain these *healthy levels*, it is seeking to sell assets ...”.

(Financial Times 2015)

يقول لوكاس اريستيوا ابال من وكالة تصنيفات فيتش ان “بتروبراس” لديها الأموال لتلبية التزاماتها المستحقة، نظرا لأنه يتوافر لديها حاليا نحو 62 مليار دولار من النقدية للحفاظ على تلك المستويات الصحية تسعى لبيع الاصول...“.

(Al-Iqtissadia 2015)

The phrase “healthy levels” in the source text triggers the conceptual metaphor ‘A Company’s Financial State is a Body’s Health,’ a specific and traditional metaphor within English financial language. This mapping from the domain of human biology (health) to the domain of corporate finance (Petrobras’s cash reserves) is more than just decorative; it plays a key cognitive role by framing an abstract financial situation in tangible, universally understood terms. The use of “healthy” explicitly conveys ideas of balance and stability, suggesting a well-functioning system, while framing the company’s issues as an “illness” and asset sales as a “treatment.” It also implies a range from “unhealthy” to “robust.” This metaphorical framing improves both the clarity and effectiveness of the message, making a complex financial strategy easier to understand for a diverse audience.

The translator’s choice to render “healthy levels” as *المستويات الصحية (al-mustawayat al-sihiyya)* reflects a thoughtful decision-making process influenced by multiple factors. From conceptual and sociocultural views, the translator correctly recognizes that the *Health/Illness* source domain has strong conceptual relevance across cultures, making it easy for the target audience to understand.

The act of reconceptualization is therefore minimal, allowing for a smooth translation of meaning. Linguistically, while the English phrase is very common, its Arabic equivalent might be less so in this specific case. However, the translator focuses on maintaining the conceptual integrity of the original text, creating a clear and understandable message that preserves the consistency of the text, especially if related metaphors like “recovery” appear later.

To understand the effectiveness of this choice, it is useful to consider alternative, nonmetaphorical solutions. For example, a paraphrase like *المستويات الآمنة* (*al-mustawayat al-amina* – “the safe levels”) or an explicitation like *المستويات التي تضمن استقرارها المالي* (*al-mustawayat allati tadman istiqraraha al-mali* – “the levels that guarantee its financial stability”) would provide immediate, clear understanding. However, this clarity comes at a cost. Such options would diminish the conceptual depth of the original, losing the entire diagnostic framework of illness, treatment, and recovery that “healthy” activates. They would reconceptualize the message as a simple binary of safe/unsafe, removing the more complex and dynamic biological narrative. The translator’s chosen strategy, while seemingly literal, actively preserves the source text’s cognitive and rhetorical strength, successfully rethinking the financial narrative for the Arabic reader while maintaining its depth, coherence, and persuasive impact.

Example 2 “As the sell-off gained pace, the list of explanations for why it was happening grew longer. It was China’s stagnation. It was poor global economic growth. It was low oil prices. It was interest rates turning negative. It was fear about banks’ capital. It was looming loan losses. It was herd mentality spiraling out of control. *It was schizophrenia*.” “Rational people suspend rationality in fast moving markets”, says a senior banker “There’s no single cause you can point to. It’s *pick your poison*.” (Financial Times 2016)

“وفي الوقت الذي تسارعت فيه علميات البيع المكثف ازدادت قائمة التفسيرات عن السبب في حدوث هذا، السبب هو الركود في الصين، أو هو ضعف النمو الاقتصادي العالمي وربما هو انخفاض أسعار النفط، أو لعله تحول أسعار الفائدة إلى سلبي، أو المخاوف بشأن رأس المال في المصارف، ومن الممكن أن خسائر القروض التي تلوح في الأفق هي السبب أو عقلية القطيع الخارجة عن السيطرة، ولعله كان انفصام الشخصية”

“يقول أحد كبار المصرفيين “العقلانيون يعلقون العقلانية في الأسواق التي تتحرك بسرعة، ليس هناك سبب واحد تمكن الإشارة إليه بل هي من باب اختراع السم الخاص بك.” (Al-Iqtissadia, 2016)

As shown in Example (2), the source text uses two metaphors from the Health/Illness domain to describe a chaotic market sell-off: “schizophrenia” and “pick your poison.” The journalist first lists several possible causes for the market’s turmoil, ending with the diagnostic term “schizophrenia,” a metaphor from the health domain that conveys the erratic, unpredictable, and fragmented behavior

of the market. This choice presents the journalist as a clinician assessing a patient, vividly illustrating the chaotic state of the financial sector. The term effectively captures the volatility and contradictory actions within the market, simplifying complex phenomena while adding a sense of urgency similar to a medical emergency. By personifying economic institutions and comparing them to patients suffering from a severe mental disorder, the metaphor makes the abstract concept of financial markets more relatable. It suggests that, just as schizophrenia in a person requires intensive treatment, the market's behavior also demands urgent solutions. Additionally, the metaphor highlights the market's inherent instability, reflecting the fragmented thought processes and erratic actions typical of the condition. This aligns with the broader conceptual metaphor *Economic Issues are Illnesses and/or Diseases* (Nader 2013, 133), reinforcing the idea that economic problems can be diagnosed, treated, and potentially cured, much like medical conditions.

The translator's choice to translate "schizophrenia" directly as انفصام الشخصية (*infisam al-shakhsiyya*) reflects a deliberate strategic decision influenced by several factors. From a sociocultural and conceptual perspective, the translator understands that although the specific clinical details of schizophrenia might differ in public perception, its core idea as a severe, disorienting mental illness is universally acknowledged. This shared cultural understanding enables the translator to trust that the target audience can bridge the conceptual gap, evoking a similar sense of severity and fragmentation. This cross-cultural understanding thus helps facilitate the redefinition of the market's condition. Linguistically, انفصام الشخصية is the exact medical term in Arabic. An alternative could have been a paraphrase like "a state of complete confusion," but that would have removed the metaphor's clinical strength and diagnostic finality, diminishing its conceptual power. By keeping the medical term, the translator maintains the intense, urgent tone of the original.

This diagnostic framing is immediately reinforced by the second metaphor, "pick your poison," which highlights the grim choices confronting banks. This expression suggests that all available options are harmful, inevitably leading to a negative outcome. The translator's direct translation, اختر السم الخاص بك (*ikhtar al-sum al-khas bik*), which literally means "choose your own poison," accurately maintains this conceptual meaning. The image of poison is widely understood to symbolize toxicity and unavoidable harm, emphasizing the severity of the situation and the certainty of negative consequences. This metaphor depicts decision-makers as being stuck in a scenario with no good choices, creating a sense of helplessness that highlights the need for careful strategic intervention.

Together, these two metaphors significantly influence the reader's perception by turning abstract economic ideas into concrete, sensory-rich, and emotionally

impactful images. They boost the persuasive strength of the text, creating a sense of urgency that encourages readers to recognize the seriousness of economic issues. The conceptual framework of *Economic Issues are Illnesses* helps readers understand the crisis in familiar terms, where selecting the right “medicine” is essential to preventing a total collapse — similar to a patient who might fall apart without proper treatment. The translator’s choice to keep both metaphors in their original form is therefore an intentional decision to preserve the source text’s complex cognitive and rhetorical strategy, making sure that the full impact of its diagnostic and warning message is effectively adapted for the target audience.

Example 3 “After huge swings in markets *steep falls* on Monday and Tuesday, a *rebound* on Wednesday, a *collapse again* on Thursday momentum-changed again”. (Financial Times 2016)

“بعد التقلبات الكبيرة في الأسواق حالات التراجع الحاد يومي الإثنين والثلاثاء والانتعاش يوم الأربعاء والانهيار مرة أخرى يوم الخميس تغير الزخم مرة أخرى.”
(Al-Iqtissadia, 2016)

The source text in Example (3) captures market volatility through a series of opposing metaphors: “rebound” and “collapse.” These expressions, though contrasting, are linked conceptually through the overarching metaphor of *A Company’s Financial State as a Body’s Health*, which frames market fluctuations as the trajectory of a patient’s health. The term “rebound” conceptualizes the market as a patient entering a positive stage of recovery, suggesting that after a period of illness (the downturn), signs of improvement are emerging. This mapping from the source domain of physical recovery to the target domain of market improvement highlights a temporary return to a better state, hinting at the potential for full stability and growth.

Conversely, the metaphor “collapse” is used to describe the market’s sharp decline, comparing it to a sudden and catastrophic deterioration in a patient’s health. “Collapse” is a strong, genre-specific metaphor defined as a “sudden and dramatic slowdown in economic activity,” and its use here highlights the abrupt and severe nature of the downturn. The translator’s choice to render “rebound” as الانتعاش (al-inte’ash — revival/recovery) and “collapse” as الانهيار (al-inhiyar — collapse) shows a clear understanding of both the source and target languages. الانهيار is the direct, widely accepted equivalent of “collapse” in Arabic economic language, ensuring the immediate transfer of its concept and severity. الانتعاش meaning “recovery” or “revival,” also serves as a conceptual mirror to “collapse,” creating a dynamic of oscillation between health and sickness. This metaphorical pairing portrays a fragile and unpredictable economy, similar to a patient experiencing periods of recovery and relapse.

This entire sequence is based on the concept of “recovery,” a metaphor that appears often in the analyzed data. From a cognitive perspective, the word “recovery” comes from the conceptual metaphor *The Recovery of an Economy is the Recovery of a Patient* (Kovacs 2006, 6). It views economic growth not just as a numbers increase but as a gradual healing process after a decline. The translator’s choice of الانتعاش for “rebound” effectively taps into this broader “recovery” framework, reimagining the market’s brief upswing as part of a bigger, ongoing health story. An alternative, nonmetaphorical translation like “a rise in prices” would show the literal event but wouldn’t place it within this clear, diagnostic system. By keeping the metaphorical system intact, the translator helps the target audience see economic changes in concrete, understandable terms, preserving the persuasive and explanatory power of the original as it prepares the way for more discussion of market “recovery” in later examples.

The genre-specific metaphor “recovery” is a key part of the *Economy is a Body* conceptual system, and (4) and (5) show its flexible use for different economic targets.

Example 4 “Many had identified Europe, less advanced in its *recovery from the recession* that the US, as the place to invest this year”.

(Financial Times 2016)

“كثيرون حددوا أوروبا التي هي أقل تقدماً من الولايات المتحدة في التعافي من الركود مكاناً للاستثمار هذا العام.” (Al-Iqtissadia, 2016)

In Example (4), “recovery from the recession” maps the source domain of a patient healing from a long-term illness onto the target domain of a national economy emerging from a recession. The text explicitly compares the economic situations of Europe and the US, portraying them as two patients at different stages of recovery. The metaphor conceptualizes the recession not just as a numerical decline but as a debilitating disease affecting both economies. The statement that Europe is “less advanced in its recovery” than the US powerfully frames the situation in diagnostic terms, suggesting a prolonged and incomplete healing process for the European economy. This framing is more vivid than a nonmetaphorical alternative like “Europe’s economic growth is slower,” as it implies underlying weakness and the need for continued treatment.

The translator’s choice to render “recovery” as التعافي (*al-ta’afi*) is a vital decision. التعافي is the direct, widely accepted equivalent in Arabic, used not only for physical health but especially in economic contexts. The translator’s choice is based on the understanding that this is no longer a fresh image but a fixed, genre-specific term. By employing التعافي, the translator makes sure that the full conceptual meaning of the original metaphor — the story of illness, healing, and gradual recovery — is smoothly conveyed and understood by the target audience.

This shift in understanding requires little effort from readers because the term has become a normal part of the Arabic economic vocabulary.

Example 5 “Oil producers’ group OPEC has said it expects *oil prices to recover* to 70 a barrel by 2020”. (BBC 2015)
 “توقعت منظمة الدول المصدرة للنفط ‘أوبك’ تعاافي سعر النفط ليرتفع الى 07 دولارا للبرميل عام 2020”. (BBC Arabic 2015)

The example shows how the same metaphor is applied to a different, more specific area: commodity prices. Here, the phrase “oil prices to recover” views the expected price increase as a patient expected to get better after a period of weakness. The source domain of a patient regaining strength is mapped onto the target domain of rising oil prices. Once again, the translator uses *ta’afi* (تعاافي), demonstrating this term’s strength across various financial contexts. The metaphor has become so embedded that its translation is almost fixed, whether the “patient” is a national economy, a stock market, or a commodity price. This consistent translation approach reflects how common the metaphor is in both the source and target languages. Choosing to use *ta’afi* is not just a literal translation; it recognizes a shared mental framework where abstract economic changes are understood through the universal and powerful story of health and recovery.

Example 6 “Wall Street *recovered from sharp falls* in morning trading but still closed slightly lower, as oil prices fell sharply”. (BBC 2015)
 “تعاافت بورصة وول ستريت من هبوط حاد أثناء الساعات الاولى من تداولات الاثنين، أول أيام أسبوع التداول، لكنها أغلقت التعاملات اليومية على تراجع كبير متأثرة بالهبوط الحاد في أسعار النفط العالمية”. (BBC Arabic 2015)

Example (6) shows a powerful metaphorical sequence where a sudden crisis is followed by a healing process, all within the HEALTH/ILLNESS domain. The phrase “sharp falls” depicts the market’s decline not just as a numerical drop but as a sudden, traumatic health event, similar to an injury or a serious medical episode. This immediately portrays Wall Street as a patient experiencing a crisis, which sets the cognitive stage for the subsequent ‘recovery.’ This narrative sequence, from injury to healing, makes the abstract market dynamics more tangible and follows a widely understood logic.

The translator’s choice to render “recovered” as *ta’afat* (تعاافت) and “sharp falls” as *hubut had* (هبوط حاد) is heavily influenced by the strong conventional use these terms have in both languages. “Recovery” is a genre-specific metaphor rooted in business discourse, and its Arabic equivalent, *ta’afi*, has become a fixed, standard term. The translator’s role here is less about creative reimagining and more about activating a shared, existing conceptual framework. Recasting the market’s rebound as a patient’s healing happens almost automatically for the target audience because the word (*ta’afi*) is already part of their established

economic vocabulary. An alternative, non-metaphorical phrase like “its value increased after a significant decrease” would state the fact plainly but would lose the coherent and persuasive narrative of injury and healing conveyed by the original text. By keeping the metaphorical equivalents, the translator maintains the text’s internal logic and cognitive effect.

This reliance on medical terminology is not limited to describing the condition of a single entity. The *Health/Illness* framework is so influential that it extends to explaining how economic conditions spread, a process that logically introduces the idea of “contagion.” It is commonly understood that “contagion” is a term related to disease; therefore, it belongs to the medical field and refers to the spread of a disease from one person to another. The example below illustrates how this concept can be metaphorically applied to describe a specific economic situation.

Example 7 “The United Kingdom’s Brexit referendum has shaken equity and financial markets around the world. As in prior episodes of *contagious financial turmoil*...” (Project Syndicate 2016a)

“كان الاستفتاء الذي أجري في المملكة المتحدة على “الخروج البريطاني” من الاتحاد الأوروبي سببا في زعزعة أركان أسواق الأسهم والأسواق المالية في العالم. وكما حدث في وقائع سابقة من الاضطرابات المالية المعديّة...” (Project Syndicate 2016b)

In Example (7), the use of “contagious financial turmoil” in the source text powerfully demonstrates how the *Health/Illness* source domain is used not just to describe a static condition, but to explain how economic crises spread. The term “contagious” directly reflects its medical meaning, the transmission of a disease, applied to the target domain of financial instability spreading from one market to another. Here, the “financial turmoil” following the Brexit referendum is conceptualized as an infectious disease, which immediately conveys a sense of unstoppable, uncontrolled spread. This metaphor is based on the idea that *Economic Issues are Illnesses and/or Diseases* (Nader 2016, 133), and its use is a recognized, genre-specific feature of financial discourse. Financial dictionaries define “contagion” as a crisis originating in one country and spreading to others, showing how the metaphor has been fully adopted as technical vocabulary.

The translator’s choice to render “contagious” as معدية (*mu’diyya*) is a clear and highly effective decision. This literal translation isn’t just a default; it accurately reflects that the concept is similarly powerful and understood in the target culture. Experts in both languages agree that describing the spread of an economic crisis as “contagious” is a common and natural linguistic technique. Therefore, using معدية maintains the original metaphor’s cognitive and communicative power, ensuring its impact and relevance are preserved for Arabic-speaking audiences.

This successful literal transfer provides insight into how our cognitive systems process such metaphors. When a business metaphor from an English text is translated directly into Arabic and the result feels natural and understandable, it indicates a shared cognitive reception between the two audiences. This suggests that the level of conventionality of the business metaphor is similar in both languages. Many of the health and illness metaphors analyzed so far have become so common that their metaphorical origins are barely noticeable in either English or Arabic. This high level of conventionality indicates that readers of both languages share similar ways of understanding business progress and collapse as health and illness. Therefore, it can be argued that the use of these metaphors in business discourse reflects a significant overlap in the conceptual systems of English and Arabic speakers within this specific domain. This shared cognitive understanding enables effective and natural translations of these metaphors, maintaining their intended meanings and implications across both languages.

7.3 Translating English business health and illness metaphors into Arabic non-metaphor

Based on the data reviewed, only two metaphors from the health/illness source domain were translated into Arabic as non-metaphors. The following section examines these metaphors within their specific contexts, explaining why they were not translated as direct equivalents in Arabic and discussing the implications of this translation choice.

Example 8 “European Central Bank Chief Mario Draghi has sought to calm fears about *the health of European banks* after a ‘sharp fall’ in their share prices”. (BBC 2016)

“سعى رئيس البنك المركزي الأوروبي ماريو درانجي الى تبديد مخاوف المستثمرين بشأن وضع القطاع المصرفي بعد ‘هبوط حاد’ في أسعار أسهمها”. (BBC Arabic 2016)

Example 9 “He hinted at further monetary stimulus next month as the Eurozone battled weak investment, sluggish manufacturing growth, geopolitical risks and heightened uncertainty about *the health global economy*”. (BBC 2016)

“وأشار الى ان المزيد من إجراءات التسيير الكمي في الطريق الى التنفيذ الشهر المقبل، إذ تقاوم منطقة اليورو خفض الاستثمار، وتباطؤ نمو قطاع التصنيع، وغير ذلك من المخاطر الجغرافية السياسية التي تعمل على زيادة الضبابية التي تحيط بأوضاع الاقتصاد العالمي”. (BBC Arabic 2016)

Examples (8) and (9) demonstrate a clear shift in translation strategy, where the translator chooses to represent the highly conventional metaphor “health”

as a nonmetaphorical equivalent. In both cases, the source text uses “health” — initially to describe the condition of European banks and later the global economy — drawing on the familiar conceptual mapping where *an Economic Entity’s State is likened to a Body’s Health*. This metaphor frames the financial situation in terms of wellness and stability, utilizing the same cognitive system seen in earlier examples like “healthy levels.” It helps readers understand a complex economic condition through the familiar and universally recognized concept of physical health.

However, in both translations, the term “health” is translated as وضع (*wad*) or أوضاع (*awda*) — literally “situation” or “conditions.” This choice intentionally moves away from the source text’s metaphorical framing, and the reasoning behind it can be understood through several overlapping factors.

From a textual perspective, the translator may have prioritized clear, straightforward meaning over deeper conceptual ideas. The term وضع is a neutral, general signifier that accurately conveys the core meaning — the “state” or “condition” of the banks and the economy. This approach, known as converting metaphor to sense, ensures that no reader, regardless of their familiarity with economic language, could misunderstand the message. The translator might have viewed the metaphor as potentially unnecessary or found the nonmetaphorical meaning more important in this context, choosing to communicate only the factual aspect.

However, this choice involves a significant tradeoff. By choosing a nonmetaphorical term, the translator actively reconceptualizes the source message, removing its diagnostic and biological connotations. The original “health” suggests a system that can be well or ill, strong or weak, and requires care to stay that way. The translated “conditions” is static and neutral; it eliminates the entire story of vitality, potential illness, and the need for preventative or curative actions that the health metaphor offers. This is especially important considering that “health” (صحة — *siha*) and “healthy” (صحي — *sihhi*) are highly conventionalized in Arabic economic discourse.

Therefore, the translator’s choice is not a “failure,” but a strategic decision that favors semantic neutrality over cognitive and rhetorical impact. While the literal meaning remains intact, the deeper conceptual layer is lost. An alternative translation using صحة (*siha*) would have kept the conceptual coherence within the larger discourse on economic “illness” and “recovery.” The choice of وضع (*wad*) breaks this connection, treating the statement as an isolated piece of information instead of part of a broader, metaphorically consistent narrative. This shows how two different translation options — one metaphorical, one not — can both be viable but lead to very different interpretations of the original text, changing how the target audience is encouraged to understand the economic situation.

Example 10 “Sports clothing maker, Under Armour tumbled 7% after Morgan Stanley cut its rating of its shares to ‘underweight’”.

(Project Syndicate 2016a)

وهبطت أسهم شركة أندر آرمور للملابس الرياضية 7 في المئة مع خفض مورغان ستانلي التصنيف الائتماني “لأسهم الشركة إلى ‘غير آمن’”.

(Project Syndicate 2016b)

This example illustrates the genre-specific metaphor “underweight,” a term that shows how abstract financial ratings are rooted in the more tangible experience of physical health and weight. The source text uses “underweight” to describe a stock rating, triggering a conceptual mapping from the source domain of insufficient body weight to the target domain of a stock’s expected performance. In financial terminology, “underweight” is part of a comparative system alongside “equal weight” and “overweight,” advising investors to reduce their holdings in a stock anticipated to perform worse than its industry peers. The metaphor effectively communicates a state of being below a desirable or standard level.

The translator’s choice to render “underweight” as *ghayr aamin* (ghayr aamin – “unsafe”) marks a major act of reconceptualization. Instead of keeping the original metaphor or finding a similar one, the translator has shifted the entire conceptual framework. The original text is based on the *Stock Performance is Body Weight system*, while the translated version aligns with a *Financial Investment is a Physical Journey/Space system*, where safety and risk are central concepts. This decision can be examined through several parameters.

From a pragmatic perspective, the translator may have focused on conveying the immediate consequence of the rating rather than its technical meaning. For an investor, an “underweight” rating suggests risk; the stock is an “unsafe” bet. By translating the implication directly, the translator makes the practical advice immediately clear to a general audience, possibly sacrificing technical accuracy. This approach is common when the translator acts as a cultural and informational mediator, deciding that the “why” (it’s below standard) is less important than the “what to do” (avoid the risk).

However, this reconceptualization has significant effects. It separates the term from its related terms, “overweight” and “equal weight,” disrupting the internal consistency of the rating system. An alternative, more straightforward translation such as *taqyeem da’eef* (taqyeem da’eef – “weak rating”) or *تصنيف أقل من الوزن النسبي* (a more literal but technical translation) would have preserved the original conceptual link to inadequacy or being below a benchmark. While *ghayr aamin* (“unsafe”) is a valid interpretation of the rating’s outcome, it does not translate the metaphor itself. It replaces a comparative judgment with a binary assessment of risk.

This choice emphasizes a key tension in translation: balancing the preservation of the source text's conceptual world with clearly conveying its practical implications to the target audience. The translator has chosen the latter, a strategic decision that makes the text easier to understand but also reduces its specialized, metaphorical meaning. This shows that translation is not just a linguistic transfer but a complex process where translators consider various factors — such as textual coherence, audience knowledge, and perceived communication goals — to adapt a message for a new context.

8. Conclusion

This study has examined how health and illness metaphors in English economic discourse are translated into Arabic, using examples from major news outlets. From the perspective of cognitive metaphor theory, the analysis shows that these metaphors are not just stylistic embellishments but essential cognitive tools that shape how we understand abstract economic concepts. Metaphors such as *healthy levels*, *recovery*, *contagion*, and *underweight* form coherent narratives that present complex financial issues in universally relatable terms of physical health, sickness, and treatment.




The analysis revealed two main translation pathways. The first, and most common, involves translating the source metaphor with a direct metaphorical equivalent in Arabic (e.g., *recovery* into تعافي). This approach proves highly effective when the underlying conceptual mapping, such as *an Economy is a Body*, resonates strongly across cultures and the linguistic expression is conventional in both languages. In these instances, the translator successfully maintains the source text's cognitive and rhetorical power, enabling the target audience to engage with the same rich, diagnostic narrative.

The second pathway involves a deliberate reconceptualization, where the translator replaces the source metaphor with a nonmetaphorical equivalent or shifts the conceptual domain entirely (e.g., translating *health* as “conditions” or *underweight* as “unsafe”). These choices are not failures but strategic decisions that prioritize different communicative goals, such as ensuring immediate denotative clarity or highlighting the practical consequences of a financial rating for a general audience. However, this strategy comes at a cost: it often flattens the conceptual depth of the original, dissolving the coherent narrative established by the metaphorical system and severing its connection to other related metaphors within the discourse.






Finally, this study concludes that translating business metaphors is a complex decision-making process involving a dynamic interplay of linguistic, textual, and

sociocultural factors. The translator's choice is not just a simple binary between "right" and "wrong," but a carefully considered tradeoff between maintaining a source text's conceptual world and adapting its message for a new context. Effective translation in this area requires a deep understanding not only of the linguistic terms but also of the powerful cognitive work that these metaphors perform. Future research could expand on these findings by empirically testing how audiences receive different translation strategies and conducting long-term studies on how business metaphors become conventionalized in Arabic. Additional comparative analyses across other conceptual domains, such as *War or Journeys*, alongside cognitive research into translators' decision-making processes, would also provide valuable insights to the field.

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Résumé

Cette étude analyse la manière dont les métaphores de la santé et de la maladie en anglais sont traduites en arabe, à partir d'exemples tirés de la BBC, de *Project Syndicate* et du *Financial Times* dans le contexte du discours économique. En mobilisant la théorie de la métaphore conceptuelle, elle examine les expressions métaphoriques liées à la santé et à la maladie dans les textes financiers, en explorant leur rôle dans la construction des idées économiques et en évaluant l'efficacité de leurs traductions en arabe. L'étude met en évidence l'importance cruciale de ces métaphores pour exprimer des situations économiques complexes et souligne leur pertinence dans les débats économiques en anglais comme en arabe. Les résultats montrent que si les traductions littérales préservent souvent le sens métaphorique, certains traducteurs optent pour des équivalents non métaphoriques, ce qui peut modifier l'impact et la clarté des métaphores. Les conclusions insistent également sur la nécessité d'une équivalence cognitive en traduction métaphorique et proposent des approches visant à améliorer la compréhension mutuelle des concepts économiques entre langues, afin de garantir la transmission du sens voulu. L'étude conclut que la réussite de la traduction de ces métaphores suppose une prise de conscience de leurs fonctions cognitives et des implications propres au genre discursif; les stratégies doivent chercher à préserver le noyau conceptuel des métaphores pour communiquer efficacement avec des publics experts comme non experts.

Mots-clés : traduction des métaphores, métaphore conceptuelle, équivalence cognitive, métaphores de la santé et de la maladie

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