

# MALAY METAPHORS: SOURCE DOMAIN AND HISTORICAL CONNECTION

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## 1. Introduction

As the English metaphor can be identified as consisting of two components known as the source domain and the target domain (Saeed 1977), a study was carried out to find out whether the same is true of the Malay metaphor. The results indicate that they adhere to the same principle. This being the case, a further study was conducted on the source domain as this domain consists of concrete forms which describes or explains the target domain. It is discovered that the words used in this component are derived from man and nature. Of particular interest is the discovery of a whole network of words used in the field of agriculture, a field which is no longer dominant in their lives.

In trying to achieve the above objective, this paper will attempt to provide a brief outline of the topics mentioned above by defining the metaphor and discussing the components of a metaphor with particular attention given to the source domain. This is followed by a discussion on the source domains of metaphors which are related to agriculture and finally, a brief explanation on its historical significance.

## 2. Definition of a metaphor

Many have stated that the word **metaphor** originated from the Greek words *meta* and *pherein* which carries the summarized meaning of 'the transfer of meaning'. To explain this phenomena, many definitions have been put forward. Aristotle, being the earliest among them stated that the metaphor involves the giving of a name to something else. The transfer is from genus to species, species to genus, or species to species based on analogy (Lappin 1981).

To further clarify this definition, Stern (1965) quoting from Stählin stated that the metaphor is a form of figurative language where something that is being referred to is given another name by the following process:

- (i) the transfer does not involve an essential identity of the two referents,
- (ii) the designation is taken from another sphere of experience than that to which the actual referent belongs, and
- (iii) the process of transfer is not expressed.

The **Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture** (1992: 836) further explains the metaphor as:

(the use of) an expression which means or describes one thing or idea using words usually used of something else with very similar qualities (as in *The sunshine of her smile* or *The rain came down in buckets*) without using the words *as* or *like*.

These definitions clearly indicate that there are two parts to a metaphor and that the two parts are from different fields. These two parts or components interact, leading to a transfer of meaning which is not explicitly stated, as words such as *as* or *like* are not used. Looking at the first example provided by the last definition, the metaphor would be the combination of *sunshine* and *her smile*. These two are from totally different fields as the former is part of nature while the latter refers to what a person is doing. *The sunshine* also describes *her smile* without the use of any explicit markers that are found in similes. The same rule applies to the next example where the metaphor is based on the direct comparison between *rainfall* and *buckets*.

### 3. The components of a metaphor

In the previous section, we have established that the English metaphor consists of two components. References to these two components have included *tenor* and *vehicle* (Richards 1936) *principal* and *subsidiary subject* (Black 1962), as well as *topic* and *image* (Larson 1984). The terms that will be used throughout this paper to refer to these two components are **source domain** and **target domain** (Saeed 1997) as these are widely used presently.

Based on Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) findings, Hatch and Brown (1995) noted that abstract concepts are often explained using more concrete concepts. Therefore, "we use terms from a concrete *source* field to talk about an abstract *target* field" (1995:86). An example which they use to illustrate this point is the abstract concept of IDEA which is explained using words from other source fields such as plants or food:

Source	→	Target	Source	→	Target
Plants	→	Ideas	Food	→	Ideas
Ideas are planted			cook up an idea		
even in a barren mind			idea smells fishy		
ideas grow from seeds			swallow an idea		
ideas bud, flower or die			a half-baked idea		
on the vine					

(Hatch & Brown 1995:86)

These examples clearly indicate the use of concrete concepts such as plants and food to explain the abstract concept of IDEA. The explanation is not based on any lengthy or wordy explanations but it is based on our ability to perceive and comprehend the nature of plants and food thus, enabling us to see the comparison being made between these and IDEAS.

### 4. Agriculture as a source domain

We will now look at some examples of Malay metaphors in which the source domain are linked to the field of agriculture. The **American Heritage Dictionary** (1980) states

that agriculture is “the science, art, and business of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock useful to man.” This provides the basis for the selection of source domain words related to the field of agriculture. Our discussion will be divided into three stages. It will begin with: (a) the components of the land (jungle) which needs to be cleared before cultivation can take place, followed by (b) the actual planting and sprouting of roots and finally, (c) the blossoming of the flower.

*(a) The components of the land (jungle)*

Located near the equator, Malaysia enjoys a tropical climate the whole year round. Its rainforest is known for its dense vegetation making a walk through the jungle difficult. Clearing the land for agriculture would be equally difficult due to the presence of collective groups of plants: **semak samun** which refers to the undergrowth consisting of shrubs, bushes and low growing trees; **hutan belantara** which refers to the extensive jungle; **rimba** which means forest or jungle; **rimba yang bersimpang-siur** which refers to the extensive forest or jungle, as well as parts of plants; **ranting dan duri** which refers to branches and thorns as parts of the tree; **berduri** which means having thorns; and **reba ranjau** which refers to obstacles on the ground such as felled timber or branches which could hurt a person. These Malay words which form the source domain of the Malay metaphors in this study are listed below:

1. Mungkin dia maklum, **dunia luar** terlalu banyak **ranting dan duri** menanti.  
(Maybe he is aware that there are many branches and thorns (for him) in the outside world.)
2. Terlalu banyak **arca berduri** mesti diinjak.  
(Too many thorny statues must be moved.)
3. Mengapa harus gentar berdepan dengan **rimba fikir** yang **bersimpang-siur**, fikirnya sambil beredar, membiarkan lelaki itu terpaku sendiri.

(Why should he feel fear when faced with the extensive jungle of thought, he thought while moving away, leaving the man all alone and motionless.)

4. Untuk menjadi pahlawan tidak harus meredah **rimba fikir** dan melayari samudera kesenyapan.

(To be a warrior one need not force one's way through the jungle of thought and sail in the sea of silence.)

5. Dan **semakin sarat negeri** yang luas di dalam tubuh kering yang kontang itu dengan **semak samun, hutan belantara, duri** serta padang kala jengking yang semakin tajam dan berbisa.

(And the spacious country in the thin and dried up body is over-laden with undergrowth, extensive jungle as well as scorpions that became sharper and more poisonous.)

6. Dan semakin terpancar cahaya itu, dia sedikit demi sedikit dapat melihat **semak samun, reba ranjau di dalam negeri dirinya** yang lebih luas dari dunia raya.

(And as the light shines, he could slowly see the undergrowth, felled timber and branches in the state of his body which is wider than the whole world.)

The above translations are direct translations. Not attempt was made to translate the metaphors into their English equivalents as the purpose of the translation is to enable the non-native Malay speaker to perceive the Malay metaphors in its original sense. The source domain in the above sentences relate to the jungle or parts of the jungle (thorns, branches) to explain the target domain. The target domain **dunia luar** or the outside world is actually a concrete concept but a source domain was needed to explain the kinds of obstacles associated with the outside world. The same is true of **arca** or statues which actually refer to people who get in one's way while **fikir** or thought is definitely abstract and requires a source domain to explain it. The target domain **negeri** is actually a double metaphor as it actually refers to the liver as a part of the body. **Negeri** or state is used to indicate that the liver is a part of the body, just as a state is a part of a country. The Malays believe in the liver as the core of the body thus, "feelings and emotions ... come from the liver" (Asmah Hj. Omar 1996). The source

domain in these examples carry the meaning of obstacles or hurdles in one's way.

(b) *The actual planting and sprouting of roots*

Moving from the land (jungle) as the source domain, we will now look into the actual cultivation of plants. The source domain in this case relates to how plants grow with words such as **tersemai subur** or growing well, **tertanam** which means planted/grown **tertanam tegak** or growing straight up, **menanam** meaning to sow, grow or plant, and **berakar** which means to grow roots.

7. Walaupun tidak dilahirkan secara terus terang, tetapi kami menyedari **jawabannya sudah tersemai subur** di dalam hati masing-masing.  
(Even though it is not stated, we realise that the answer is growing well in our liver.)
8. Benih **ketakutan itu tertanam** dalam hidupnya sewaktu ia mula menyaksikan perpisahan.  
(The seed of fear has been planted in her since she first experienced separation.)
9. Dapatku rasakan **kemesraan itu sudah tertanam tegak** dalam hati Nursyimah.  
(I could feel that the closeness was growing straight up in Nursyimah's liver.)
10. Dia juga bergiat untuk mempengaruhi dan **menanam fahaman ateisnya** kepada penuntut lain, agar apabila keluar nanti mereka mampu mempengaruhi masyarakat dan **menanam ke dalam fikiran** masyarakat supaya wujud satu masyarakat ateis yang progresif.  
(He tried hard to influence and sow the seeds of atheism into the other students, so that after they have graduated they are able to influence society and sow into their thoughts, in order to establish an atheistic society that is progressive.)
11. **Susur galur leluhurnya** dari Yahudi Ashkenazic asal Afrika dan dari sebelah ibunya Yahudi Sephardic asal Eropah lalu bertemu di Capernum sebelum **berakar** di Haifa hingga kini.

(Her ancestors (on her father's side) are Ashkenazic Jews from Africa while her mother's side are Sephardic Jews from Europe, they met in Capernum before sprouting roots in Haifa, to this day.)

The source domain of the metaphors in the above sentences are used to explain abstract concepts which include **jawapan**, the answer or the actual feelings to the question about their love for each other which is not stated, **ketakutan** or the fear of separation as her father had left her mother for another woman, **kemesraan** which relates to the intimacy or closeness felt by Nursyimah's cousin and **fahaman** which relates to one's belief in atheism. In the last example, **susur galur leluhurnya** refers to her ancestors. Although this is a concrete concept, a source domain was needed to explain that the family had lived and expanded in Haifa, up to this day. **Berakar** or the sprouting of roots seemed the obvious solution to explain this target domain as it is economical in terms of words used. The source domain in the above examples explain feelings and beliefs as being firm or unchanging and family as staying put in one place.

(c) *The blossoming of the flower*

In the following sentences, the source domain is based on the blossoming of the flower. The word **kembang** is the root word for **kembanglah** and **berkembang**. The word **kembang** can be used as a noun to replace *flower* or *bloom*. However, the following examples indicate that as the source domain of a metaphor, it is used to convey the meaning of *spreading out* or *expanding*.

12. Akulah perakam gementar kembara tatkala disajen pagi dan sejuaknya hembus angin dari sudut celiknya **kembang matahari**.  
(I record the fear that travellers feel when presented with the cold breeze early in the morning from the corner where the blooming sun rises.)
13. **Kembanglah kegembiraan** dalam dada rakan syarikat.

(The feeling of happiness blossomed in his partner's chest.)

14. Alon-alon **ingatan berkembang**.  
(Slowly his thoughts blossomed.)

In sentence (12), the target domain is the sun or **matahari**. It is not an abstract concept. However, a source domain **kembang** was needed to explain the heat and intensity of the sun at its peak. In sentence (13), **kegembiraan** refers to happiness. In this case, his partner feels very happy (or rather happier than before) as their business venture is expected to yield high returns. The target domain in sentence (14) refers to thoughts or **ingatan** which was slowly coming back to him, enabling him to remember more.

The sentences we have analyzed indicate how the source domain explains the target domain. Even though it has been stated that the source domain is concrete and the target domain abstract, there were instances where the target domain is concrete but a source domain was needed to explain it. As stated earlier, these sentences were selected as they are related to agriculture in some way. One might argue that this is not necessarily so as they are part of our knowledge about nature but then again, agriculture is part of nature.

## 5. Conclusion

In relating the above findings to the history of the Malays, it should be pointed out that during the colonial days, the British ruled Malaya (now Malaysia) by separating the different races. Many Malays lived in villages and the British “confined (the ordinary Malays) to having humble goals, or remain as farmers ...” The Chinese who were brought into the country to work in tin mines lived in towns and cities while the Indians worked and remained in the rubber estates. ([http://www/fba/nus/edu.sg/tudent/bk3400/t2\\_9899\\_student/Malaysia\\_AE3.../Social\\_Riots.Htm.5/10/01](http://www/fba/nus/edu.sg/tudent/bk3400/t2_9899_student/Malaysia_AE3.../Social_Riots.Htm.5/10/01)). Independence was achieved from the British in 1957. By then there was already a wide gap among the races in terms of income. To close this gap the government introduced the National Economic Policy (NEP) in the 1970s with the purpose of eradicating poverty. The country which



was predominantly dependant on agriculture shifted to a market-based economy. This led to an increase in Malay women joining the work force in the electronics and textile industry (ibid). From that point onwards, the Malays moved out of the agricultural sector. The latest census indicate that only 20% of Malaysians are in the agricultural sector and this includes the non-Malays.

Despite the fact that the Malays have ventured out into other sectors of the economy, the predominant use of agricultural terms in the source domains of Malay metaphors remain. A possible explanation for this occurrence would be their inherent understanding of nature, or in a stricter sense, of agriculture has been passed down from one generation to the next even though there is no real physical contact with agriculture among the present generation. As the source domain explains the target domain, the implication of this finding is that the Malays have a deep understanding of nature, or agriculture in particular, to be able to use these agricultural terms to explain the more abstract terms of the target domain.

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