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An Investigation of Davis' Translation of *SHAHNAMEH*

Rostam and Sohrab Story in Focus

Mohammad Reza Dehbashi M.A. Candidate

Abstract

Translation is a controversial subject *per se*, especially in the field of literature and poetry wherein one side it is related to feelings and emotions and, on the other side, to language rules and requirements. Therefore, rendering the message and style of poetic masterpieces like *Shahnameh* is much more complicated than other types of texts.

In this investigation there is an attempt to compare the translations of *Shahnameh* by Davis (2007) in terms of semantic features of Persian poetry to see, to what extent, semantic features of Persian poetry and specifically the story of Rostam and Sohrab are kept intact, changed, or lost in the English translation of *Shahnameh*. To this end, the data were analyzed in terms of loss of translation, gain in translation and also loss of figurative language.

The results showed that in Davis' translation %74 of selected verses were translated correctly (Gain), %2 of Loss in Davis' translation is seen and in %24 of cases the translation has been done with the Loss of figurative language. In other words, he translated them communicatively.

Shahnameh consists of about sixty thousands of couplets and translated by many scholars, so potentially provides a very wide area for those translators who are interested in research and investigation about Persian literature and epic poetry.

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Key Words

Translation, Epic Poetry, Figure of speech

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Among all translated texts, literary works have been the most problematic. That is due to diversity and versatility among cultures, and variations in languages. Each geographical region of the world has its own traditions and cultural features, pursuant to its own way of communication. In other words, different languages follow different cultures and different attitudes and this discrepancy among languages causes different views toward the world in the speakers of these languages.

So, each specific language has its own influence on the thought and behaviors of its speakers. In spite of diverse cultures and languages, human beings, nations and tribes, based on their needs could not live in isolation, because all Adam's offspring have some common characteristics like human emotions, passions, impressions and peripheral perceptions and stuff like these, which pave the way of communication, therefore cross-cultural communication will take place and the phenomenon of translation will loom large.

1.2 Poetry

According to *Advanced Oxford Dictionary* (2009): "A poem is a piece of writing in which the words are chosen for their sounds and images they suggest, not just for their obvious meanings," (p.972) and the poetry that comes from the Greek word *poesis* which means "making" is a form of literary art in which language is used for its aesthetic and evocative qualities in addition to or in lieu of its apparent meaning. Also epic poems refer to poems that are long and tell stories about heroic deeds.

Frost (1969) stated that poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another. Based on different definitions and different methods of translation of poetry, it is seems that translation of poetry is not impossible and each poem in some aspects of poetic features is translatable.

1.3 SHAHNAMEH

Shahnameh is a great Persian epic, written by Feerdowsi. Shahnameh means "The Epic of Kings." This epic is full of figures of speech and purple patches. For example, in just one verse (verse:867 from Rostam and Sohrab story) of Shahnameh, there are 6-7 types figurative language like alliteration, assonance, consonance, allusion, collocation, pun, metaphor etc.

گرازان و بر گور نعره زنان
سمندش جهان و جهان را کنان

(Verse: 7009, p.196)

Gorazan o bar goor naare zanan

Samandash jehano jahan ra kanaan

Alliteration: **gorazan** , **goor** and **jahan,jehan**

- a) Assonance: **ä** sound repeated 7 times
- b) Consonance: **n** repeated 9 and **r** 5 times
- c) Pun: between **jahan** and **jehan**
- d) Allusion: direct meaning of goor refers to zebra(*goore khar*) and indirect meaning refers to tomb(*goor*)
- e) Metaphor: samand for horse (asb)
- f) Taxis (Mora atonnazir): Goraz, Goor and samand which mean pig, zebra and horse.

Clearly, rendering the beauty and magnificence of these two verses, with regard to formal and semantic features of Persian poetic matters, is a very hard task. Honestly, Ferdowsi (940-1020) did a great job in Persian literature as he himself points below and left the Shahnameh as a memorial for us, and forever.

که تخم

نمیرم از این پس که من زنده ام
سخن را پراکنده ام

(Verse: 49593, p.1367)

Namiram azin pas ke man zende am
am

Ke tokhme sokhan ra paraakande

*I will never die, afterwards;¹
I'll be immortal all the times
The seeds of speeches, because;
I've spread in, all minds*

1.4 Translation of SHAHNAMEH

Translation per se is a problematic issue, especially in cultural and literary works and more specifically in the field of poetry and the world masterpieces like Shahnameh.

Ferdowsi revived the pre-Islamic history and culture of Persia in 60000 lines, so skillfully that we have no literary work after him, which was not influenced by this unique masterpiece.

Dick Davis (2007) is currently professor of Persian at Ohio State University and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He takes an unorthodox approach to the epic, transforming Ferdowsi's verse into a combination of poetry and prose.

¹ Suggested Translation

There are many different translations of Shahnameh into many different languages with different forms of translation; some are in poetry, some in prose, and some are combinations of verse and prose, but most of them are incomplete translations which are only collections of several episodes.

2. Methodology

In classification of figures of speech, Peacham (1577) in his book, "*The garden of eloquence*", enumerated 184 different figures of speech which are divided into two main categories: schemes and tropes. According to Peacham tropes are artful deviations from the ordinary or principal signification of words like anthropomorphism that means ascribing human characteristics to something that is not human, such as an animal or a god.

The present study attempted to extract 40 examples of figures of speech in the story of Rostam and Sohrab with regard to degree of frequency of each item and locate their corresponding expressions in Davis' translation, in order to compare and contrast them with the source text and also with each other to show, how the elements of the source text in this translation may be translated.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

1. Simile

Perrine (1970, p.715) in his book *literature: The elements of poetry* said: simile is a means of comparing things that are essentially unlike, the comparison is expressed by the use of some words or phrase, such as like, as, than, similar to, resembles or seems.

In Shahnameh to describe *Tahmineh (Sohrab's mother)* in verse 63 of the story of Sohrab story, Ferdowsi (1010), states:

دو ابرو کمان و دو گیسو کمند به بالا به کردار سرو بلند

(Verse: 6197, p.174)

Do abroo kamaano do gisoo boland be baalaa be kerdaare sarve boland

There is a very beautiful simile between the face beauties of Tahmineh's eyebrows and hairs against weaponry utensils like bow and lasso and also between the tallness of stature and cypress.

"This beauty's eyebrows curved like an archer's bow, and her ringlets hung like nooses to snare the unwary; in stature she was as elegant as a cypress tree".

(p.188)

2. Simile

جو خورشید

پس پرده اندر یکی ماهروی
تابان پر از رنگ و بوی

(Verse: 6195, p.174)

Paseh parde andar yeki mahrooy

cho khorshide taban por az rang o booy

"Like a splendid sun, a paradise of tints and scents, her mistress followed her."

(p.188)

3. Simile

بدانست کو هم

زدش بر زمین بر به کردار شیر
نماند به زیر

(Verse: 7019, p.196)

Zadash bar zamin bar be kerdaare shir

bedanest ku ham namaanad bezir

Be kerdare shir means as powerful and fast as a lion.

Like a lion Rostam laid him low, but, knowing that the youth would not lie there for long.

(p.209)

4. Simile

که شد لاله

چنان ننگش آمد زکار هجیر
رنگش به کردار قیر

(Verse: 6330, p.177)

*Chaenan angash amad ze kare hujir
shir*

ke shod laleh ranash be kerdare

Be kerdare ghir means as black as tar or pitch.

She found his behavior so shameful that her rosy cheeks became as black as pitch with rage.

(p.191)

5. Simile

یکی پورش آمد جو تابنده

چو نه ماه بگذشت بر دخت شاه
ماه

(Verse: 6242, p.175)

*Cho noh mah bogzasht bar dokhte shah
maah*

yeki poorash aamad cho taabandeh

Cho taabandeh maah means as shining as moon.

Nine month passed, and the princess Tahmineh gave birth to a son as splendid as the shining moon.

(p.189)

6. Simile

درختی است

بدو گفت خوی بد شهریار
جنگی همیشه به بار

(Verse: 7105, p.199)

Be doo goft khooye bade shahriar

Derakhtist jangi gamishe be baar

Here keykavous bad (khooye bade Sharyar) nature likened to a tree that his fruit is always war (Derakhtist jangi hamishe be baar).

When Gudarz heard these words, he hurried back to Rostam and said:

"This king malicious nature is a tree that grows new, bitter fruit perpetually;

(p.212)

7. Simile

به آوردگه رفت چون

خروشید و بگرفت نیزه به دست
پیل مست

(Verse: 6773, p.190)

*Khorushi o begreft neyze be dast
Be avrdgah raft choon pileh mast*

Choon pile mast means like drunken elephant.

Seething with fury, he mounted his horse, couched his lance and rode out to the battlefield like a maddened elephant.

(p.202)

8. Simile

تو گفתי همه تخت سهراب بود
شاداب بود
دو بازو به کردار ران هیون
و چهره چو خون
بسان یکی سرو
برش چون بر پیل

(Verse: 6618, 6619, p.185)

*To gofti hameh takht Sohrab bood
Do bazoo be kerdare raaneh hayun*

*Besane yeki sarve shadab bood
Barash choon bare pil o chehreh cho khoon*

He was like a happy cypress (Sarve shaadaab), his two arms were like animals thighs (raaneh hayun), and his width was similar to elephants width (Barash coon bare pil), also his face was like blood in terms of color (chehre cho khoon).

Tall as a cypress, of mighty limb, and mammoth chested, Sohrab seemed to fill the throne.

(p.198)

9. Metaphor

According to Tajalli (1997, p.106), a metaphor is a figure of speech which compares the meaning or appearance of one thing to some other things imaginatively. For example in this verse Ferdowsi quoted from Sohrab that:

چو روشن بود روی خورشید و ماه
فرازد کلاه
ستاره چرا بر
(Verse: 6271, p.176)

*Cho roshan bovad rooyeh khorshi o maah Setaareh cheraa bar faraazad
kolaah*

Here, the Sun (Khorshid) is a metaphor for Rostam, the moon (Maah) for Sohrab and the star (Setareh) for Afrasiab. The meaning of the verse is that despite the existence of me and my father, Afrasiab doesn't deserve to be the King.

"When the sun and the moon shine out in splendor, what should lesser stars do, boasting of their glory?"

(p.190)

10. Metaphor

به گیتی زخوبان مرا جفت نیست
چو من زیر چرخ کی بود اندکی است
(Verse: 6202, p.174)

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Be giti ze khoobaan maraa joft nist

Cho man zire charkha kabood andakist

charkhe kabood (Dark-blue wheel) is a metaphor for sky.

"The daughter of the king of Samangan, And descended from the warrior clan".

(p.188)

10. Metaphor

After the first combat, when Sohrab didn't kill Rostam and let him go, Hooman blamed him and said:

هژیری که آورده بودی به دام رها کردی از دام و شد کار، خام

(Verse: 6997, p.196)

Hezhabri ke aavarde boodi be daam

Rahaa kardi az daam o aod kaar khaam

Hezhabr or Hezabr means lion and is a metaphorical expression to indicate braveness.

You'd trapped the tiger and let him go, which was the act of a simpleton!

(p.208)

11. Metaphor

Tahmineh says to admire Rostam says, you don't afraid of lion, giant, whale and leopard and you are such a warrior, indeed.

که از شیر و دیو ونهنگ و پلنگ نترسی و هستی چنین تیز چنگ

(Verse: 6997, p.196)

Ke az shir o div o nahang o palng

natarsi o hasti chenin tiz chang

Tizchang (someone who has powerful paws) is a metaphor for powerful warrior.

"Of how you have no fear and face alone, Dragons and demons and the dark unknown,"

(p.189)

13. Metaphor

چو رخساره بنمود سهراب را ز خوشاب بگشاد عتاب را

(Verse: 6373, p.179)

Cho rokhsare benmood soraab raa
Za khooshab bogshaad annaab raa

Khooshab literary means bright and brilliant and is a metaphor for white teeth of Gordafarid and Annaaab is a red fruit and also a metaphor for red lips of Gordafarid.

As she spoke, her shining teeth and bright red lips and heavenly face were like a paradise to Sohrab.

(p.192)

14. Metaphor

که گرگ اندر آمد میان رَمه سگ و مرد را آزمودش همه
(Verse: 6638, p.186)

Ke gorg andar aamad mian e rameh *Sag o mard ra azmoodash hameh*

Gorg (wolf) is metaphor for an Iranian rapacious and Rameh (herd) for Turanin armies.

A wolf has attacked our flock, eluding the shepherd and his dog.

(p.198)

15. Metaphor

دریغ آیدم کین چنین یال و سفت همی از یلنگان بیاید نهفت
(Verses: 6396, p.179)

Drigh aayadam kin chenin yaal o soft *Hami az palangan ebaayad nahoft*

Palangan (leopards) is metaphor for warriors.

"And neither you nor any of your men will live for long: I should be sad to see this lion destroy you here- turn now and flee,

(p.193)

16. Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a thing is not designated by its own name, but by the name of a thing resembling it or closely related to it. Sokhanvar (2001, p.940), For example Rostam proudly cited that:

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نگین گرز و مغفر کلاه من است

زمین بنده و رخس گاه من است

(Verse: 6520, p.183)

Zamin bandevo rakhsh gaahe man ast

Negin gorzo meghfar kolahe man ast

Zimmern used the word in a suitable order as a metonymy for earth (*zamin*) she also did an acceptable translation for all other elements of the verse.

"My helmet is my crown, Rakhsh is my throne, and I am slave to none but God alone.

(p.196)

17. Metonymy

کمر بست و ترکش پر از تیر کرد

غمی بد دلش ساز نخچیر کرد

(Verse: 6147, p.172)

Delash (his heart) is metonymy for Rostam, means he was upset.

Ghami bod delash sazeh nakhchir kard

Kamar bast o tarkesh por az tir kard

At down one day Rostam decided to go hunting, to drive away the sadness he felt in his heart.

(p.187)

18. Metonymy

تو گفتی سپهر بلندش بیست

سرافراز سهراب با زور دست

(Verse: 7016, p.196)

Sar afraz Sohrab ba zoore dast

to gofti sepehre bolandash bebast

In this verse Sepehr (sky) is metonymy for destiny.

But, for all his great strength, Sohrab seemed as though he were hindered by the heavens.

(p.209)

19. Metonymy

(Verses: 6397, p.179)

Toraa behtar aayad ke farmaan koni

Rokhe naamvar sooye Tooran koni

Rokhe naamvar (your face) is metaphor for Sohrab; gurdafarid says to Sohrab that you had better go home.

"And neither you nor any of your men will live for long: I should be sad to see this lion destroy you here- turn now and flee,

(p.193)

20. Personification

According to Tajalli (1997, p.126), personification is a figure of speech in which a thing, quality or idea is represented as a person. Like the two following verses that Rostam said: the star is witness for whatever I did.

که با نامداران توران گروه
بمردی جهان زیر پای منست

مرا دید در جنگ دریا و کوه
چه کردم ستاره گواهی منست

(Verse: 6717, 6818, p.191)

Mara did dar jangeh daryaa o kooh

Ke ba namdaran e tooran grooh

Che kardam setareh govaaye man ast

Bemardi jahaan zire paaye man ast

Setareh (star) plays the role of witness for Rostam deeds.

**The sea and mountains know what I have wrought
Against Turan, how nobly I have fought,
The stars are witness to my chivalry,
In all the world there's none can equal me.**

(p.203)

21. Personification

شب تیره بر دشت لشکر کشید

چو خورشید گشت از جهان ناپدید

(Verse: 6608, p.188)

Cho khorshid gasht az jahan napadid

shab tireh bar dasht lashkar keshid

Shabeh tireh (dark night) brought his army to the field.

The sun withdrew from the world, and dark night spread her troops across the plain.

(p.198)

22. Personification

هر آنکه که خشم آورد بخت شوم کند سنگ خارا به کردار موم

(Verse: 7015, p.196)

Har aan gah ke khashm avarad bakhte shoom Conad sange khaaara be kerdaare moom

In the above verse of Shahnameh, there is a personification of bakhte shoom (ominous luck), means that when the ominous fortune gets angry it causes

"But, for all his great strength, Sohrab seemed as though he were hindered by the heavens,"

(p.209)

23. Apostrophe

According to Tajalli (1997, p.123) apostrophe is a form of address in which things are spoken to directly as though they were persons, the dead as they were living , and absent as though they were present. For example Ferdowsi to state his surprise from predestination of Sohrab in the first combat with Rostam addresses the world and says:

جهانا شکفتی ز کردار تست تو درست
هم از تو شکسته هم از خرد دور بد مهر ن نمود ازین دو یکی را نجنبید مهر
چه ماهی بدریا چه در همی بچه را باز داند ستور دشت گور

(Verses: 6837, 6838, 6839, p. 191)

*Jahaanaa shegefti ze kerdaare tost
Ham az to shekasteh ham az to dorost
Az in do yeki raa najonbid mehr
Kherad door bod mehr nanmood chehr
Hami bachchah ra baaz daanad sotoor
Cheh maahi be daryaa che dar dasht goor*

Jahana means O world as an apostrophe in this verse.

"How strange the world's ways are! All beasts will recognize their young- the fish on the sea, the wild asses on the plain- but suffering and pride will make the man unable to distinguish his son from his enemy".

(p.204)

24. Contrast

According to Oxford advanced learner's dictionary (2008, p.269), contrast is a difference between two or more people or things that you can see clearly when they are compared or put close together

جوانی کند

اگرچه گوی سرو بالا بود
پیر کانا بود

(Verse: 6855, p.192)

Agarr che govi sarv baalaa bovad

Javaani konad pir kaana bovad

Javaani (youthfulness) and pir (old) have opposite meanings.

You might be cypress-tall, but an old man who acts like a youth is a fool.

(p.204)

25. Contrast

دلش ماتم آرد بهنگام سور

درفش مرا چون ببیند ز دور

(Verse: 6488, p.182)

Darafshe maraa choon bebinad ze door

Dalash maatam aarad be hengaam e soor

Maatam (mourning) and soor (feast) have opposite meaning.

And when this young warrior sees my banner, his heart will know his revels are all ended; he won't be in such a hurry to fight anymore.

(p.195)

26. Hyperbole

Hyperbole, according to Abrams (1993, p.85), is bold over statement, or extravagant exaggeration of fact or of possibility; it may be used either for serious or ironic or comic effect. For instance Tahmineh, to describe Rostam for his son, Sohrab says:

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سواری جو رستم نیامد پدید
(Verse: 6225, p.175)

جهان آفرین تا جهان آفرید

Jahaan aafarin taa jahaan aafarid
Savaari cho Rostam nayaamad padid

; Since the creator made this world, there never has been such a knight as Rostam.

(p.190)

27. Hyperbole

که در جنگ او پَر مرغی نسخت
(Verse: 6654, p.173)

یکی نره گوری بزد بر درخت

Yeki narreh goori bezad bar derakht
nasakht

Ke dar changeh oo parreh morghh

Next he selected a tree and spitted one of the slaughtered asses on it. The spit was as light as a feather to him.

(p.185)

28. Hyperbole

درفشان چو خورشید شد روی
(Verse: 6357, p.168)

رها شد ز بند زره موی اوی
اوی

Rahaa shod ze bande zereh mooye oo

Dorafshan cho khorshid shod rooyeh oo

; Her hair streamed out, and her face shone like a splendid sun.

(p.192)

29. Hyperbole

نباید به گیتی کسی تاجور
(Verse: 6272, p.176)

جو رستم پدر باشد و من پسر

Cho Rostam pedar baashad o man pesar

Nabaayad be giti kasi taajvar

If Rostam is my father and I am his son, the no one else in all the world should wear the crown;

(p.190)

31. Hyperbole

کنم دشت را همچو دریای آب
(Verse: 6603, p.185)

کنون من بخت شه افراسیاب

Konoon man bebakhte shah Afrasyab
Konam dasht raa hamcho daryaaye aab

"And now in Afrasyab's name I shall make this plain a sea of blood."

(p.198)

32. Proverb

Proverb is "a well-known phrase or sentence that gives advice or says something that is generally true". (Oxford, 2008, p.1020)

And in this verse opposite meaning of youthful and oldness has beautified the concept of the verse.

خورد گاو نادان ز پهلوی خویش

نباشی بس ایمن ببازوی خویش

(Verses: 6398 p.179)

Nabashi bas imen be baazooye khish

Khorad gaave nadan ze pahlloye khish

The second hemistich literary means, the foolish cow eats from its body, exactly the same as Davis translation.

Don't trust your strength, strength will not save your life; the fatted calf knows nothing of the knife.

(p.193)

4. Results

According to table 4.1 (See Appendix) the figures showed that in Davis' translations of figures of speech the most frequent procedure belongs to Gain, %80 (32 from 40), and the least procedure belongs to Loss, %2.5 (1 from 40), also % 17.5 (7 from 40) verses were translated pragmatically, L.F(loss of figurative language).

% 80 of Gain and %2.5 of Loss in Davis' translation is verification that his translation is indeed a faithful translation in terms of figurative language.

Following diagram shows the results of table, 4.1

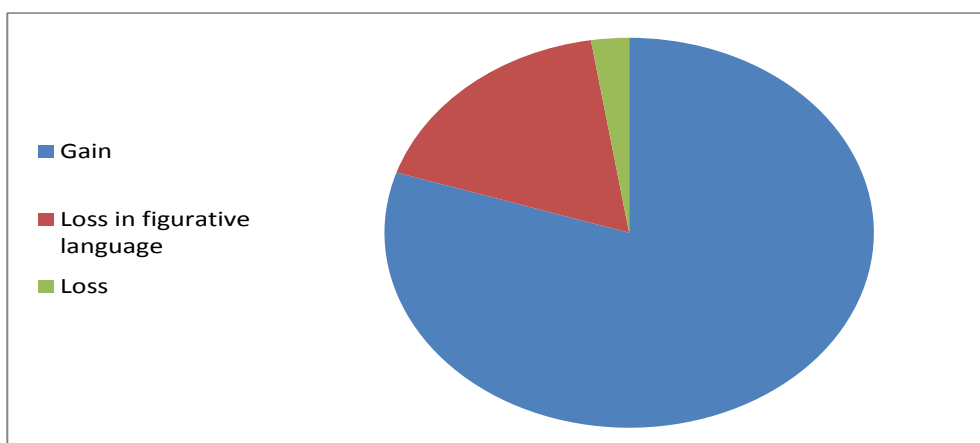


Diagram 4.1 the Comparison between three procedures in Davis' Translation.

5. Conclusion

In this investigation the acquired results of tropes, based on selected verses, showed that the translation of Davis in terms of appeal of poetic translation is an acceptable translation with regard to the process of loss and gain. As final words, translation of Shahnameh has been done by many scholars since more than two centuries ago. Each translator tried to make known and introduce a Persian masterpiece to other cultures around the world.

For this firstly we owe them a great debt of gratitude and they should be appreciated. Secondly, lack of many aesthetic features which in translations of Shahnameh are seen, are naturally due to technical problems of transferring the style, schemes and tropes of the poetic sources that sometimes are culture bound. Thirdly, majority of the translators of Shahnameh have been native speakers of target language and consequently, some aesthetic aspects of Persian poems like classical rhyme and rhythm have not been known to them and therefore have been lost. Maybe in future, the scholars who are well-educated in Persian literature will be more prepared to achieve perfection in this task.

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Appendix

Table 4.1 Davis' figurative language

| NO. | Figure of speech | Loss | L.F | Gain |
|-----|------------------|------|-----|------|
| 1 | Simile | | | * |
| 2 | Simile | | | * |
| 3 | Simile | | | * |
| 4 | Simile | | | * |
| 5 | Simile | | | * |
| 6 | Simile | | | * |
| 7 | Simile | | | * |
| 8 | Simile | | | * |
| 9 | Simile | | | * |
| 10 | Simile | | | * |
| 11 | Simile | | * | |
| 12 | Simile | | | * |
| 13 | Simile | * | | |
| 14 | Metaphor | | | * |
| 15 | Metaphor | | | * |

| | | | | |
|------------|-----------------|-------|--------|------|
| 16 | Metaphor | | | * |
| 17 | Metaphor | | * | |
| 18 | Metaphor | | | * |
| 19 | Metaphor | | * | |
| 20 | Metaphor | | | * |
| 21 | Metaphor | | | * |
| 22 | Metaphor | | | * |
| 23 | Metaphor | | | * |
| 24 | Metaphor | | | * |
| 25 | Metonymy | | * | |
| 26 | Metonymy | | | * |
| 27 | Metonymy | | * | |
| 28 | Metonymy | | * | |
| 29 | Personification | | | * |
| 30 | Personification | | | * |
| 31 | Personification | | * | |
| 32 | Apostrophe | | | * |
| 33 | Contrast | | | * |
| 34 | Contrast | | | * |
| 35 | Hyperbole | | | * |
| 36 | Hyperbole | | | * |
| 37 | Hyperbole | | | * |
| 38 | Hyperbole | | | * |
| 39 | Hyperbole | | | * |
| 40 | Proverb | | | * |
| Total | | 1 | 7 | 32 |
| Percentage | | % 2.5 | % 17.5 | % 80 |

Mohammad Reza Dehbashi, M.A. Candidate, *Islamic Azad University, Shahreza Branch* from Iran, Dehashi1350@yahoo.com