

The Validity of Componential Analysis In Translating Metaphor

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Abstract

Componential Analysis is a means by which an accurate account of sense relations, that hold among lexemes, can be given. This technique is met with contentions by some ,but on the whole, it is a valid and substantiated technique. It accounts for sense relations which make it of great use to studies based on these relations and this makes Componential Analysis have different uses. This technique is utilized in this paper as a means to interpret metaphors of universal nature and translate them in English and Arabic .Being based on the existence of universals and cultural overlaps, Componential Analysis achieves the aim for which it is used here.

صلاحية تحليل المكونات في ترجمة الاستعارة

مها طاهر عيسى /مدرس مساعد
قسم اللغة الانجليزية/ كلية التربية/ جامعة القادسية

الخلاصة

ان تحليل المكونات هو وسيلة يمكن الولوج من خلالها الى وشائج المعنى التي تربط للكزيمات (الدلالات) .وهو تقنية اختلف عليها البعض لكن في جملة الامر يمكن اعتبارها تقنية رصينة وصالحة.نتناول هذه التقنية علاقات المعنى مما يجعلها ذات فائدة كبرى في الدراسات التي تعتمد على هذه العلاقات وذات استعمالات عديدة. تستثمر الدراسة هنا هذه التقنية وسيلة لتفسير الاستعارة ذات الطبيعة العامة (الكونية) والتي تشترك بها اللغتين العربية والانجليزية بيد ان اعتمادها على ما تشترك به اللغات والتداخل الثقافي يمكنها من تحقيق الهدف الذي استعملت من اجله هذه الدراسة.

1.Comonential Analysis :Controvesies and Validity

Componential Analysis* is a way of formalizing and stating precisely the sense-relations that hold among words (lexemes). It involves analyzing the sense of the word into its components; therefore, an alternative term for componential analysis* could be “lexical decomposition “(Lyons,1981:76). It is a process of breaking down the sense of the word into its semantic features(Leech,1981:89) By this process words can be defined componentially in terms of formulae. These componential definitions reduce the word’s meaning into its ultimate contrastive elements. The dimensions of meanings are given(+ ,-) labelling system so that marked features carry (+) and unmarked features carry(-)(ibid:90). These features are called also semantic components and they refer to the theoretical constructs which characterize the vocabulary of a language(Lehrer,1974:46).

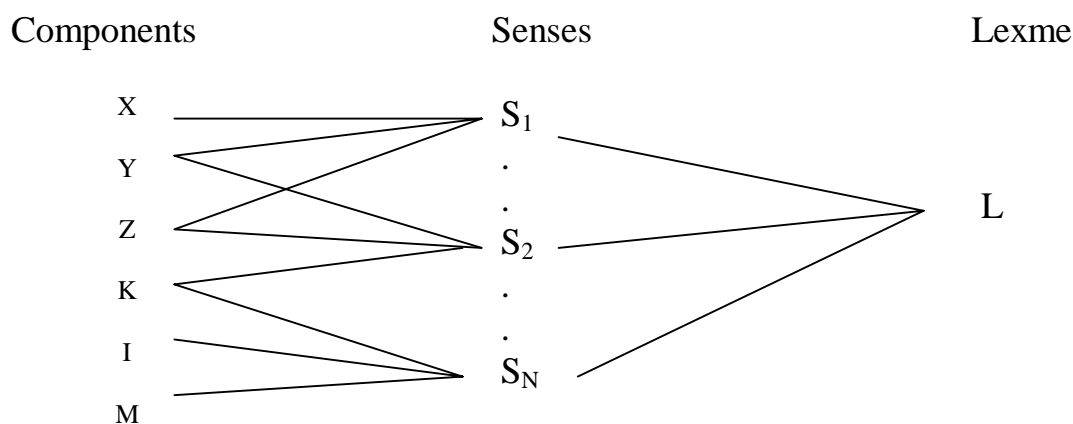
Two kinds of components are postulated in Katz and Fodor’s early work: semantic markers and distinguishers that are enclosed in parentheses and square brackets respectively as in the following example(ibid:49).

Bachelor : (HUMAN) (MALE) (ADULT) [who has never married]

CA offers a theoretical framework for handling all the semantic relationships of anatomy, synonymy,hyponymy,homonymy and polysemy; and allows us to define words in terms of few components(Palmers,1976:85-6). It produces a level of semantic organisation between the components themselves and the lexical item. This level is represented by semantic feature complex (that stands for

*henceforth CA.

sense). Each complex specifies one of the senses of a lexeme as shown in this diagram(drawn by James,1986:91) wherein the componential features specify the senses of a lexeme:



1.1 Controversies

As a theory of word-meaning, CA is controversial. For theoretical reasons, CA is undermined if one looks carefully at particular analyses.

The problem lies in how to decide on the senses that are basic for selecting “putative atomic universal components”(Lyons ,1981:82). There is no reason to think that “what is basic in the sense of being maximally general is also basic in the day-to-day thinking of most users of a language”(ibid.). Moreover, if we select components that can be identified in the largest number of lexemes, then we may have particular lexemes that are analyzed less systematically and less economically than lexemes analyzed in their own terms (ibid). Tackling some controversies of CA as a theory ,Leech (1981:117-9) refers to some of those who criticize it trying to defend his position.

Another argument raised against CA is by Nida. Referring to some limitations in the technique of CA, he states that this analysis “tends to define more what a term does not mean than what it does mean”(1964:87)

because the features or components represent ways to separate territories of meaning from one another and not means by which any of these territories fill such areas with meaning.(But, separating territories of meaning is a step toward defining meaning). The arguments above show that though CA is not void of problems, still the validity of this technique can be detected.

1.2 Validity of CA

CA for Lyons(1972:80) is as valid as the relations upon which it is based and which it may conveniently summarize. This validity, for him(1981:84), can be drawn from its empirical defectiveness. This defect is represented in the example of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ that have the essential feature(component) HUMAN and which is not essential in ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ because in case of talking about the male offspring of the goddesses as boys (like cupid) and female offspring as girls or maidens(like the Muses), the component HUMAN is not included in the componential definition of these words for they (the referents) are non-human. This example shows that CA should not be taken as a technique of representation of the meaning of lexemes but as a way of formalizing part of their proto-typical or focal meaning that they share with other lexemes. ‘Boy’ is used prototypically for human beings and it is taken firstly as such when we use it descriptively for goddesses. HUMAN, then, is used in focal uses and non-focal uses as universal components and this makes CA greatly valid.

The validity of CA, for leech(1981:98), comes from the economical analysis of meaning it produces and its ability to predict basic statements and account for the semantic relations as: synonymy and hyponymy

through which relations of inconsistency, entailment and incompatibility can be reflected.

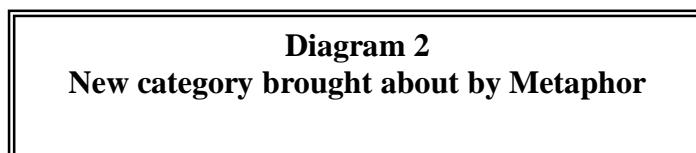
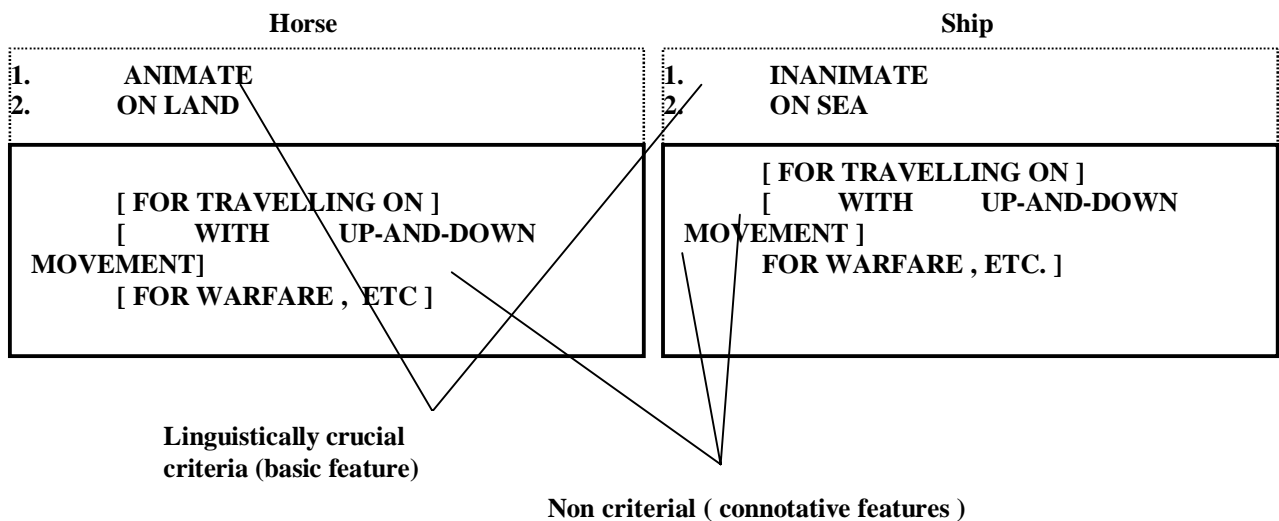
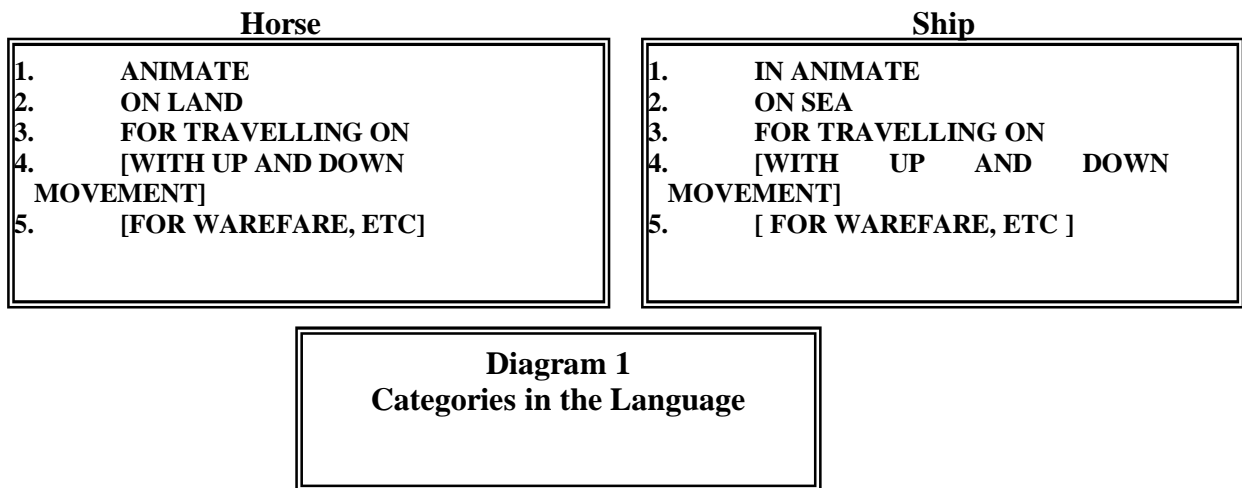
To investigate the validity of CA further, an attempt is made here to test it as a procedure in the interpretation and rendition of metaphor.

2. The CA of Metaphor

Originally metaphor in Greek means carrying from one place to another it is a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another (Peck & Coyle,1984:139). This figurative extension of meaning takes place when one or more components of the meaning of a particular term is selected and extended to cover some objects which has not been within the domain of such a word(Nida:1964:93). The interpretation of the figurative meanings must consider the componential features carefully because the logical validity of the figurative extension is based on the shared componential features (ibid:94). The example “a mighty fortress is our God “ does not mean that God is literally a fortress but there are certain features that can be regarded as characteristics of a fortress ,eg: strength , protection, safety and unassailability that are characteristics of God as well. Such figures of speech are based on a feature that is recognized by people as dominant in a certain speech community (ibid.).

The literal meaning ,here,remains paramount in the mechanism (rule) of semantic transfer through which words extend and change their meanings. The rule of semantic transfer is “a lexical rule which brings about a major change in the semantic specification only” (Leech,1981:217); an example of this is the rule of metaphoric extension:”for a meaning (a) we substitute the meaning ‘something similar to (a)’”(ibid.)

Leech diagrammes the conceptual reorganization of metaphor in the example of 'sea steed' as a metaphor for 'ship' (ibid:38). The comparison is between 'horse' and 'ship'. In the first diagram below, the first pair of CA of 'horse' and 'ship' shows how the categories in the language are set while in the second diagram the CA of the pair shows that new categories are brought about by metaphor. Through these diagrams the connotative or non-criterial features could be distinguished by putting them in square brackets to be recognized from the basic ones that are written without brackets.

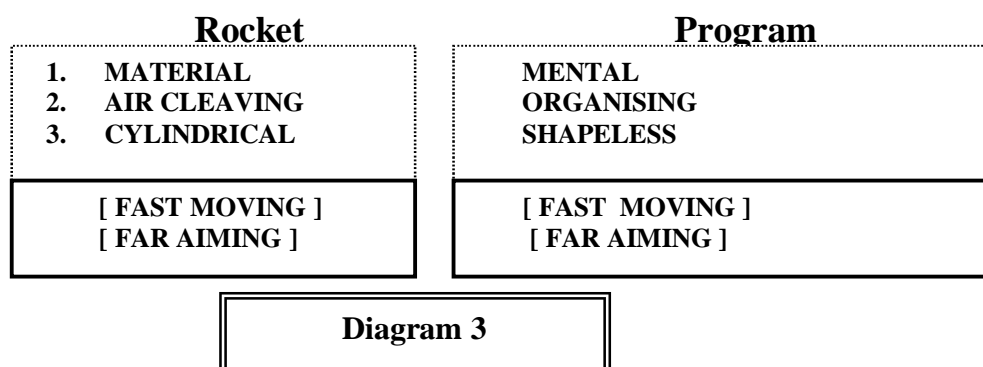


Another view of metaphor in terms of componential semantics is that of cancellation. This method is used in analyzing the composition of metaphorical sentence meanings. In this method Cohen(1993:70) distinguishes between semantic features that “represent attributes which are empirical, immediately evident, or relatively obvious , and those which are inferential , intellectually appreciated or relatively latent “(ibid.). These features are referred to as empirical and inferential respectively; they represent also Leech’s basic features and connotative ones. In the normal (literal) sentences, the inferential features are cancelled whereas in metaphorical sentences the empirical features are cancelled. The following example shows that:

- Their legislative program is a rocket to the moon.

In this metaphorical sentence Cohen (ibid) states that the legislative program could be a rocket only in a sense that it cancels such empirical features as + MATERIAL , + AIR CLEAVING , + CYLINDRICAL , which are incompatible with the features of “ legislative program” , and retains features as +FAST MOVING, +FAR AIMING .

‘Rocket ‘ and ‘legislative program’ could be analyzed in terms of Leech’s diagram of conceptual reorganization of Metaphor as:



This diagram shows that both Leech and Cohen’s methods of componential analysis of metaphor are similar in splitting features and

classifying them. On the one hand Leech distinguishes between basic features that represent crucial linguistic criteria and connotative and non-criterial linguistic ones that are brought about by metaphor. In this sense, his method represents a split of basic features from that which are not basic. Cohen's method, on the other hand, distinguishes between features as empirical and inferential ones. Metaphor relies on inferential features whereas empirical ones are neglected because they are the concern of literal meaning.

Taking Leech's diagram of features and casting Cohen's features in it to apply cancellation(as done in diagram 3), an accurate componential analysis would be brought about to lead us to an accurate interpretation of metaphor. This accurate interpretation help us to produce an adequate translation consequently.

3. Using CA in Translation

CA can be of great use to translators. Newmark(1981:30) mentions eight uses of it for the translator. Later, he rementioned them giving seven uses (1988:117-123) of CA as a means to bridge lexical gaps linguistically and culturally between languages. CA in translation is based on universals and cultural overlaps, and if it is seen by some as no more than a common sense, one can not deny the various approaches and techniques used (ibid:124). One of the main uses of CA, for Newmark, is to reduce metaphor in which two or more sense-components are present. CA is a translation procedure for closeness of meaning (1991:3) and it can be used also to translate words that has no one –to-one equivalence (ibid:152). What it is concerned with, here ,is the use of CA in the translation of metaphor as shown in the following examples.

1.This man is a fox

In order to understand this metaphor we should not take ‘man’ or ‘fox’ ‘in terms of their full extensional meanings. We should construct two prototypes, one for man and another for fox that represent composites of the attributes associated with each term.

| FOX ثعلب | | MAN رجل | |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| نكرة | + indefinite | معرف | + definite |
| معدود | + countable | معدود | + countable |
| حي | + animate | حي | + animate |
| ثديي | + mammal | ثديي | + mammal |
| كلبي | + canine | بشري | + human |
| بالغ | + adult | بالغ | + adult |
| ذكر | + male | ذكر | + male |
| رباعي الاقدام | + quadruped | ثنائي الارجل | + bi-ped |
| لايتكلم | + non-speaking | يتكلم | + speaking |

The cast of features can be shown by the combination of Leech and Cohen’s methods to give the following analysis

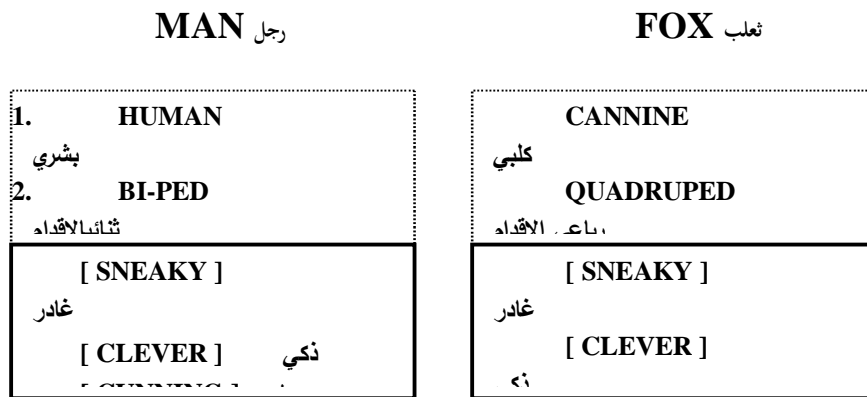


Diagram 4

The empirical features of (HUMAN, BI-PED, SPEAKING:CANINE,QUADRUPED , NON-SPEAKING) are cancelled while the inferential ones are retained to help us to find relations between man

and fox since these features are universal among languages. Consequently the translation of this sentence (1) becomes:

هذا الرجل ثعلب

In this translation ‘fox’ and ‘ثعلب’ have the same values in both English and Arabic and the same components of each word lead to an equivalent translation. Those features that are not related to human beings (as CANINE, QUADRUPED, and NON-SPEAKING) are excluded because they do not serve interpretation while the features SNEAKY, CUIVNING and CLEVER that are inferred from the meaning of fox help us to find relations between ‘fox’ and ‘man’. In order to interpret this metaphor we look for the meaning of the meaning of ‘fox’ which is associated with wiles and covert ways that can be attributed to man as well and therefore can be preserved in translation equivalently.

* * * *

Another example of animal metaphor is given below but this time to show how it can be translated from Arabic into English by means of CA.

2. طفلها حمل وديع

The componential features in this figurative sentence are:



Diagram 5

In this example the basic features are cancelled while the connotative ones are retained in order to interpret the metaphor in terms of the relationship between ‘child’ and ‘lamb’ concerning the attributes of meekness, weakness, passivity. The universality of features of ‘child’ and ‘lamb’ makes equivalence in translation feasible that they both represent a symbol of innocence in the following translation:

Her child is a tame lamb

* * * * *

3. My head is an apple without a core *

To understand this metaphor one must infer the relation between ‘head’ and ‘apple’. The cast of features of these words is the following:

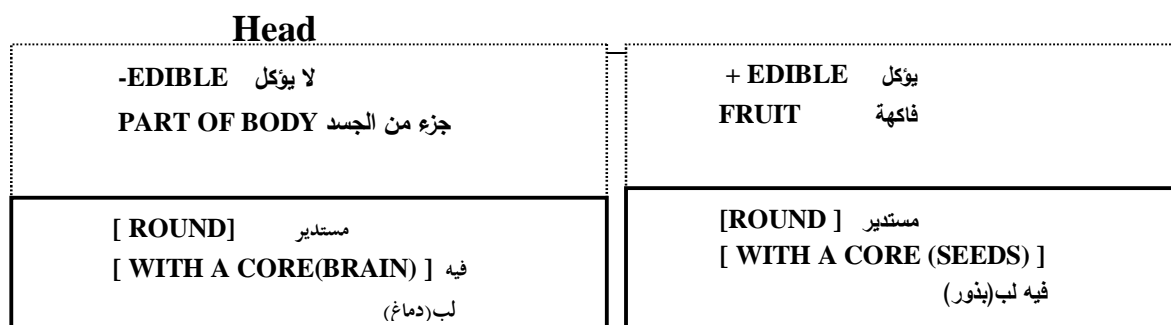


Diagram ٦

‘I’ and An apple is related to head in terms of being round and having a core. The core of the apple is seeds and the care of head is the brain. Being an apple without a core is similar to a head without a brain. This is reflected also in this translation :

رأسي تفاحة جوفاء

*This example is quoted from Sternberg et al.,(1993:29)

This translated metaphor refers to one whose head is hollow because it is empty of a core which is اللب in Arabic.

The word ‘ لب ’ refers to mind (العقل) in Arabic and therefore the head here is hollow or أجوف ,i.e,without لب

* * * *

The following metaphor from Arabic (by Imam Ali(PBOH) shows the role of CA in translation into English relying on the equivalence of features

ان المت ملمة بي فاني في الملمات صخرة صماء^{4.*}

The CA of the pronoun ‘stone’ is :

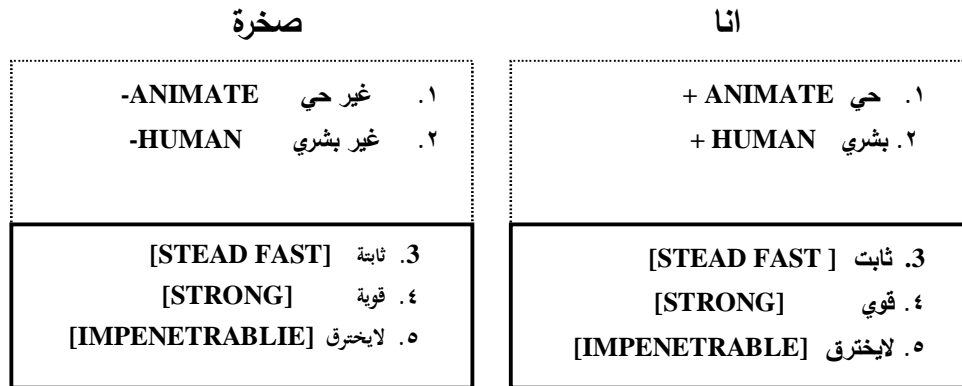


Diagram 7

The empirical features-ANIMATE-HUMAN are cancelled to make the relation between ‘I’ and ‘stone’ stronger. Retaining features like STEAFAST, STRONG and IMPENETRABLE that are compatible with the personality of the speaker of the line helps to infer that ‘I’ refers to an immovable hard personality. This meaning is constructed through having a picture of the world as close as relevantly and sensibly possible to the

*Quoted from AL_Khazraji,1988:112

world that corresponds to the literal meaning of this sentence. Interpreting this metaphor in this way shows that it can be translated equivalently as:

**If a misfortune comes to me , I would be
A solid stone in misfortunes.**

* * * *

Following the same analysis of preceding examples the cast of features of the following metaphor would be:

5. Encyclopaedias are gold mines*

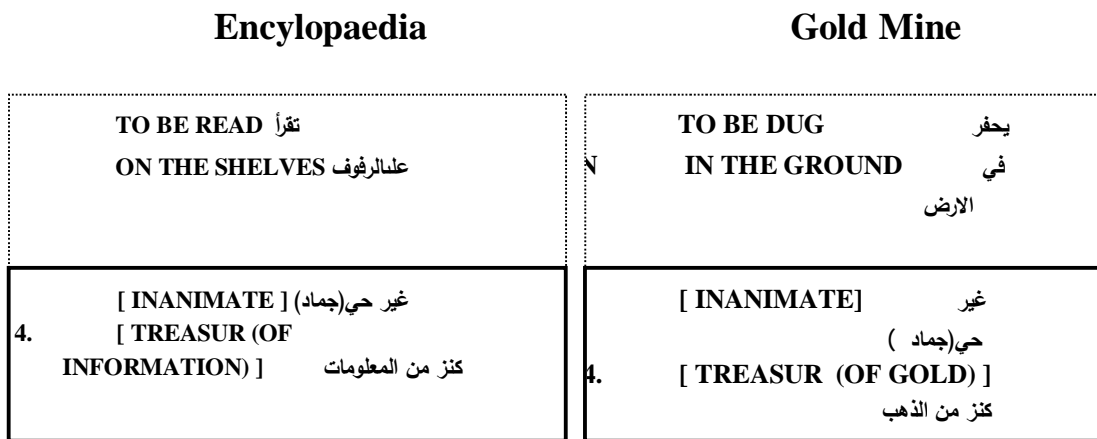


Diagram 8

Retaining inferential features of depth and richness helps to infer that encyclopaedias are valuable treasures like gold mines. Thus the translation would be:

الموسوعات مناجم من الذهب

* * * *

*quoted from Rumelhart(1993:81).

Conclusion

The CA of words can have different purpose and the componential features are tackled in different ways to suit these purpose. AS far as the interpretation of metaphor, the combination of Leech and Cohen's methods in setting the compouential features of metaphor shows that this model represents a workable procedure in the interpretation and translation of this figure of speech . This model makes it possible to see at glance both English and Arabic components of words to separate the basic (empirical) features from the non-criterial (inferential) ones which are not basic; or connotative. This helps in finding relations between the arguments of metaphor to interpret it and then translate it equivalently ; and shows the validity of CA in this respect.

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