

MEANING LOSS COMPENSATION IN TRANSLATION:AN ANALYTICAL AND CRITICAL STUDY ON ARABIC INTO ENGLISH TRANSLATED NOVEL. (THE HOSTAGE WRITTEN BY ZAYDMUTEEDAMMAJ&TRANSLATED BY MAY JAYYUSI& CHRISTOPHER TINGLEY)

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ABSTRACT: *This study focuses on how meanings are captured when translating cultural expressions and how meaning loss is compensated. Fifty-nine expressions are selected from the chosen novel and analyzed, using the Analytical and Critical Method. Findings indicate that, in most of the expressions, the translators could not capture the meaning, the translators overused transliteration which makes the target text look foreign, consistency of translation is absent in some expressions, the translation of some expressions does not maintain the same effect as the source text does, and some expressions are left untranslated.*

Key Words: *Meaning Loss Compensation, Untranslatability, Translation Techniques.*

Introduction

Arabic is an ancient Semitic language, while English belongs to the Indo-European language family, more specifically to the Germanic language family. As any language, Arabic has got many, or one can say uncountable, dialects which include certain variants or variations such as phonetic variations, phonological variations, morphological variations, semantic variations, syntactic variations, pragmatic variations and so on.

In fact, translation is not only a linguistic activity, but it is also a combination of a cognitive procedure and a social practice. These aspects have to be taken into consideration in order to find out the right equivalents in the target text, i.e. equivalence in terms of vocabulary, culture, context, collocation, register, and so on. Therefore, translation is subject to and influenced by a variety of extra-linguistic factors and conditions. In brief, the text in one language has to be recontextualized in another language and the situation of the source text has to be recreated by the translator in the target text.

Untranslatability

Catford writes that "Translatability appears intuitively to be a cline rather than a clear-cut dichotomy, and SL texts and items are more or less translatable rather than absolutely translatable or untranslatable" (1965: 93). In some texts like scientific, religious or literary texts, the translator may fail to obtain, or even maintain the same sense of the source language text due to the absence of equivalence in the target language, i.e. sometimes translation fails or untranslatability occurs when the target language fails to digest the SLT items and aspects. Catford has mentioned two types of untranslatability as follows:

1. Linguistic untranslatability and
2. Cultural untranslatability

In linguistic untranslatability, the target language fails to give corresponding features of equivalents to the source language text. Due to this inability, the source language items become untranslatable. In fact, linguistic untranslatability can take place at different levels such as sounds, morphemes, structure, meanings, and ...etc. However, the Linguistic untranslatability can occur mostly due to ambiguity that generally can arise from the following two reasons:

- (1) Homonymy: it refers to a situation in which two words or more have accidentally the same pronunciation and/or the same spellings. For example, when we take the lexical item, bank, that, we believe, has two distinct meanings as it is a single term. The first meaning is the river side and the second meaning is the place where we save our money. In fact, it is not a single lexical item, rather we can say that they are two lexical items, having accidentally the same sounds and letters. To solve this kind of problem, the translator needs to understand the context that is of two types as follows: 1. linguistic context, and 2. physical context.

- (2) Polysemy: it refers to a situation in which one word has more than one meaning, i.e. the primary and the secondary meanings. For example, the word *hand* may mean a part of body or help as shown in the following example *give me a hand*.

In cultural untranslatability Catford states that "What appears to be a quite different problem arises, however, when a situational feature, functionally relevant for the SL text, is completely absent in the culture of which the TL is a part" (1965: 99). When translating cultural items and aspects, the translators have to understand the register of what has been written or is being translated in order to compensate the meaning loss.

Meaning loss compensation

To compensate the meaning loss, the translator can use different techniques such as providing more explanation between brackets, giving commentaries in the footnotes, using the transliteration technique, using the addition and omission technique, and ... etc. as we can see in the current study. In brief, Ghazala states that "Any translation problem demands a solution. Without a solution (or solutions) there is no great use pinpointing a translation problem. Indeed, without solutions to translation problems, we stop translating altogether" (2008: 24).

Duty of translators

In fact, a translator's duty is to bridge the gap that takes place between the source language text and the target language text by finding equivalence in the target language for all the source text aspects. Finding linguistic equivalents must be so much easier than finding equivalents for the cultural items or aspects, especially when dialectal items are to be rendered. In brief, the translator has to produce the closest and the most natural target text which must be the replica of the source text.

Overview about the Writer

Zayd Mutee' Dammaj (Arabic: زيد مطيع دماج, from 1943 to March 20th, 2000) was born in Assayyani District of Ibb governorate. He was a Yemeni author and politician. He is best known for his short novel under current study (The Hostage) which was selected by the Arab Writers Union as one of the top 100 Arabic novels of the 20th century.

Overview about the translators

They are two translators who translated the novel under study, the first one is May Jayyusi who was born in Amman, Jordan to Palestinian parents and was educated at London University and Boston University. She is a PROTA reader and translator and has worked extensively in the process of selection of the poetry. She lives with her husband and two children in Jerusalem. The second one is Christopher Tingley who is an English academic and translator of Arabic literature. He was born in Brighton and studied at the University of London and at Leeds University. He has taught in many different countries: Britain, Germany, Algeria, Rwanda and Burkina Faso among them. He has held academic appointments at the University of Constantine (Algeria), the National University of Rwanda and the University of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso).

Statement of Problem

Today, in the translation world, there are many Arabic texts including novels that have been translated into English language. Sometimes translation fails or does not obtain the quality needed especially when it comes to literary texts due to the inability of translators to compensate the meaning loss that occurs due to mainly the untranslatable items and aspects which are source language text-oriented or which the target language has no corresponding ones for. Due to this fact, the translated literary texts may be found unfaithful, misunderstood or vague even when read by the native speakers of the source language text. The present study is concerned with the investigation of how the meaning loss in the translation of the novel under study is compensated and how untranslatability can negatively affect the quality of translation especially in literary texts.

Aim of the study

To analyze, criticize and study how the meaning loss is compensated and avoided in the translation of the novel under investigation.

Objectives

There are two objectives.

- (1) To investigate how the translators of the novel under study have compensated or avoided the meaning loss of the untranslatable/cultural items.

- (2) To shed light on whether the translators of the present novel could maintain or obtain the same or even an approximate effect, which the source text has on its readership, on the readership of the translated text in terms of the translation of the selected cultural items.

Methodology

An analytical and a critical study is conducted in this paper. Fifty-nine expressions from Fifty pages out of hundred and fifty pages of the novel (arrahinah/ The Hostage by Zayd Muttee'Dammaj- a Yemeni Novelist, 1ST Ed., 1984, translated by May Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley, 1994) have been analyzed and criticized by the researcher in terms of how meaning was maintained or how the meaning loss was compensated and avoided while translating cultural and Source language-specific terms. The study is to investigate how far or close the translators could capture the same effect that the original text does. The method is qualitative rather than it is quantitative.

The analysis

Translating cultural items or source language-oriented items is a challenge where a translator tries to squeeze the daughters of his mind to maintain the closest if not the identical message intended by the source language writer. In this novel the writer has used certain cultural terms that are restricted to Arabic more specifically to a Yemeni dialect. Due to the use of such terms and items by the writer, the novel has a taste with a Yemeni flavor. The following data has been divided into six sections during the analysis as explained below.

No.	The Arabic Items	Transcription	The Translation
1-	عكفة	/ʕakfah/	Soldiers
2-	علان	/ʕallaan/	Allan
3-	دويدار	/duwaydar/	duwaydar
4-	حالي	/haali/	Handsome
5-	الحريرية	/alhari:riyah/	Soft
6-	الفروض	/alfuruuḍ/	Duties
7-	الفقيه	/alfaqī:h/	faqih
8-	أتاريك	/ataari:k/	Kind of latern
9-	سنا الفقيه	/sanaaalfaqī:h/	Sir
10-	الكوافي	/alkawaafi:/	Kercheifs
11-	متوحشون	/mutawahifuun/	Animals
12-	أوباش	/awbaa/	Riffraff
13-	الهندام	/alhindaam/	Neatness
14-	انكمش	/inkamaʃ/	Shrink back
15-	ملحمة	/mullaḥamah/	Held together
16-	القمریات	/alqamariyaat/	Marble-framed windows
17-	نهج	/nahḍaʃ/	Sleep
18-	سفل	/safel/	Lower part of our house
19-	العجور	/alʕaḍḡuur/	Fodder
20-	القات	/alqaar/	Qat
21-	متشبت	/mutaʃabeθ/	concentrating
22-	مقرص	/muqarfaʃ/	Squatted
23-	بلاد مدخل	/bilaadmadxal/	Foreign country
24-	لحاف	/lihaaf/	Quilt
25-	لويت شفتي	/lawaitʃafatai/	Turned down my mouth
26-	العكفة والسواري	/alʕakfahwaalssawaari:/	Soldiers and cavalry guards
27-	يا عبادي	/jaaʃubaadi:/	My love
28-	قد أمك فاقدة لك	/qadummakfaaḡdahlak/	Your mother is distracted by her loss
29-	فحيح ملتهب	/fahi:hmultaheb/	Excited hissing
30-	الجمنة	/alḡamanah/	Pot
31-	جفنة	/ḡufnah/	untranslated
32-	دكة	/dakah/	Post
33-	كاوش	/kaawef/	Quarters
34-	طولاقة	/ṭʰawlaqah/	Toulqa
35-	زامل	/zaamel/	Traditional song
36-	حاضر النكتة	/haaḡʕerannuktah/	Witty remark
37-	جنبية	/ḡanbiyah/	Side dagger
38-	راس صيفاني	/raʔssʰaifaani:/	sayfani blade

39-	منزر	/miʔzar/	Spotless cloak
40-	المشارعين	/almuʔaarʕi:n/	Disputants
41-	مزرکشة	/muzarkafah/	Set off
42-	بالحناء والخضاب الاسود المتعرج	/alhinawaalxiqʕaabalʔaaswadalmutaʔaredʒ/	untranslated
43-	الرخو	/arraxw/	Soft voice
44-	كفانية من الحور العين	/kayʔaniyah min alhuuralʕi:n/	A houri from paradise
45-	شيخ	/ʔaix/	Shaykh
46-	القشر	/alqeʕr/	Coffee
47-	المداعة	/almadaaʔah/	Splendid nargila
48-	يلهب الدنيا	/julebaddunjaa/	Stirring things up
49-	كل شبر	/kolʔebr/	The whole
50-	كرام البغل لبغل أو حيوان آخر	/karaʔamalbaylilbayl aw hayawaanaaxar /	As the fondness of one of God's creatures for another
51-	مجرد مجابرة	/muɖʒaradmuɖʒaabarah/	untranslated
52-	تكالبت	/takaalabat/	Assailed
53-	نفسا	/nafasan/	Puff
54-	تعتصران	/taʔtasʕiraan/	Squeezing
55-	ميرج	/mubrih/	Black and white
56-	أواني العسكر المبخرة	/ʔwaani:alʕaskaralmubaxxarah/	untranslated
57-	سائلة	/saaʔilah/	Waterway
58-	بقوامها الصاروخي	/Biqawaamahaasʕsʕaarex/	untranslated
59-	المسلول	/almasluul/	Consumptive

Table 1. It shows the data that has been collected from the first third part of the novel under study (The first 50 pages).

- Expressions given the closest English equivalents. The following expressions and terms have been translated into their closest English equivalents which can more or less convey the message intended by the original writer or at least the one that is understood by the readership of the source novel.

6. No.	The Arabic items	Transcription	The translation
1-	عكفة	/ʕakfah/	Soldiers
2-	حالي	/Haali/	Handsome
3-	أوباش	/awbaaf/	Riffraff
4-	ال	/alhindaam/	Neatness
5-	سفل	/Safel/	Lower part of our house
6-	العجور	/alʕadʒuur/	Fodder
7-	مقرقص	/muqarfasʕ/	Squatted
8-	بلاد مدخل	/bilaadmadxal/	Foreign country
9-	العكفة والسواري	/alʕakfahwaalssawaari:/	Soldiers and cavalry guards
10-	كاوش	/kaawef/	Quarters
11-	مزرکشة	/muzarkafah/	Set off
12-	تك	/takaalabat/	Assailed
13-	نفسا	/nafasan/	Puff
14-	تعتصران	/taʔtasʕiraan/	Squeezing
15-	ميرج	/mubrih/	Black and blue
16-	المسلول	/almasluul/	Consumptive
17-	كل شبر	/kolʔebr/	The whole
18-	نهجع	/nahɖʒaʕ/	Sleep
19-	يلهب الدنيا	/julebaddunjaa/	Stirring things up
20-	المشارعين	/almuʔaarʕi:n/	Disputants
21-	سائلة	/saaʔilah/	Waterway
22-	الفروض	/alfuruuɖʕ/	Duties
23-	الرخو	/arraxw/	Soft voice
24-	انكمش	/inkamaʔ/	Shrink back
25-	علان	/ʕallaan/	Allan

Table 2. Expressions given the closest English equivalents.

2. Expressions given English equivalents but do not exactly correspond to the source ones. The following expressions have been given English equivalents but in fact they do not convey the same accurate meaning that can be understood by the natives of the source text from the context used in this novel. The fourth column includes the meanings that can closely correspond to the Arabic cultural terms based on the observation and analysis of the Arabic text by the researcher as a native speaker. Some terms are untranslatable due to their cultural value such as the term زامل/zaamel/ that was translated as the (traditional song) which is far away from what the real meaning is. Such terms should have been used as proper nouns or transliterated and then explained in the commentary footnote.

No.	The Arabic items	Transcription	The translation	The meaning
1-	الكوافي	/alkawaafi:/	Kerchiefs	Kaffieh/keffiyeh
2-	موتوحشون	/mutawahijūn/	Animals	barbarians
3-	ملحمة	/Mullaḥamah/	Held together	Made weldment
4-	القمريات	/Alqamariyaat/	Marble-framed windows	Small window made of plaster
5-	سنا الفقيه	/sanaaalfaqi:h/	Sir	Faqiih
6-	متنبث	/mutafabeθ/	concentrating	Cling to
7-	كغانية من الحور العين	/kayaaniyah min alhuuralfi:n/	A houri from paradise	Nymph
8-	أتاريك	/ataari:k/	Kind of lantern	ataari:k
9-	الحريرية	/alḥari:riyah/	Soft	Silk
10-	كرام البغل لبغل أو حيوان آخر	/karaʔamalbaylilbayl aw ḥayawaanaaxar/	As the fondness of one of God's creatures for another	As the fondness of the mule to mule or any other animals
11-	لحاف	/Liḥaaf/	blanket	Quilt
12-	لويت شفتي	/lawaitʃafatai/	Turned down my mouth	Turned around my lips
13-	ياعبادي	/jaaʃubaadi:/	My love	Oh ubaadi
14-	قد أمك فاقدة لك	/qadummakfaaqdahlak/	Your mother is distracted by her loss	Your mother has missed you
15-	فحيح ملتهب	/fahi:ḥmultaheb/	Excited hissing	Sexy hissing
16-	الجمنة	/aldʒamanah/	Pot	aljamanah
17-	دكة	/Dakah/	Post	Terrace
18-	زامل	/Zaamel/	Traditional song	Zaamel
19-	حاضر النكتة	/haaɖʔerannuktah/	Witty remark	Always funny
20-	جنيبة	/dʒanbiyah/	Side dagger	janbiyyah
21-	رأس صيفاني	/raʔssʔaifaani:/	sayfani blade	Saifaanijanbiyyah toper
22-	منزر	/miʔzar/	Spotless cloak	Dhoti
23-	القشر	/alqeʃr/	Coffee	Light coffee (type of coffee)

Table 3. Expressions given English equivalents but do not exactly correspond to the source ones.

3. Proper nouns have been transliterated. There are some terms in this novel which are considered as proper nouns i.e. they have to be initially capitalized but the translators have only transliterated them as it is clear in the following examples.
- (1) The term قات /Qaat/, which refers to a certain kind of tree that most of Yemeni people chew to be given more energy, was transliterated. The translators also have negatively explained the meaning of /Qaat/ in the footnote. Yet, the author of the source text did not provide such an explanation.
 - (2) The term طولة /Toulaqa/ is a name of a huge tree that was not even explained by the translators in the footnote what this word could mean or refer to.
 - (3) The term شيخ /sheikh/ is a name given to a leader of a tribe or a group of people also it can refer to a religious man who preaches in Islam. The meaning needed in this novel is the first one; therefore, the translators have used the transliteration technique without even capitalizing the initial letter of the expression. However, the term has an English equivalent /sheikh/ that can fully correspond to the Arabic one.
 - (4) The term صيفاني /saifaanii/ is transliterated however it is a proper noun and the translators did not even explain the meaning of this term as a cultural term which refers to the material from which the Janbiyyah (digger) worn by Yemeni people is made.
4. Same expressions are transliterated in some positions but translated elsewhere. Based on the analytical observation, it was clear that the two translators of the novel under investigation have used the technique

of **Transliteration** to deal with some expressions and terms in the original text. Meanwhile, they have translated and found equivalents for the same terms and expressions in some other positions in the same translation of the novel. The following example can explain the case.

The word **الفقيه**/alfaqih:/ has been transliterated as /faqih/ in one position. In contrary, the same word **الفقهاء** /alfuqaahaa?/ as the plural of /faqih/ has been translated as (learned men). Moreover, the translators in this translation of the novel under study did not keep the consistency in their translation. However, the term **فقيه** /faqih/ in fact refers to the learned man particularly in religious things as it was given in the footnote by the translators (religious teacher).

In another position, they translated the **سنا الفقيه** /sanaalfaqih/ as (Sir) which gives the meaning of (السيد) if we try to have the back translation. Therefore, the term (فقيه) was not given its exact equivalent term due to its cultural value.

5. Expression that have been transliterated and then given commentary explanation in the footnote. The translators of the novel under study have used the transliteration in translating some of the cultural expressions and terms and then they have explained the exact meaning of the transliterated terms so that the meaning becomes clearer and more accurate as noticed in the following examples.

- (1) The term **(دويدار)** was transliterated /duwaydar/ and then it was explained in the footnote as follows (a smart young boy employed by princes and governors in their palaces). In fact, this commentary explanation was provided by the source novel writer in the footnote.

- (2) The term **(فقيه)** was also transliterated as /faqih/ and then explained in the footnote as (a religious teacher) and this explanation was also given by the source text writer.

- (3) The expression **نرجيلة**/nargila/ was transliterated and then explained down in the footnote as (a kind of pipe in which the tobacco is drawn through water). However, there is an English equivalent for it as (narghile).

6. Terms and expressions which have not been given any equivalents. The following terms **جفنة**/ḡufnah/, **المتعرج**/almutafaredḡ/, **مجرد مجابرة**/muḡzaradmuḡzaabarah/, **بقوامها الصارخ**/Biqawaamahaaas's'aarex/ and, **المبخرة**/almubaxxarah/, can be translated and given equivalents in English but the translators have left them untranslated without bringing any expressions that may imply their meanings. The term **جفنة**/ḡufnah/ can be translated as (handful) that culturally refers to what a person brings with him in his/her hand to be eaten. The term **المتعرج**/almutafaredḡ/ can be also translated into English as (zigzag) but the translators left them untranslated. The term **مجرد مجابرة**/muḡzaradmuḡzaabarah/ can be also translated as (just a talk) but the expression was left untranslated. The expression **بقوامها الصارخ**/Biqawaamahaaas's'aarex/ was not translated. Though, they can be given an equivalent in English language as (her shocking body's structure). The expression **المبخرة**/almubaxxarah/ can be also translated as (fragrant) but the translators here left it untranslated.

Findings

The findings obtained from the analysis indicate the following.

- (1) In most of the expressions the translators could bring the approximate picture of what was needed to be translated either by giving the English corresponding ones or by giving some more commentary explanation in the footnote so that they could compensate or at least avoid the meaning loss.
- (2) The translators resorted to transliteration even when it was not needed and that makes the translated text look foreign because there is a kind of overuse of foreignization process.
- (3) There is no consistency in the translation of some of the expressions so that the readership might be confused.
- (4) The translation of some expressions does not maintain the same effect on its readership as the source one does on its readership especially the Yemeni ones because of the untranslatability of some terms or due to the inaccuracy so that the translation quality might be negatively affected.
- (5) Some expressions left untranslated, however, they can be given some apt equivalents.

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