

Problems in Translating Arabic Texts into English

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□ ABSTRACT □

The article discusses some of the problems facing an Arabic translator in the work between Arabic and English and exemplifies them with illustrative examples. These include syntactical problems in so far as the sentence structure and the use of referents. The Arabic use of dual in addition to the singular and the plural poses problems in translation and so does the fact that Arabic and English render information about gender in different ways. There are other incongruent features. Thus emotiveness is yet another aspect which it is hard to render adequately into English. Furthermore, there are large areas where there is lexical non-equivalence, mostly so because the phenomena described are culture-specific. This becomes particularly obvious when the translator has to deal with proverbs, euphemism and the like.

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مشاكل ترجمة النصوص العربية إلى الإنكليزية

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□ ملخص □

تناقش هذه المقالة بعض المشاكل التي يواجهها المترجم أثناء قيامه بترجمة النصوص من اللغة العربية إلى اللغة الإنكليزية وتدلل على ذلك من خلال تقديم الأمثلة التوضيحية . ومن أهم هذه المشكلات قضايا تتعلق ببنية التراكيب والمثنى والمذكر والمؤنث والعبارات المثيرة للعطفة والعبارات المرتبطة بالثقافة العربية كالأمثال وعبارات التلطيف. وتشير المقالة إلى أن وجود مثل هذه الفروقات اللغوية ما بين اللغة العربية واللغة الإنكليزية يتسبب في عدم تطابق النص المترجم مع النص الأصلي.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, problematic issues in translation were widely dealt with by linguists and theorists of translation alike. Adaptation in translation, componential analysis, equivalence in translation, emotive meaning, figurative expressions, gloss translation, free translation, literal translation, appropriateness, different types of translation, relationship to source and receptor languages, translator's roles and tastes, repetition and redundancy, among other issues were dealt with in some detail by scholars such as Austin, R.G. (1956); Bar-Hillel, Y. (1955a and 1955b); de Beaugrande, R. (1978 and 1994); Catford, J.C.(1965); Fishbach. H. (1953); Hatim, B. & Mason, I. (1990) Jakobson, R.Q959 b.); al-Na[jar, M. (1984); Newmark, P. (1957,1982 and 1988); Nida, E. (1964); Nida, E. and Taber, C. (1974); Shunnaq, A. (1989, 1992, 1993 and 1994) Wilss, W.(1982,1994 and 1996) among others.

Theorists of translation agree that TRANSLATION is the rendering of the same ideas from the Source Language (=SL) into the Target Language (=TL). They also agree that the translator is both a text receiver and a text producer who should first read and comprehend the Source Language Text (=SLT) then convey it EQUIVALENTLY into the Target Language Text (=TLT).

It is axiomatic to say, therefore, that the translator's task is more difficult than the writer's because the former is confined to the ideas of the latter. Moreover, he is obliged to convey the ideas of the SLT into the TLT giving utmost care to the linguistic and cultural norms of the TL. as well as its naturalness. In other words, the translator is expected to produce a TLT which should be equivalent, creative, genuine and has the SL-cultural flavor. The important question that might spring into one's mind would be "Is it possible to produce a translation that could meet these standards?"

Due to lack of space a convincing argument can not be furnished in here. However, the author hastens to say that producing an equivalent translation is almost an unattainable task and that any attempt aiming at providing an adequate functional equivalence may be deemed to be a failure. In fact, in his experience as a translator at an Arab radio station, a lecturer on translation at a number of Jordanian universities, and a practitioner of translation for almost two decades, the author has observed that translation from Arabic into English and vice-versa always involves problems arising from the transfer of the message from the SL to the TL. Indeed, producing functional equivalence (=FE) in translating certain Arabic texts into English

constitutes main problems to Arab translators. Some of the problems are discussed below.

2- Problems in Translating Arabic Texts into English.

Some of the main problems encountered by an Arab translator while translating from Arabic into English will be discussed and illustrated through relevant examples in Arabic wherever necessary.

From a wide variety of translation problems the author opts to deal with issues related to syntax; number and gender; relative nouns/pronouns/clauses; text-type; emotiveness; monitoring and managing; lexical non-equivalence; cultural expressions and synonymy. Priority in selecting and arranging the above issues does not reflect the importance of these problems. In fact, no strict categorization is intended⁽¹⁾

2.1 Syntactic problems.

Arabic and English are almost different in their constructions. A comparison of an Arabic text and its English translation would show that in order to produce a readable English text, the translator has almost to change the structure of nearly all sentences.

For example, Arabic verbal sentences have the basic word- order of verb-subject-object-adverbial. The main Arabic word-order is V.S-O., whereas the English one is S.V.O. The translator may overlook this simple rule and consequently the Arabic rendering of some English sentences would look odd. To illustrate this point further consider the translation of example(1) below:

(1) The teacher left .

(1-a) *al-mu^callimu yā dara*

(1-b) *yā dara al-mu^callimu*

(1-a) Look odd whereas (1.b) looks normal.

Arabic favours co-ordination, whereas English tends to use complex sentences using subordination.

Consider example(2):

(2) Because he had felt unhappy after he had failed his exams, he thought he had better stay away from school-

(2-a) *li-ānnaḥu Ṣ^cara bi!-ta^c asati ba^c da ān fašila fi-1-imtihānati*

azama an yabqā ba^c idan^c an-l-madrasati.

This rendering has conveyed the grammatical structure but at the cost of naturalness, abandoning the fact that Arabic favours linking through co-ordination and usually forwarding the main clause rather than subordinate clause. Thus the translation (2-b) below may be more appropriate:

(2-b) *‘azama ānyabqā ba^c i idan^c an-l-madrasati fa- qad Ša^c ara bil-
tā ā sati ba^c da ān fašila fi-l- imtihānati*

Further, whereas in English one can say

(3) In his speech, the president said...'

in Arabic the cataphoric usage is ruled out: that is, one cannot mention the adjectival pronoun before mentioning the noun to which it refers, e.g. It is only possible to say.

(3-a) *qā la a-syyidu l-ra 'isufi -xitā bin la-hu,*

In English, when a series of modifiers precedes a noun, the modifiers must be placed in a special order, e.g. 'Mary's three new large brown house doors', in Arabic, however, there are no such restrictions in the arrangement of a series of adjectives in a sentence. Moreover, English adjectives precede nouns, but in Arabic they always *come* after them. In Arabic, the *mubtada*, should precede the *Xabar* ⁽²⁾ e.g. *Allah maujū d.*

In brief, in Arabic the translator has to use an entirely different approach and completely different construction in dealing with syntactic problems of translation.

2.2 Number and gender

The main difficulties in translating from Arabic into English lie in number and gender. English makes two number distinctions: 'one' and 'more than one', i.e. singular and plural, whereas Arabic makes a third distinction as well, i.e. the dual. Consequently, when rendering English plurality into Arabic, the translator should be sure if it is dual or plural ⁽³⁾. He should be aware of the uses of the dual form as distinct from the plural form, i.e. the use of a special form to indicate two persons or items and the use of another form to indicate three or more persons or items. Thus, for an Arab translator, the term 'vice-presidents' may constitute a difficulty ⁽⁴⁾.

Gender is even more difficult to translate. Consider the following sentences.

(4) She is pretty (a girl).

(5) It is pretty (a picture).

Both (4) and (5) are to be rendered in the same way: *inn dh ā jamī lah.* As a result, the difference between the two is not to be conveyed despite the fact that the first refers to 'a girl' and the second to 'a picture'.

S.M. El-Sheikh (1977:p.22f.) has the following to say on the importance of gender in Arabic.

Compared to English, gender plays an extremely important part in the grammar of Arabic. It combines with number to form intricate concord systems which might link together, or set apart the various elements of the larger linguistic units such as the phrase or the clause.

In English, in some cases, a noun of common gender may correspond to two nouns each indicating a different sex, e.g.

child: boy, girl

horse: stallion, mare

parent: father, mother.

Arabic, on the other hand, distinguishes two genders, i.e. masculine and feminine (the concept of neuter is missing in Arabic). The English word 'cousin', for instance, is a troublesome lexical item to an Arab translator, because it does not tell him/her what sex is meant and what the exact relation is. In Arabic, the words *ibn* (son) or *bint* (daughter) are placed before the words corresponding to the items 'uncle' and 'aunt'. So we have eight designations in Arabic for the single English word 'cousin'. To translate the word *ibn ʿam* into English specifying its sex, we have to say, 'the son of the brother of one's father' and *bint ʿam* we have to say, 'the daughter of the brother of one's father'.

Arabic-speaking students and translators usually regard English nouns of common gender as belonging to masculine gender only⁽⁵⁾ This being the 'unmarked category' since in Arabic the feminine gender differs from the masculine in that a suffix is added to the feminine, e.g. *muʿallimah* (female teacher) / *muʿallim* (male teacher).

2.3 Relative nouns/pronouns/clauses.

In Arabic, relative pronouns are used far more than their counterparts in English. In English, we use 'who, whom, which' and 'that', whereas in Arabic, we use, *allotī, allađī, allawā tī, allađain allatān, allađān, allađān, allatain, allađī na*, etc., which could be rendered by the one English item 'who', as in the following examples (6-9):

(6) *hā đā huwa as-safī ru all ađī ālqā l-Xutbata.*

(6) This is the ambassador who delivered the speech.

(7) *hāđān as-safī rā ni allađā ni ālqay ā l-Xutbata.*

(7) These are the two ambassadors who delivered the speech.

(8) *hā 'ulā ī hum as-sufaraā 'u allaḏī na 'alqu l-Xutbata.*
(8) These are the ambassadors who delivered the speech.

(9) *hā ḏihi hiya as-safī ratu allati alqat l-xutbata.*
(9) This is the ambassadoress who delivered the speech:

(Notice that in Arabic the relative pronoun has to agree with antecedent in number and gender, as in 6-9 examples above.)

In Arabic, the personal pronoun may be used along with the relative pronoun, both referring to the same antecedent. Consider examples (10-12) below:

(10) *ar-rajulu allaḏī ra'aitu-hu.*

(10) The man whom I saw him. (Lit.)

(11) *ar-rajulu aliḏī katabtu la-hu ir-ris ā lata*

(11) The man whom I wrote the letter to him. (Lit.)

(12) *ar-rajulu allaḏī ra'aitu ibna-hu.*

(12) The man who I saw his son. (Lit.)

When translating an Arabic relative clause into English (as in the above examples), one should drop *dam īr-l-^cā id⁽⁶⁾* but transfer the case role to the relative pronoun. Consequently, a sentence like no.(10) above should be rendered as 'the man (whom) I saw' and no. (12) as "the man whose son I saw". It is worth noting also that a relative pronoun in the objective case may be omitted in English, whereas this is not permissible in Arabic. (However, in Arabic, a relative pronoun is omitted when the antecedent is indefinite, e.g. *qābal-tu rajulan qatala imr'atuh-* I met a man killed his wife(Lit.)

5.4 Text-types

The text has been widely defined and discussed by different linguists. The most appropriate definition for our present discussion is the one given by R. de Beaugrande and W. Dressler (1981:p.3):
A Text will be defined as a COMMUNICATIVE OCCURRENCE which meets seven standards of TEXTUALITY⁽⁷⁾ If any of these standards is not considered to have been satisfied, the text will not be communicative.

The word 'text' is equivalent to *nas* -in Arabic. Text, therefore, is a stretch of language which is functional, i.e. doing some job in some contexts as opposed to isolated words or sentences.

It goes without saying that translation involves more than replacement of unrelated sentences, because sentences are parts of the text. Consequently, our main purpose will be concentrated on translating the text as a maximal unit of language. Here, I shall be concerned with the problems arising from translating different types of Arabic texts into English. R. de Beaugrande (1978:16) has the following to say in this respect:

Recent contributions about translating have reaffirmed that the strategies involved must indeed be co-ordinated with the text-type (Dressier 1975 and ensuing discussion; Holmes 1975; Reiss 1971,1977). However, text-type cannot be simply determined according to traditional classifications of texts. Even the most basic groupings, such as fact versus fiction or prose versus poetry, have been called into question. Most texts contain at least some admixture of both actual and fictional material, and poetic and prose features.

The text-typological approach to translation considers context as a crucial element which determines the structure of the text. According to B. Hatim, context almost casually determines the shape of the text's hierarchic structure, which in turn determines the kind of texture devices used to make the text operational. Hatim classifies texts into three types according to the pragmatic, and communicative layers of the context. He distinguishes (1) expository: used to describe (e.g. an apparatus), to analyse concepts with the aim of informing, or to narrate (e.g. an event); (2) argumentative: used to evaluate objects, events, or concepts with the aim of influencing future behavior; and (3) instructive: used to direct the receiver towards a certain course of action (e.g. legal texts).⁽⁸⁾

This approach concentrates on the function of words with respect to these three types and their contexts. For example, the translator may interpret the word 'tender' differently into Arabic according to the context of the text. It could be translated as *mu'lim* (acutely sensitive) in a medical context or 'atā' or 'umlih (bid or money) in a commercial context, *safi nat tamwīn* or 'arabat il- wagū d fi-l-qitārāt (a small rowboat or motorboat carried or towed by a yacht; a car attached to a steam locomotive for carrying fuel and water) in a context about trains or, *yad* or *nā'im* or *raqīq* or *sayīr is-sin* (soft or delicate in substance; weak in constitution; young or immature children) in a literary context.

2.5 Emotiveness

Another taxonomy depends on the emotive intention of the speaker. Some types of text intend to express or arouse emotional reactions toward a special topic. On the other hand, other types of text aim only to denote. That is to say, some text-producers use emotive/objective vocabulary, whereas others use emotive/ subjective vocabulary. Shunnaq (1993:39) argues for the view that an emotive meaning is a function of responses to words (i.e. certain words tend to produce emotive responses showing that there is emotive meaning). He subscribes to Stevenson's (1963:21-22) definition of emotiveness; "the emotive meaning of a word is a tendency of a word, arising from the history of its usage, to produce (result from) effective responses in people."

Newmark (1981:133) suggests that the translators sometimes have to give precedence to emotive and affective elements in the SL over the informative or content elements if the context requires that. Shunnaq (1993:38) agrees with Newmark and says that an Arab translator translating emotive lexical items into English should take this suggestion to heart. He goes on to say that in Arabic we have numerous examples of lexical items/expressions which constitute a difficulty when translated into English and their translations look incongruent despite strenuous efforts that would be exerted by translators and, in most cases, translators fail to convey their connotative meanings and they manage only to convey the denotative meanings. To illustrate this point further, consider examples (13-15) cited below:

(13) *bi-raymi hā ḍihi as-sura -l-hā lika wa-bi-raymi -l-wacḍi -l- ma 's ā w ī -l-muhzin allaḍī ta' ī shu-hu I- 'aylabiyya as-s ā hiqah min āibn ā jan ū bi 'Afr ī q ī yā wa-Nā mī bī yā .* ⁽⁹⁾

(13) Despite the black picture and despite the tragic situation of the overwhelming majority of the sons of South Africa and Namibia...

The translator may opt to translate a lexical item with '+ emotiveness' as opposed to '- emotiveness'. In this type of text and context,⁽¹⁰⁾ a translator should use emotive vocabularies. This segment is part of a political speech, i.e. an argumentative text, which is characterized by an excessive use of emotive vocabulary.⁽¹¹⁾ The item *al-hā lika* could have different renderings in other text-types: pitch black, deep black, gloomy, and murky. Each of which would be proper in a certain context.

(14) *wa-lā-budda li-l-mujtama' idduwalī min 'an yarfa'a sauta-hu*
'ā liyan wa-bi-kulli quwwatin wa-salā batin sā rixan auqifū il-
harbā, 'anqiḏū l-'ajyā la min-l-majā zir wa-l-maḏā bih.⁽¹²⁾

(14) The international community must speak out. Proclaiming firmly and equivocally the need to end the war and save the present and future generations from massacres and slaughters.

The items *sā rixan* (speak out), *l-majāzir* (butcheries/massacres/carnages), and *l-maḏā bih* (massacres/ slaughter/ carnage) are emotive, evaluative, and carry value-judgment. Here, the two synonymous items *l-majā zir wa-l-maḏā bih* (which mean almost the same) mean 'to kill indiscriminately' as in barbarous warfare or persecution. However, the meaning of each of them would be different in other texts. In an expository text, the item *maḏbaha* could mean 'slaughter' (such as killing cattle and sheep for food).

It goes without saying that the native speakers of a language have keen appreciation of the emotive meanings of words. The analysis of the emotive meaning is by no means as easy as that of a referential meaning. Contexts, particularly cultural ones, are very helpful in analyzing the emotive meanings. Consider example (15) below:

(15) *'ar ā allaḏī yajrī fī -l-Qucis wa-yazza wa Na blis wa-l-xal ī I wa-fi*
kulli maḏī na wa-qarya wa-muxayyam fī l-'ardi-l- muhtalla, wa-'arā mā
yajrī xā rija-hā fa-ya'tasiru qalb ī -l- 'alam, wa-yastaqirru l-'as ā fi-l-jaw ā
nih.⁽¹³⁾

(15) I see what goes on in Jerusalem, Gaza, Nablus, Hebron, and in each city, village, and refugee camp in the occupied territory, and I see what goes on outside them. As a result, pain wrings my heart and sorrow settles down there.

Here, the two clauses *ya'tasiru qalb ī -l-'alam, wa-yastaqirru l-'as ā fi-l-jaw ā nih* (pain wrings my heart and sorrow settles down there) are rich in connotations. The reader's emotional reaction to these expressions may become very strong as they are used in an argumentative text. However, in an expository text, the meanings of *ya'tasiru* and *yastaqirru* will be referential, i.e. dictionary meanings. The item *l-jawā nih* (heart) as it is used in this example is far more emotive and affective than its translation in English.

2.6. Monitoring and managing(14)

In some cases, the text producer manipulates the elements of his/her text in order to steer the situation towards a certain goal. In such cases, it can be said that the situation is being "managed", whereas if he/she reacts to the situation by just describing or narrating the available evidence, it can be said that the situation is being "monitored". Consequently, the translator should be aware of these linguistic notions and the text-types⁽¹⁵⁾. Usually, monitoring is associated with "objectivity" and "denotation", whereas managing is associated with "subjectivity" and "emotiveness".

In order to demonstrate how the notions of monitoring and managing influence the translation process, we will contextualize and translate the following example from English into Arabic.

(16) Mr. Neil Kinnock, leader of the opposition, who opened the debate, said that Mr. Heseltine, when he resigned as Secretary of State for Defence, had made some serious allegations about the conduct and course of the government.

(The Times, 16.1.1986)

(16) *q āla za' ī mu -l-mu' ā radati al-br ī tā nī as-sayyid Nīl Kinok ladā 'iftitā hihi al-munā qashati al-barlam a niyya bi-'anna as-sayyid Haziltain allaḏī istaqā la min mansibi-hi ka-waz ī rin li-l-difā'i kāna qad 'adlā bi-ittihā mā tin xatī ratin tata'allaq bi-siy ā sati wa-sulū ki il-hukū mati l-hā liyyati.*

This translation is neutral, since the translator does not become involved but only monitors, whereas if the above sentences were rendered as:

(16-a) *Za'ania Za' ī mu l-mu'ā radati al-brī t ānī as-sayyid Nī I Kinok lad ā tadaxxuli-hi bi-l-mun ā qashati al barlam ā niyya bi- 'ann as-sayyid Haziltain allaḏī 'ujbira °alā isfaqā lati-hi min mansibi-hi ka-waz ī rin li-l-difā °i kā na qad 'adlā bi-ittihā matin xatī ratin tata' allaqu bi- siyasati -l-muš ī nati wa l-sulū ki -l-muxz ī lil-huk ū mati l-hā liyyati.*

We then observe that the translator is not neutral. The use of *Za'ama* (alleged, pretended, or claimed) instead of *qā la* (said) sparks off evaluativeness and shows that the translator is managing rather than monitoring. The rendering shows that the translator was unaware of the two linguistic notions (monitoring and managing) as well as of the text-type. In an expository text (such as the one above), the translator should only relay the piece of news as it is and not mistranslate it by managing the situation.

This management is indicated in the use of the above underlined expressions.

It is, therefore, recommended that an Arab translator should be trained to be able to render fully and efficiently the relevant features of monitoring and managing.

2.7 Lexical non-equivalence

The problem of equivalence has been discussed by different linguists. J.C. Catford defined translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language (=SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (=TL)"⁽¹⁶⁾ According to S. Bassnetta McGuire 'equivalence in translation should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot even exist between two TL versions of the same text, let alone between the SL and the TL versions.'⁽¹⁷⁾ Therefore, it could be safely assumed that complete equivalence in translation is a far-fetched task, indeed virtually impossible. The translator may find some terms in Arabic difficult if they are to be fully translated into English. Consequently, he/she will be obliged to accept a partial equivalent item in English, as in the following examples: the translation of *ʿam* as "uncle", *ibn ʿam* as "cousin", *ā nta* as "you", *hum* as "they", *ḍahaba* as "went", *ʿišq* as "love", and *hurma* as "woman"⁽¹⁸⁾

In some cases, the Arab translator may find certain lexical items in Arabic that have no equivalences in English because the concepts they refer to do not exist in English. Such items are normally culture-bound terms in Arabic, as in *salāt l-istix ā rat* (the prayer for Guidance in making a good choice; *Tayammum* (ablution with fine sand), and *hid ā d* (a widow in Islam has to observe mourning for her dead husband for period of four months and ten days). To illustrate this point further consider the following example:

(17) *ištaraitu l-lubba wa-l-mulū xiyyata wa-l-hinn ā.*

(17) I bought *al-lubb*, *al-malukhiyya* and *al-hinna*.

It is almost impossible to translate the above sentence. However, the meaning could be conveyed through transliteration and paraphrase, as in "I bought *al-lubb*, *al-malukhiyya*, and *al-hinna*' with the periphrastic explanation of these items appearing in the following sample footnote: *al-lubb*: seeds of the water-melon or of other vegetables eaten as nuts and almonds, *l-mulū xiyya*: Jew's mallow (bot.), cultivated as a pot herb and used to prepare a thick soup made of this herb, especially in Egypt and Syria,

l-hinnā': i.e. *henna*, a reddish-orange cosmetic gained from leaves and stalks of the *henna* plant are used by Arab brides.' The difficulty in translating these words is due to lexical gaps resulting from the cultural difference between the two languages.

In the following example, the translator may also confront difficulty in translating it to English due to the same cause:

(18) *fa-qasamat mā-lā yajū zu la-hā 'an taqsima-'arda l- watani il-wā hid. Wa-hī na rafad-nā hā ḏā l-qarār fa- li-'annan ā miḥlu umm it-tifli allatī rafadat 'an yaqsima sulaimanu tifla- hā hī na nāzā'at-hā 'alai-hi imra 'atun uxrā.*⁽¹⁹⁾

(18) it partitioned *what* it had no right to partition. When we rejected that decision, our position corresponded to that of the natural mother who refused to permit Solomon to cut her son into two when the unnatural mother claimed the child for herself.

Here, the expression *'an yaqsima sulaimanu tifla-hā* (Solomon to cut her son into two) may not be readily understood by a normal native English speaker until he is briefed on the story behind it.⁽²⁰⁾

Non-equivalence could arise from the fact that certain terms have slightly different shades of meaning in English without having clear-cut equivalents in Arabic. Consider in this respect the two words "committee" and "commission". In Arabic, both "committee" in "committee on conferences" and "commission" in "commission on human rights" could be translated by the Arabic word *lijnah*. However, it becomes more difficult to translate "committees and commissions".⁽²¹⁾

Another area of non-equivalence could arise from the fact that English has more grammatical categories for tenses than Arabic. For instance, the past simple tense and present perfect are often misused. Sometimes where the simple present is required, the present perfect is used and *vice versa*, e.g.

(19) *yulq ī l- 'aminu l-ā mmu kalimata-hu.*

(19) The secretary general delivers his speech... (lit.)

The Arabic version may denote progressive, present, simple, or future (i.e. an unfinished act)⁽²²⁾

2.8 Culture-specific expressions

In translating Arabic into English and *vice versa* the translator has sometimes to deal with texts full of proverbs, verses, historical incidents long forgotten, legendary personages, euphemisms, etc. In addition, we must add the normal difficulties of interpreting cultural contexts of worlds remote from the English language, with completely different tastes and conventions.

When translating, a translator has to bear in mind the fact that he should exchange ideas and messages and not merely words. Taking this into consideration, the translator should be familiar with and sensitive to the SL culture⁽²³⁾

Time and again, as Arab translators, we find instances of Islamic teachings and conventions deeply rooted in Arabic culture which are very difficult to render into other languages. So, for instance, we are faced with problems of how to cope with such culture-specific expressions as *'alayyi it-talā q*, and *kaθθar Allah xairak*⁽²⁴⁾. In these cases the translator may be completely faithful to the SL text, but the reader needs further explanation. In this respect, Farghal & Shuunaq (1998) argue that translation of Islamic texts is further complicated when the translator attempts to render a key religious term that constitutes a complete referential gap in English, such as the concept of *Jan ā ba*, when an adult has got semen on him due to a sexual intercourse, a wet dream, an instance of masturbation, or any other imaginable manner, which is totally missing in the target culture. This concept is so important in Islam that a Muslim can not perform many of his duties in the event of *janā ba*. One could imagine how difficult to assign the correct denotation to *janā ba* in English.

Proverbial expressions (which are products of culture and heritage) are difficult to translate. Different languages reflect different shades of meanings because of differences in cultural aspects. F.M. Maligoub (1986) has the following to say on proverbs:

Proverbs have been defined in numerous ways. Cervantes describes proverbs as being opinions derived from experience which is the mother of knowledge. James Howell, in a sonnet which lies prefixed to his collection of proverbs, describes the proverbs as being the people's voice 'coined first and current made by common choice'. Dictionaries also define the proverb in more or less the same way⁽²⁵⁾

Translation of proverbs is difficult unless the translator is fully aware of the idiosyncracies of SL culture. For instance, it is difficult to translate the Arab proverb *ka-l-bā hiθθi 'an hatfi -hi bi- dīlfi-h* into English. It could be literally rendered as 'like one searching for his death with his own hoof. However, this rendering looks meaningless unless it is accompanied by the

story underlying the proverb (originating from the story of a ewe digging up a knife in the earth and then being slaughtered with it).

However, some proverbs are easy to translate because they have their equivalence in the TL. For instance, the Arabic proverb *na'kul li-na' ī š wa-la na' ī šu li-na 'kul* has an equivalent in the English 'live not to eat, but eat to live'. The proverb, in both languages, warns us that eating should not be the main purpose of life.

Euphemism is another cultural problem of translation. A. Shvitiel (1976: p.221) defines this figure of speech as:

Euphemism is the substitution of a word or a phrase for an unpleasant one, usually to avoid words which are embarrassing in certain circumstances or taboo words.

Euphemism is, therefore, a linguistic device to avoid talking about unpleasant realities directly. For example, 'died' is a blunt, factual term used to express the event of death. However, 'passed away', 'departed from the world', 'went to his reward', 'found rest', etc. are English euphemisms. Euphemisms in Arabic used to express the same idea could be *intaqala ilā jiwā ri rabbi-h* (moved to his Lord's neighbourhood), *intaqala ilā rahmati Allah* (moved to God's mercy), and *al-maθwd l-'axī r* (the last abode). Consequently, the translator should always attempt to maintain euphemism in his translation.

Having discussed the cultural difficulties of translation between Arabic and English in general, it might be helpful also to illustrate this difficulty through the following examples:

(20) *wa-lkarm nawaddu 'an latamaθθala qiyā datu 'ir ā n bi-mā qālahu min qā blu šā 'irun 'Arabiyyun tarjī'u 'usū lu-hu ilā Fā ris ā l-muslimah: "'iḏā ihtarabat. yauman fa-sā lat dimā 'uhā, taḏakkarat l-qurb ā fa-sā lat dnm ū 'u-hā "* ⁽²⁶⁾

We hope the leaders of Iran will find inspiration in the following lines of poetry by an Arab poet of Persian Islamic descent:

'Though one day, alas, they went to war and bled, they recognized their kinship and tears were shed'.

(21) *kam-ā quddira lī 'an ' atahammala l-mas 'ū liyyata fī baladin 'Arabiyyin, yatillu 'alā θar ā Filist ī na allaḏī yadummu rufā ta jaddī l-kab ī r Hā šim, fī yazzat Hā šim wa-ta'attara bi- 'uqdā mi jaddin min nasli-hi, huwa Muhammad bin 'Abdul- Allah- salwā tu*

Allā hi wa-salā muhu ʿalaihi- allaḏī istafā –hu l-Allā hu hudan li-l-nā si wa-rahma.⁽²⁷⁾

(21) It has been my destiny to carry out the responsibility in an Arab country overlooking the soil of Palestine, which contains the remains of my grandfather Hashim in Gazat Hashim, and which was also blessed by the feet of a grandfather of his descendants, Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah (may God bless him and grant him salvation) whom God selected for the guidance and mercy of mankind.

Though they are grammatically sound, the translated English versions may not look stylistically natural in English.

2.9 Synonymy

Eugene Nida (1964), Peter Newmark (1984 & 1988), S.B. McGuire (1980), Anna Wierzbicka (1980), and D.A. Cruse (1986) have all attempted to handle the problem of synonymy and translatability. Let us attempt to discover just what practical difficulties may arise in translation, by considering further examples quoted from Arabic texts.

(22) *laqad šahida ʿām 1986 'kḥar min ayy ī -waqtin mad ā -mazī dan min l-maḏā bihi wa-hamm ā mā t id-dami wa-l-ʿtiqā lā ti l- ʿašwā 'iyyati wa-maz ī dan min tadā b ī ri il-qamaʿi wa-l- idtih ā di wa-l-raq ā bati.*⁽²⁸⁾

(22) The year 1986 witnessed more carnage, bloodshed, arbitrary detention, and more measures of **oppression** and censorship than any previous year.

Here, the two cognitive synonyms *l-qamaʿi wa-l-idtih ā di* are better rendered by one English item (i.e. 'oppression') to avoid tautology in translation.

(23) *r āj ī na. li-ijti ā ʿi-mā kulla taufī qin wa-naj ā h.*⁽²⁹⁾

(23) Witnessing their meeting every *success*.

Here, the synonymous couplet *taufī q wa-naj ā h* is rendered by one English item (success).

A translator should distinguish the degree of similarity between SL synonymous items. If it is very high, it is advisable to render them by one item in the TL. However, if the items of the SL are only near- synonyms, the

translator might translate them separately in order to preseive the function of such repetition, ⁽³⁰⁾ e.g. *as-silmu wa-l- 'arnnu* (peace and security).

Before concluding this article on translation problems, it is worth noting that there are other problems that deserve discussing, such as: indeterminacy of meaning (due to ellipsis, pronominal ambiguity, etc.); the translation of metaphors, *clichés*, and idioms; word-collocations; conjunctious; parallelism; syntactic processes of restructuring (such as deletion, insertion, permutation, and substitution), etc. In this respect, the author would like to substantiate his above argument by a quotation of W. Wilss (1996: 166):

The success of translators to come to grips with their translation tasks depends on various factors such as their mental disposition, experience, the congeniality (or uncongeuiality) of the textual input, the correlation (or nou-correlation) of the degree of difficulty of the pertinent text to be translated and the translator's competence level, the degree of syntactic, lexical and sociocultural repertoire, to name just a few.

As the scope of the present paper does not permit a discussion of such topics, it is hoped that further studies will deal with these issues.

Notes

1. For instance, problems are not categorized according to their being linguistic, cultural, stylistic, etc., because in a given case one category might overlap with another one.
2. This arrangement may be violated for special reasons; shifting is possible for stylistic and rhetorical reasons.
3. Contexts in such cases could be very helpful, otherwise the difficulty could be more complicated.
4. He/she must make sure whether it refers to two or more. It is even more difficult for the interpreter who must necessarily make the mistake of using the plural form if it becomes clear afterwards that the term refers to only two.

5. The author has noted this case with his Arabic-speaking students who would translate and consider words like 'doctor, teacher, friend', etc. as males. In spite of (the context, nouns of common gender are often translated wrongly as masculine).
6. A resumptive pronoun is the one that tends to resume or repeat.
7. According to de Beaugrande and Dressier, the seven standards of textuality are: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality. For a very clear and comprehensive discussion of these standards, see *ibid.*, P 48-208.
8. "A text Typological Approach to Syllabus Design in Translator Training," *The Incorporated Linguist*, Vol. XXI(1), No. 3, (1984) P. 46f.
9. From a speech delivered by the Sudanese diplomat Mr. Adam, Provisional Verbatim Record of the Two Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty-Fourth Meeting, Held at Headquarters, New York, 18 February 1987 at 3.30p.m. p.40.
10. This, of course, depends on text-types, for some texts are characterized by the use of an emotive rather than neutral items which inevitably involve the reader.
11. The lexical items *al-hā likah* (bleak), *al-ma 's ā wī* (tragic), *al-muhzin* (sad), *as-sā hiqah* (overwhelming), '*abn ā* ' (sons), etc. are highly charged with emotiveness. We not only understand their reference, but we react to them emotionally. Consequently, translation should attempt to convey the same emotiveness.
12. From a speech delivered by the Palestinian politician Mr. Kaddoumi, Provisional Verbatim Record of the Two Thousand Seven Hundred and Tenth Meeting, held at the Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 3 October 1986, at 3.30 p.m. p.31.
13. From a speech delivered by King Hussein of Jordan on 19 February 1986.
14. Very few studies have been carried out on these linguistic notions. For further discussion, however, see Shunnaq (1992) and (1994) and Farghal (1993).
15. The text-producer usually monitors in expository and instructive texts, whereas he/she may manage in argumentative texts.
16. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (London, 1965), p. 20.
17. *Translation Studies* (London & New York, 1980) p.29.
18. The above English renderings are partially equivalent to their Arabic items because each of the English renderings would cover more possibilities than the given Arabic item. For instance, 'uncle' could mean *ʿam* or *xā l*; 'cousin' could mean *ibn-l-ʿam*, *bint-l-ʿam*, *ibn-l-xā l*, *ibn-l-xā lah*, *bint-l-xā lah*, *ibn-l-ʿammah*, *bint-l-ʿammah*, 'you' could mean *anta*, *anti*, *antum*, or *antun*, 'they' could mean *hum*, *hunna* or *hum ā*; 'went' could mean *rā ha*, *madā*, *dahaba* or *insarafa*; 'love' could mean *hub*, *ʿulā qah*, *kalaf*, *ʿišq*, *šayaf*, *lauʿ*, *a hawā*, *yarā m*, *hiyā m*, or *tad! ī h*; and 'woman' could mean *hurmah*,

- imra'a*, or *waliyyih*. (Here (lie terms designating 'woman' have the same referential meanings but different connotations).
19. From a speech delivered by the PLO Leader Yasir Arafat at the United Nations Headquarters (1974).
 20. The story relates how Solomon adjudicated between two women who each claimed that a living child was her own after another child had died. In order to reveal the true mother of the child, Solomon commanded the child to be divided and each woman given half, with the result that the natural mother preferred to renounce her claim to the child rather than witness its death. See Bible, 1 Kings 3: 16-28.
 21. A possible way of rendering such an expression might be to paraphrase it as 'committees of different kinds': *al-lij ā nu bi-muxtalf 'anwā 'i-hā*.
 22. This is not restricted to Arabic. In English, the present form (where simple or present) may under certain conditions refer to the future as well.
 23. That is assuming the translator translates into his native language and also that lie is aware of his own culture.
 24. These expressions may be literally (but roughly) rendered respectively: '(I swear) to divorce (my wife)' and 'May God increase your income'. Of course, lexical gaps were not filled in such renderings due to cultural differences. These expressions are familiar in Arabic, but they have no equivalents in English.
 25. *Linguistic Study of Cairene Proverbs*. (Bloomington 1986: 2).
 26. From a speech delivered by the Yemeni diplomat Mr. Basendwah, Personal Verbatim Record of the Two Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirteen U.N. held at the Headquarters, New York, 18 February 1987 at 3.30 p.m. p. 17.
 27. From a speech delivered by King Hussein of Jordan on 19 February 1986.
 28. From a speech delivered by a Kuwaiti diplomat at the U.N. headquarters in 1987.
 29. From a speech delivered by a Libyan diplomat at the U.N. headquarters in 1987.
 30. There are typical differences between most synonymous couplets, which the translator should convey in the TL. S. Ullmann (1962: p. 142f.) pointed out that Prof. W.E. Collinson distinguished between nine relational possibilities, *vi*: (1) one term is more general than another: *refuse* - *reject*; (2) one term is more intense than another: *repudiate* - *refuse*', (3) one term is more emotive than another: *reject* - *decline*', (4) one term may imply moral approbation or censure where another is neutral: *thrifty* - *economical*', (5) one term is more professional than another: *decease* - *death*; (6) one term is more literary than another: *pasting* - *death*; (7) one term is more colloquial than another: *turn down* - *refuse*; (8) one term is more local or dialectal than another: Scots *flesher* - *butcher*. And (9) one of the synonyms belongs to child-talk: *daddy* - *father*.

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