

Translation: The Translator's Intuition and Senses

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Abstract

This paper starts with the assumption that translation is neither a transference nor a replacement of one word or symbol in one language with a word or symbol in another. It is a matter of choice, selecting the most appropriate and/or equivalent form to the original.

This paper also argues that although translation is based on the source text, its outcome depends essentially on the translator's own realization and perception of the text. Therefore, it may be difficult to approach translation merely from decoding and encoding perspectives because words and phrases change over the years. At the heart of the translation process, there is the translator's free will, which determines the outcome and the quality of the text to be translated.

Introduction

Arab as well as non-Arab scholars have frequently discussed aspects of technical and grammatical translation from Arabic into English and vice versa. However, we believe a significant aspect of translating texts creatively and artistically has been overlooked. The term "creative" is treated here as the ability to describe something in a new and imaginative way to produce interesting results. This can be accomplished through the reader's lived-experience and through his own senses of the world. This does not mean that the translator is completely free to do whatever he wants, nor should he be faithful to the original text, but free to feel and appreciate the work. Translation is believed to involve transferring thoughts behind words, sometimes between the words, or transferring all shades of meanings that evolve around the text.¹ This is a procedure that should be regarded as the central issue of translation.

Along the same line translation is believed to involve conveying what is implied and not what is said.² This is the meaning behind meaning. However, in translating the implied meaning, i.e. the sub-text and all shades of meaning, the translator must word a sentence in such a way that the implied meaning is equally clear in the target text. Consider the following sentence:

*How can he succeed when he won't work hard?*³

A quick look at the English term "when" may mislead the inexperienced translator to fall into the trap of translating such a term as a time expression. However, if one scrutinizes the sentence along the context in which the term "when" is used, he will realize that there is a conditional meaning behind the use of such an expression. It is logical to assume that native speakers of English may not use language in a simple and direct way, and if the translator is not equipped with all means, whether theoretical or practical, he will more likely produce an inappropriate translation of the term. Sometimes, a word in a sentence can be used in a way where two or more interpretations are possible. A dictionary at this stage is not really helpful simply because the translator may find that the term "when" refers to *at what time, on what occasion, at or during the time that, considering that, although*, etc. None of these English equivalents conveys the intended meaning. the same thing applies to the Arabic equivalents of the English term "when". An inexperienced translator may literally render this term as *ʿindama, mata, wa min thumma, bil rughmi min, fii hiin*, etc. Again, none of these expressions captures the implications behind the use of such a term. The translator here should grasp the relevant meaning of the term based on the context in which

it is used. Therefore, an appropriate rendition of the term "when" would be in *lam* (if) as follows:

kayfa bi imkanihi an yanjaha in lam yakun musta'iddan?

In the above sentence, "when" is translated as conditional and not a time expression. Only by going beyond the explicit meaning of the term, and analyzing the context in which it is used can the conditional meaning of "when" be captured.

Furthermore, the word "Harvard" in the sentence *George wants to send his son to Harvard* raises a similar problem, particularly if one ignores its function (the most prestigious school in the United States). Besides, words such as *Makkah* and *Ka'ba*, used within an arabic context can be rendered catastrophically if the translator ignores the religious connotation these places have for the Muslims, and this raises the problem of inadequate translations. Therefore, relying on the explicit meaning of the word is not enough. Text-producers bring their own assumptions, presuppositions, and general word-views to bear on their processing of texts at all levels. Individual lexical choices are also important. In such cases, the translator should go beyond the explicit meaning to perceive the potential meaning of particular choices within the cultural and linguistic community of the source text.⁴ The translator should carefully measure the thought behind the meaning, as the thought that is carried on by the word is its essential meaning and it is this kind of meaning that should not be tampered with. This particular problem is prevalent when translating cultural terms. For example, the term *tabun* which corresponds to "a small, jar-shaped oven, sunk in the ground, open on top, used for baking," cannot be translated literally without referring to the culture in which the term is used. The meaning of this term can be understood only within a particular Arabic culture and that is mainly of Syria, Jordan, Palestine, etc. Therefore, understanding the socio-cultural context in which terms are utilized is fundamental in translation.

In addition, proverbs can hardly be translated literally into the target language, simply because they manifest cultural overtones that cannot be rendered adequately without going beyond their literal meanings. The expression *Adam kicked the bucket* is a term that cannot be translated literally as *darab adam al-satla* (literally translated as *Adam hit the pail*, whether of wood or metal), as the term is used metaphorically to mean *tuwuffiya adam*, *intaqala adam ila rahmatillah*, *mata adam*, corresponding to the English expression *Adam passed away*. Also, the Arabic proverb *asafir batni bitzaqziq* which corresponds literally to *the birds of my stomach are chirping* cannot be

rendered into the target language without understanding its cultural context, simply because its literal meaning has no relevance whatsoever to the meaning manifested in it. The metaphorical meaning underlying such an expression is *I am extremely hungry*. Therefore, it is fundamental for the translator to provide an equivalent that contains the overall meaning of the expression used.

From a different angle, Arabic sentences such *hadihi al-hadiqatu jamilah* cannot be translated literally as *this a beautiful garden* simply because this sentence is not grammatically acceptable in English. Although there is no verb in the Arabic sentence, a good translator has to use his own experience and render the sentence as *This is a beautiful garden*. The addition of the verb is has resulted from the translator's thorough analysis of both sentences and his knowledge of both languages.

Taking the above examples into account, it should be pointed out that translation is not a direct transference of a word in the original text into a word in the target text. It is a careful analysis of culture written in a good choice of words. Understanding the stylistic feature are also of great importance to the translator. Therefore, the translator is in situation where he chooses from among several more or less equally acceptable target language versions. This depends on the following factors:⁵

1. The type of text to be translated.
2. The extent to which the Source Language text bears stylistic markings.
3. The intended target language audience.
4. The extent to which the translator can culturally comprehend the Source Language text and identify himself with.
5. The translator's stylistic preference and his ability to recognize and handle stylistic register.

Now the translator has to consider many things when translating a text. Among the situational factors stated above are essence, spirit, and sense of sentences which need to be carefully maintained. It follows, therefore, that within the core of the translation process, there lies a choice that, in one way or another, plays a significant role in the process of translation. The choice of the translator has to be made if things have to be accomplished, only because what the translator is confronted with is a text whose forms and functions have been carefully used by the writer.

Regardless of the decision made, whether it is based on careful scrutiny and reconstruction or on the outcome of the translator's trained instinct, the final decision that must be made comes down to choosing the word or

expression that the translator thinks is the closest equivalent to the target text. At the same time, the translator tries hard to maintain the form and function of the source text; he also tries hard not to add new shades of differing points or any of the values, norms and functions that are not included within the text. Therefore, the translator works here as a coordinator who is free to choose whatever but at the same time responsible for whatever he chooses.

Translator's Perception

It is to be noted that translators are different from one another; they differ conspicuously in their perception of the real world. They are also different in their capabilities and talents. Therefore, it is axiomatic to point out that in translating literature, for example, four translators would more likely produce four different versions or translations of the same text. This is highly logical because each translator looks at the text from his own perspective. For example, in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, one can see how the expression "*Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio*", uttered by Marcellus in Act I, Scene I, of *Hamlet* has been translated differently by the four translators: Mutran, Jabra, Jamal, and Al-Khmyri. Because the word "scholar" is polysemous, each one of these four translators has translated it differently and according to his own personal talent or possible synonyms. The four translations are listed below for the sake of exposition:

- (1) *anta faqih* (you are a jurisprudent) - Jabra
- (2) *anta fasih²alim* (you are eloquent and knowledgeable) - Mutran
- (3) *anta rajulun muthaggaf wa fasih* (you are both a cultured and eloquent man) - Jamal
- (4) *anta rajulun muta²allim* (you are an educated man) - Al-Khmyri

Taking into account the religious context in which the word "scholar" was used by Marcellus, and because Marcellus looks at the addressee as a man of knowledge, we understand and agree with several literary critics, who favored the Arabic rendition of the above expression as *you are a jurisprudent* simply because it is a more acceptable equivalent than all other words provided by other translators. It also gives the gist of the meaning in this context.

However, the question always arises: can the idea that is expressed intelligently by the writer be maintained in the translation? To answer this question, we should note that translation is a matter of interpretation, and when we write about translation, we only write about it from a translator's perspective. The translator generally sees things from his own subjective

evaluation. He sees them from his untrammelled viewpoint. To him, words have personal perception; they have different kinds of recognition. Therefore, it would be hard for the translator to express the words exactly in the same form and function of the target language. In such cases, the translator has to convey the idea according to his own perception.

When the translator is confronted with a word that has to be conveyed into the target language, the choice he makes all the difference in the world. The lexis he chooses may have almost the same meaning to that of the other language, paying his utmost attention to avoid contamination or not to allow translation nuances interfere and distort the meaning of the original. For the sake of clarity, the translator digs for textual and situational resemblance. The search for resemblance and synonymy is what made some linguists and translation practitioners believe that translation is a form of synonymy.⁶ Graham clearly comments on Quine's idea of synonymy,⁷ saying that the natural alternative is to abandon the notion of two messages synonymous in all respect with one another and replace it with the requirement that similarity of meaning be attained in some particular respects, never all.

From a philosophical point of view, Quine, while discussing the indeterminacy of translation, proposes that synonymy roughly consists in approximate likeness in effect on the hearer. Quine's use of the word "synonymy" is not restricted. He points out that the word "synonymy" carries the full generality of "same in meaning", whatever that is. Quine distinguishes between two types of synonymy: broad type and narrow type. According to Quine, broad synonymy can be formulated in intuitive terms. That is, two sentences command assent concomitantly and dissent concomitantly. This kind of concomitance is due strictly to word usage rather than how things happen in the world. As for the narrow type, Quine believes that it is synonymy of parts and not synonymy of wholes. Quine states:

"Synonymy of parts is defined by appeal to analogy of roles in synonymous wholes; then synonymy in the narrow sense is defined for the wholes by appeal to synonymy of homologous parts."⁷

Part-whole relationships always exist in synonymy. When two sentences have, what is called by philosophers⁸ "sameness of confirming experience and of disconfirming experience", then we have wholly synonymous sentences. However, when two sentences partially confirm and disconfirm experience, then we have partially synonymous sentences. Here, one can argue, to this effect, that synonymy involves partial overlapping or whole overlapping. That is, the meaning of one message may partially or wholly

overlap with the meaning of another, and the idea of partial and whole overlapping is something that is inevitable in translation. In other words, the meaning of one word is wholly or partially covered by the other. The idea of partial and whole overlapping is represented in Figure (1):

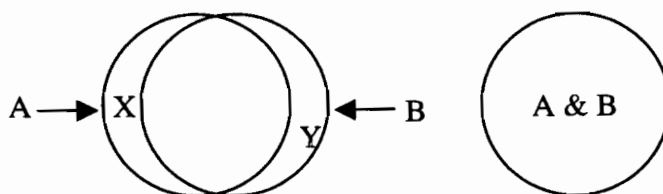


Figure (1): Representation of partial and whole overlapping

It is axiomatic to point out that total or complete overlapping, if it exists, does not cause any problem. However, for partial overlapping, one could look at A as the original word or even text. Then, B is the target word of the target text. The relationship is that of a mirror image, i.e. one word in a text is mirrored to create the target image. Inevitably, this kind of overlapping cannot always be total, because of at least phonological differences. The most difficult part, however, is that one part is being partially or wholly covered and another part does the covering. There is a neutral part that is not covered in partial overlapping, and this is the area where the translator finds himself free to move. Here, portion X in the original occupies accompanying meaning which is not encumbered in the meaning of the word B. Also, portion Y holds a concomitant meaning that is not included in the meaning of A. Therefore, the translator, if possible, must target a total overlapping, a very complicated if not an impossible task.

It is to be noted that complete synonymy does not exist, and the translator seeks to preserve the meaning that is similar to the meaning of the original. Ross states:

"The translator seeks to convey the same meaning in a new language as is found in the original. Not only must he choose among the various respects in which similarity of meaning is to be preserved; this is less sameness in any particular respect, and is more an equivalence satisfactory to the constraints, which govern his work."⁹

The translator here makes his choices with differing degrees of ease or sophistication. This actually depends on the subjectmatter he is dealing with.

It often happens that one discovers that, upon looking over the printed copy of a translation, particularly when it comes off the press, he could, if given the choice and the chance again, introduce a different alternative. Hence, people often dislike their translation of a particular subject-matter after it has been published; they feel that they have not done well in their translation. However, when one reads his own writing, he reads it with some satisfaction; he may not change a single jot. This is the difference between translating and writing. Translating, if not done intuitively, is interpretation. On the other hand, writing, as it is not interpretation, is an art; it is a creation of the mind. Therefore, one is done through the imitation of the original text while the other is done through the creation of the individual's mind, paying his utmost attention to the original message.

Translating vs. Writing

It is to be noted here that having the capability of writing effectively and clearly should have a bearing on translating appropriately. After all, translating is writing creatively with the translator's utmost attention to the meaning of the original text. The difference between the two activities (i.e. translating and writing), however, is a matter of perception. Writing, particularly in literature, is a matter of creation whereas translating is a matter of text-comprehension, as the idea of the text to be translated has already been determined by the writer. Therefore, writing focuses on creating the idea whereas translating focuses on choosing the closest natural equivalent to a particular lexis. Following is a manifestation of these two skills:

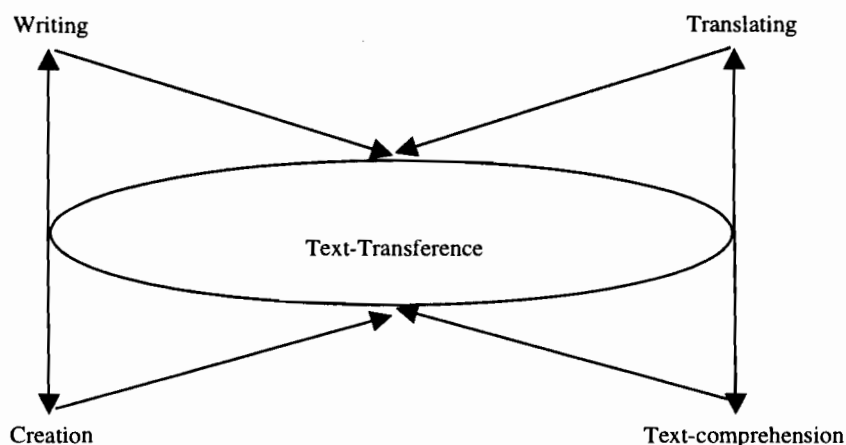


Figure (2): Writing - translating Representation

In this regard, the translator must be modest; he should not be too creative nor should he be too literal. Being too creative may result in distorting the beauty and intricacy of the original text. Being literal may result in ambiguating the text.

Therefore, the translator faces a dilemma. The solution to such information immoderation is to be accurate in such a way that the two texts are closely approximated.

Translation is Personal

As the translator seeks to choose his closest natural equivalent, he looks backward and forward. He may see that words have changed and therefore he acts upon this. He may also discover that words have drifted, have disappeared over the years, and there is no reason to believe that they will not continue to do so. This implies that the translator has a sense of what is called "the other meaning" in relation to the text to be processed. He should experience the text in his own way, feeling words as mobiles, sensing all possible avenues. It is through his own sensitive and artistic talent that he is able to convey this into the target language. Whenever there is some kind of strangeness in the text, through his own perception, he is capable of changing this into likeness. After all, he is the "fixer" and the one who puts things into their proper perspective. He is the one who looks backward and forward into language for the purpose of understanding, making changes, maintaining text-functions, etc. In this regard, one finds it relevant to refer to Bakhtin's term 'verbal art'. Here the term is used to refer to the concept of 'moving in language', and in this sense, translating would be a movement in the words used to make language along the context in which words or sentences are used. Bakhtin states:

"The word is not a thing, but rather the eternally mobile, eternally changing medium of dialogical intercourse. It never coincides with a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is in its transferal from one mouth to another, one context to another, one social collective to another, one generation to another. In the process, the word does not forget where it has been and can never wholly free itself from the domination of the contexts of which it has been a part."¹⁰

From a different perspective, some¹¹ believe that translation is an imitation. One often finds in translating literature, for example, that Horace, who, in *Odes* iv. ii, details the problems of rivaling Pindar, and proceeds to apply his precepts in *Odes* iv. iv, a brilliant Pindar pastiche on an essentially Roman theme. Horace's work was an imitation of another, but it was an art

that consisted of bending the technique of another author to his own subject and language.

Furthermore, translation can be viewed as an artistic activity.¹² Kelly argues that the translator attempts to create his own personal relationship with the text-producer. He follows this in grasping the inner significance of the text he studies. As for the relationship between the translator and the text, translators should know how to use their minds, not only in a rational way, but also in an intuitive and creative way.¹³ Pagnouille believes that translators are expected to be creative, because texts, particularly literary texts, use language creatively.

Some¹⁴ believe that translation is the reader's interpretation. The concept Gadamer is referring to here is what is called the "hermeneutic circle". This concept refers to knowledge as the lived-experience. Lived-experience is what gives meaning to language and thought. A compelling factor in support of translation as a personal lived-experience is the continual renewal of translating traditional texts. If the goal of the translator were to capture the intentions of the text-producer, one translation of *The Iliad* would be sufficient proof. Instead, one finds new and different translations for almost every poetic or literary work.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that at the center of the translation process, there lives individual choices and the general world-view perceived by the translator. To him, words have personal perception and have different recognition. It is through his intuition, free will and personal experience that he can determine the way in which any two texts are culturally and linguistically approximated. The free will or the translator's freedom we refer to here, however, must be enjoyed by the serious translator rather than by any free translator. In this sense, we agree with Jin who makes a distinction between these two types of translators. Jin states that "the new freedom of the serious translator thrives only in so far as he uses it to tap the rich resources of the target text (TL) worthy for the production of the original."¹⁵

NOTES

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