

## The Effect of Cultural Element in Translating from English to Arabic or vice versa

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### Abstract

*This paper focuses on the effect of cultural element in translating from English to Arabic, and how two different culture could create difficulties for the translators. The researcher uses the descriptive methods of data analysis to identify these difficulties in translation from English to Arabic or vice versa. The researcher sets 15 expressions from Arabic to English or vice versa and which were given to the students, males and females who study translation. These expressions varied in its collocation, idioms, metaphors, proverbs, sayings and some peculiar to the environment and culture of the target language to be translated. Essentially, the researcher was focusing on the cultural content on both languages English and Arabic, plus the difficulties of finding the correct equivalent in the target language, in addition to the variety of spoken English or Arabic language which create difficulties in understanding the English or Arabic language culture.*

**Keywords:** cultural element, translation, Arabic, English

### INTRODUCTION

Culture plays a crucial role in translation domain, as languages spoken in different ways to deliver a certain message within the community who speak this language. The challenge comes when

transferring these messages from one language to another, considering the cultural elements in it, and delivering it without losing the source language which is the real meaning. According to Newmark (1988) translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message or statement in one language by the same message or statement in another language. Each exercise involves some kind of loss of meaning, due to number of factors. It provokes a continuous tension, dialectic, an argument based on the claims of each language. The basic loss is on a continuum between over-translation (increased details) and under-translation (increased generalization).

Translation is the mediation between the plurality of cultures and the unity of humanity... The astonishing phenomenon of translation is that it transfers the meaning of one language to another or of one culture to another, not making them identical, however but offering only an equivalent.... Translation is the phenomenon of equivalence without identity. In this it serves project of humanity, without breaking down the initial plurality. That is sign of humanity engendered by translation in the very flesh of plurality."

Notre Dame 'Philosophical Reviews', e-Journal, 2007.02.14

In 1990s the term Cultural translation has come to the field of translation, and scholars started to write more about this new term. This new term has gained global attention among translators and criticisms. It requires research and acquisition of specialized cultural knowledge about societies, peoples, nations and their languages by the aspiring translator besides ensuring proficiency in chosen language pairs. It needs deeper dive into similarities and differences of languages and culture even in the same language. The concept of the cultural theory today is growing more than ever before, as the world is getting smaller in terms of technological discoveries and globalization.

The distance between two cultures like English and Arabic are quite big, but this distance is shrinking as life goes on, due to the cultural exchange. Therefore, as a result of that, translator must use (cultural translation), that is when the source text contains an element or expression that is culturally unfamiliar or not existed to the target culture. For example, with the word camel, we all know that it means an animal, but it symbolizes a different meaning from Arabic culture to English culture. For the Arab, and throughout history, camels have also served as a status and symbol of wealth, in

addition to the endurance and patience. Camels were also used as a form of currency, to pay brides' dowries or the annual charity fee known as zakat. Camels could also be very profitable if they won camel races or beauty contests, as prizes included food, useful animals and other essentials. The camel symbolizes temperance, patience and perseverance as described in Arabic poetry. For the English culture camel is just an animal and sometime looked at as a stupid animal because of its long legs and neck, while the back looks like a mountain and cannot be rode without a saddle. Camels live in hot place like deserts and Britain is not its place that is why it is not part of the English culture. It is the same for the owl in the Arabi culture, it represents pessimism and destruction where it represents wisdom and agriculture in the western culture.

(Nida1964: 13) points out that the role of the translator is to facilitate the transfer of message, meaning and cultural elements from one language into another and create an equivalent response from the receivers. The message in the source language is embedded a cultural context and has to be transferred to the target language.

(Katan 1999/2004; Bassnett and Lefevere 1990) have mentioned the relationship between culture and translation which has recently increased in the past and it's beneficial to raise the awareness of the need to develop human communication and the translation of texts across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Within the wide range of different disciplines, literary translation can reflect the interrelationship of culture, ideology and communication. Maybe Nida is confirming and stressing on the cultural element more than the linguistic one.

Al-Darawish (1983) has introduced the features of four main difficulties in any translation as follow:

- a) No two languages have exactly identical phonological, Morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic features.
- b) Languages differ in terms of sentence arrangement.
- c) A translator is forced to front or move backward certain items, and.
- d) The impossibility for a translator to completely master two languages; however, this problem can be resolved through specialized scientific committees.

**Statement of the problem:**

This study attempts to explain the relationship between the cultural element and translation, and how closely are related to help finding the correct equivalent in the target language. It also looking out for the students' translation strategies to overcome the difficulties, in addition to the required skills to accuracy and delivering the message fully.

The lack of knowledge of the language literature which contains the cultural element, make it impossible for the translator to find right replacement and equivalent when translating, even if these cultural contents were exist in the translator's mother tongue language.

**Objective of the study:**

This study aiming to find a practical approach for the problem of the meaning losses occurs during the English Arabic translation process due to the cultural differences of the English language and the Arabic language. The objectives of the study mainly go in an investigation to answer these questions:

- a) What are main difficulties in translation generally?
- b) How the cultural element affects the translation from English to Arabic or vice versa?
- c) How could these problems and difficulties be addressed and solved?
- d) To what extent, solving these problems could promote English Arabic translation?

**Significance of the study:**

Catford has brought the term untranslatability to the surface of the translation field, as he mentioned it on his book *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965) because of interculturality that invaded the world in which it affects the translated texts. Untranslatability, exists because of the inevitable loss in meaning due to cultural differences in language especially if these languages belong to different language families. Catford has explained two kinds of untranslatability, linguistic untranslatability and cultural untranslatability. Catford explained when we say culturally untranslatability it means there are certain situations in which the meaning of the texts or some words in source text are translated wrongly into the translated text due to lack

of knowledge of the culture when text was translated. This study gives guidelines to the role of the translator (as a mediation) and involvement to professionally approach as English has regularly become part of Sudan's education and communication. Therefore, this huge gap of Arabic\ English language translation in terms of culture must be filled professionally. The results of the study will also help the students to understand the notion of cultural translation and be able to find better strategies in translating any such culture-specific concept relates to social customs, religious belief or political language.

### **Literature Review**

For some years, after I have finished my master degree in translation and spent some time in translation career. I have been wondering whether translation is a science or theory and what are the barrier of delivering the exact or the closest meaning to the original text. That is was before I add more efforts in comparison of theories, the books of translation, methods and strategies. I found out that it has to do with the two-language's culture. Of course, the linguistic element is important but the cultural one is vital.

There have been some attempts to feature a theory or principles of translation. Scholars like Cowley who has set a simple approach of translation, it was very free and he calls it 'imitation' which is forsaking words and sense to create new invention and beauty of translation. But Cowley's theory was criticized by an English poet and translator, John Dryden, whose description of the translation process was shown clearly into the translation theory and practice in the preface to his translation of Ovid's Epistles in 1680. Dryden (1680/1992: 17) reduces all translation to three categories:

- a) Metaphrase: 'word by word and line by line' translation, which corresponds to literal translation.
- b) Paraphrase: 'translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense', this involves changing whole phrases and more or less corresponds to faithful or sense-for-sense translation.
- c) Imitation: 'forsaking' both words and sense; this corresponds to Cowley's very free translation and is more or less adaptation.

Other scholars like Dolet stated five principles in translation stressing on the sense of the original text and the perfect knowledge of both languages the SL and TL. The principles as follows:

1. The translator must perfectly understand the sense and material of the original author, although translator should feel free to clarify obscurities.
2. The translator should have a perfect knowledge of both SL and TL, so as not to lessen the majesty of the language.
3. The translator should avoid word-for-word renderings.
4. The translator should avoid Latinate and unusual forms.
5. The translator should assemble and liaise words eloquently to avoid clumsiness.

Schleiermacher's prefers to move the reader towards the writer, by means giving the reader the same impression and sense of the original language. To fulfil this, the translator must adopt an alienating as opposed to naturalizing method of translation, orienting himself or herself by the language and content of the ST. He or she must valorize the foreign and transfer that into the TL. In another word, translating in such way depends on the knowledge of the translator of the language he/she translated to.

‘A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator’ Benjamin 1969/2000: 21

Newmark thinks that translation it is neither a theory nor a science, but the body of knowledge that we have and have still to acquire about the process of translating, its main concern is to determine appropriate translation methods for the widest possible range of texts or text categories. Newmark states the importance of communicative translation, he stresses on the communicative and semantic of translation which reflects Newmark's main contribution to general translation theory.

Here is one example of cultural translation:

Grandpa Simpson's newly found lover, Zelda, has deserted grandpa and traveled to Branson Missouri with her new boyfriend. Grandpa, hoping to win Zelda back, is trying frantically to find her. The Simpson family is trying to find grandpa. They have driven hundreds of miles and have now arrived at what seems to be Branson, Missouri.

HOMER: [Stepping out of the bus] Hello Branson, Missouri!

PASSER-BY: This is Bronson, Missouri.

The Simpson.

We have a situation here where the translator might think that Bronson, Missouri is a name of a person as HOMER said: Hello Bronson Missouri, because there is no clear-cut difference between the name of the city and the name of a person in English, unless the translator has a deep knowledge of the language he\she translating from or to.

## Methodology

In this study, the researcher has collected the data qualitatively and analyzed it, using frequencies and percentages, to show the result statistically. The researcher had some texts examples varied in its aspects (social, religious and political) these texts were the criteria in which the researcher was seeing how learners are showing their skills and knowledge in translating these texts. The researcher also has obtained a deeper understanding of individual participants, in addition to their perspectives and opinions.

## Findings

- Some expressions with specific- cultural element need to be acquainted in order to be transferred to another language, and this can be achieved by understanding both culture of the ST and TT. "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression" Peter Newmark,1988.
- Political texts and comedy create a high level of difficulties, because of the cultural content and the satire aspect of the language in it. Therefore, translator must be extra careful in such texts.
- The linguistic element does not constitute obstacle in translation as much as the cultural element.

## **Recommendations**

- The researcher recommends that the theory of the cultural translation, to be introduced more fully and taught in Arab universities as long as translation deals with two languages differ in culture.
- Arab universities are recommended to include in their program the translation strategies, as it gives learners the chance to use them accordingly.
- Directing the students through the teachers of translation to focus more on the language and literature and improving their listening and speaking skills in both languages English and Arabic.

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