

## TEXT BETRAYAL VERSUS CULTURAL LOYALTY: EMPLOYED STRATEGIES IN TRANSLATING ARABIC POETIC TEXT INTO ENGLISH

BY

**Prof. Ahmad M Abd Al-Salam<sup>1\*</sup>, Aya Awad Shehata Mabrouk<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>\*Professor of English Language and Literature Faculty of Arts- Fayoum University-Egypt  
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<sup>2</sup>English Language Instructor Faculty of Arts- Fayoum University-Egypt

**\*Corresponding Author :**

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**Abstract**

*Translating Arabic poetry into English or any European or (anti-Semitic) language constitutes an essential burden on the translator due to their common origins that are similar in terms of rhetorical uses (e.g., synecdoche, metaphor, simile, euphemism, and the most important of all, similarity in grammatical, morphological and derivational linguistic rules). In the case of rendering Arabic poetry into English, the gap is vast and this requires a double effort, wider knowledge, and a high-level culture awareness on part of the translator. More importantly, the translator has to be equipped with an abundant knowledge of the means of influence that fall within the circle of rhetoric methods that may be unique to both Arabic and English languages. That is what we called Text Betrayal Versus Cultural Loyalty.*

**Keywords:** Cultural loyalty, rendering poetry, rhetorical uses, text betrayal

## 1. Introduction

Every time the issue of translation is raised, a lot of advantages that the translator possesses, including (professional honesty), are discussed. There are many views that are repeatedly cited to denote the inevitable failure while trying to translate poetry. Al-Jahiz said: "Poetry cannot be translated, and it is not permissible for it to be transmitted, and when, its goodness and wonderment has gone" also the American poet Robert Frost said: "Poetry is what is lost in translation." The poet and critic Muhammad al-Ali likens poetry to a bottle that cannot be broken, and says: Translation is a breaking of poetry. That is the implied risk of translator's not abiding by the rules and sometimes follows his own whims. In this respect, some translators tend to insert what they want between the lines, and there are those who overturn the meaning. Also, the translator's culture sometimes prevails over the writer's culture. On the other hand, many believe that translation is a moral profession and that the process of transmitting texts should be as it is, not as the translator desires, and that some translators manipulate texts, either out of ignorance or lack of experience.

The translator's betrayal of the text is a lie or propaganda and there is no traitorous translator. The translator tries his best to make his translation acceptable to the readers who provide them with a translation worthy of the work he translates in their mother tongue. The so-called betrayal perhaps appears when the translator resorts using a language far from the essence of the original text, Either in poetry or in novel for example, he is trying to translate the text into a culture of people who can approach it through their daily or historical culture.

There is absolutely no betrayal in translation unless the translator tries to distort the deep meaning of the text and carry it more than he can.

In the case of translating poetry, there are some translation theorists who believe that the poetic meters and rhythms in the poem should be converted to their equivalents, but the prevailing and predominant opinion states that this process is difficult to the point of impossibility in many cases, this is particularly evident in the case of metered and rhymed poetry. It is precisely for this reason that Al-Jahiz says in (Book of Animals): "...and poetry cannot be translated and it is not permissible for it to transmit." Therefore, we find that insisting on the search for an equivalence in the level of meter and rhyme is absurd. If the translator succeeds in reaching it in some lines and verses, he will certainly not succeed in others. In fact, the pursuit of meter and rhyme will lead to the sacrifice of appropriate images and words because they considered the deep meanings that constitute the essence and soul of the poem. It is more useful for the translator to try as much as possible to preserve some internal and external musical rhythm through the choice of words, phrases and rhyme, if they come spontaneously and without imposing or intrusive on the translated text. The translator should give most of his attention on generating a text that has a similar emotional impact on the reader in a creative poetic language which is closer to free verse or poetic prose. The ideal translator of poetry or otherwise according to Al-Jahiz should be as follows: "لا بد للترجمان من أن يكون بيانه في نفس الترجمة، في وزن علمه في نفس المعرفة، وينبغي أن يكون أعلم الناس باللغة المنقولة والمنقول إليها، حتى يكون فيهما سواء وغاية. ومتنى وجذناء أيضا قد تكلم بلسانين، علمنا أنه قد أدخل الضيم عليهما، لأن كل واحدة من اللغتين تجذب الأخرى وتأخذ منها، وتعتبرض عليها. وكيف يكون تمكن اللسان منها مجتمعين فيه، كتمكنه إذا انفرد بالواحدة، وإنما له قوة واحدة، فإن تكلم بلغة واحدة استفرغت تلك القوة عليهما، وكذلك إن تكلم بأكثر من لغتين، وعلى حساب ذلك تكون الترجمة لجميع اللغات. وكلما كان الباب من العلم أسرع وأضيق، والعلماء به أقل، كان أشد على المترجم، وأجد أن يخطئ فيه. ولن تجد البتة مترجمًا يفي بواحد من هؤلاء العلماء".

Among the examples that I found illustrating the difficulty of translating rhymed and metered poetry appears in the following verses of the Egyptian poet Mahmoud Abu Al-Wafa from his poem (ما هو الحب) (What is love?), in which he says:

لِيْتْ شِعْرِيْ ما هُوَ الْحُبُّ  
وَمَنْ أَنْشَأْ سِحْرَهُ

مَنْ هُوَ السَّحَّارُ هَذِهِ  
مَنْ رَمَى فِي الْأَرْضِ بَذْرَهُ

إِنَّهُ فِي كُلِّ عَوْدٍ  
أَخْضَرٌ أَوْدَعَ جَمَرَهُ

يَا لَهُ مَنْ سَاجَرَ فِي  
جَفَنِهِ خَبَّأَ مَكْرَهَهُ

فَإِذَا هُمْ يَأْمُرُ  
أَدْرِكُ الْأَمْرَ بِنَظَرِهِ

وَإِذَا افْتَادَ أَسِيرًا  
عَشْقُ الْمَأْسُورِ أَسْرَهُ

قَسَمًاً أَتَرْكَهُ الْيَوْمَ  
مَأْوَى أَهْتَكَ سَرَهُ

In translating these lines, the translator Arthur Arberry of Cambridge University renders them into the following lines:

Would I knew what love may be,  
Who devised this wizardry

Or what wizard, shrewd indeed,  
 Cast upon the earth his seed!  
 In each green and sappy bough,  
 He has made Love's brand to glow.  
 See, how the magician is wise  
 Hides his magic in Love's eyes,  
 That a single glance may gain  
 Whatsoe'er he would attain,  
 Whatsoe'er his captives be  
 Cherish their captivity.  
 I'll forsake him now, I swear-  
 Or his secret I'll declare!

In the previous translation, the translator has preferred to convey the musical effect of the lines by preserving the rhyme between each two halves, while it is one rhyme in the Arabic verses. It also conveyed the rhythm by using the seven-syllable activation against the eight syllables in the Arabic text. However, the translator neglected the interrogative construction method in the first line, which is an interrogative method intended to be exclamation, and perhaps that is the reason for the translator's omission to put a question mark at the end of the second line. But in both cases, he prefers to put an exclamation point or a question instead of the comma. In the seventh line of the translation, he added the tone of the speech to the reader, asking him to look closely, saying to him: "See how the wise magician (instead of the cunning) hides love in his eyes and then casts his magic if he decides with just a look.

The truth is that when we read the Arabic verses and then the English lines, we realize that there is a clear difference in receiving and communicating the meanings in addition to the difference in form. Yet, regardless of these differences, the foreign reader will undoubtedly find pleasure in reading these lines that carry the noble Arab romantic spirit and tenderness that is completely different from the foreign romantic feeling. This in my opinion is the point, as the foreign reader does not harm the difference in aesthetics in language and form, and some variations in interpretation, as long as he enjoys a text that has a high degree of taste and creativity when compared to English poetry, a text that preserves the essence of the Arabic text despite the acceptable difference in the meanings of the words.

I believed that attaching the trait of betrayal in translation to those who deviate from honesty towards the text, since honesty towards the text is an inevitable condition for the success of the translation and the translator, and without it the translator would be a liar and a traitor because he conveys something other than the truth.

We can say that the liar in conveying the truth is equal to the traitor who deviates from the honesty hanging around his neck towards the text, which makes the translator's task difficult, sensitive and sometimes critical, a task that requires the translator to be capable in his work to bear the weight of honesty or not.

The translator can process some texts according to the need and the environment, but the limits are very narrow, noting that even the pornographic details may have a certain value, and as a result, the text manipulation becomes like manipulating the poem that collapses the rhyme and meter as soon as we change one letter.

Translation, as Edmond Cary says, is one of the essential means of communication based on cultural commonality and one of the greatest ways of intersection of cultures. That the translation theory accommodates the external linguistic or parallel linguistic perspective. This view results in central trends in the cultural perception of translation, the most important of which is that the cultural factor is of great importance in translation, because the transfer of values and customs to the culture of reception is crucial to the success or failure of translation. This transfer is subject to contextual and intertextual constraints related to the original language and culture as well as to the target language and culture.

### To what extent can culture be translated?

This question is related to two issues: The first is the cultural dimension, since the subject of translation is not exclusively related to the linguistic expression, but rather to the text in its dynamism and in its communicative context. The second is the discourse concerned in most of the cultural dimension with the literary discourse that carries a strong cultural load. This cultural load preoccupies the minds of translation scholars and those who interested in the specificity of each language in the installation and transmission of its perspective on the culture that is reflected and represented.

A simple example of the subtlety of the differences between cultures and the consequent fundamental difference in expression, like an expression which can be seen commonly used in the Arab culture to express satisfaction, which is the phrase (أنا لست صدري) (it made me happy). In comparison, we find that the French who live in a cold geographical and natural environment does not use this expression to express his feeling of contentment and comfort, but rather reflecting it, saying (أنا سعيد) (I am happy). If the translator encounters an expression of this kind, he must come up with what is equivalent to it in meaning and effect, and this does not come unless he has experienced its pragmatic use in different languages.

Here I am stopped by the opinion of some translators who lack the transparency of poets and the spirit of the artist. They go to a very biased direction against the translation of poetry and consider poetry as it is not translated because it loses all its aesthetics and privacy in transferring from its original language to any other language, the same degree of creativity and influence as the original text. An example of this is the translation made by the German Wilhelm Schlegel between 1797 and 1810 when he translated seven plays of Shakespeare into German and it was one of the most successful translations ever. It was even clearer than the original texts that are known as it contains some vague and incomprehensible phrases due to typographical errors made by the print workers who first printed it. But the German translation was clear and enjoyable to read, and the translator did not need to add the footnotes and comments that filled the original play.

In the case of translation from Arabic to English, some of the expressive and aesthetic rhetorical phenomena in the Arabic language seem familiar to the Arab reader due to his natural understanding of them and the overtones they contain, but they are mostly strange and unpalatable to the foreign reader. For example, when we read verses in which a poet describes the gait of his beloved with the gait of a doe, and her eyes are (the eyes of the Oryx or the Reem), this metaphor or simile is understood by the Arab reader because it is related to his environment and his way of thinking, as well as being linked to the poetic purpose known in Arabic poetry, which is the kinship and virginal spinning. The analogy has countless images and connotations for the knowledgeable reader. As for the foreign reader, what would his reaction be if the rhetorical picture was translated literally and without adding an explanation or clarification? Flirting with the eyes is not what we find in foreign poetry in general. Therefore, the translator must search for a word that brings the image closer to the reader's mind as much as possible, and may change the word (Al-Maha), which is a female antelope, to make it a deer! Will that solve the problem anyway?

Omar bin Abi Rabia says:

ولها من الريم عيناه ولفتته  
ونجوة السباقة المختال إذ صهلا

In another poem, he describes the gait of beautiful women as that of a wild cow:

بيضاً جساناً خرائد قطفاً  
يمشين هوناً كمشية البقر

Does the translator change some of these words to suit the taste of the foreign reader, or does he have to be honest and add the explanation and footnotes?

There is a consensus, then, among the public of linguists, cultural anthropologists and translation scholars that mastering the language with its lexicon and grammar is not enough, because the cultural background provides all the instructions and positions that facilitate the linguistic act. The translator has to call upon his extralinguistic knowledge in order for the reader of the translated text to have the same effects that were produced on the readers of the original text.

Translation is a cultural dialogue par excellence. This is the central lesson championed by the great translators and translation theorists. It is an essential factor in the translation act because the success or failure of translation depends on the transmission of the values of the reception culture. Here the deep concept of the context intervenes with the temporal and spatial framework in which the original text appeared and to which it will go. In other words, culture influences the reception of each translation act.

### **Is translation a form of interpretation, and is interpretation a form of translation?**

Umberto Eco approaches this issue through copious details and examples. First, he presents Jakobson's perspective on translation and divides it into three types:

1. Interlingual translation, which occurs when a text is transferred from one language to another.
2. Intersémiose translation, in which we find an interpretation of linguistic signs by means of a system of non-linguistic signs (when we translate a book into a movie or a story into a ballet). Jacobson also calls this translation a transmutation.
3. Interlinguale or reformulation, which is the interpretation of linguistic signs by other signs of the same language (a change of scale in a melody).

In the context of these divisions, Eco notes that Jacobson used the term 'interpretation', defining translation of its types. Says:

"If the three kinds of translation are interpretations, does not Jacobson want to say that the kinds of translation are three kinds of interpretation, and that translation is therefore a kind of interpretation?" (p. 282)

He provides many details and analyzes related to this position and refers to Peirce and his theory of interpretation, and indicates in the context of his disclosure of the backgrounds that:

It should be noted that Heidegger in 1943 declared the correspondence between translation and interpretation. However, Umberto Eco, in presenting divisions other than what Jacobson presented, concludes with an opinion that does not go completely in the direction of the previous hypotheses, which is that "the world of interpretation is wider than the world of translation in terms of meaning" (p.292), which requires a lot of discussion and reflection.

### **Translation and Cultural Background**

Although the researcher initially referred to the centrality of the cultural dimension in translation, opinions differed greatly in this regard, and even reached the point of denying the supposed relationship between language and reference as the world of things that language speaks of, and calling for not paying attention to reference but to the internal structure of language. In this respect Davidson says: The translation book is just a way of passing from the sentences of one language to the sentences of another language, and we cannot infer from it anything about the relationships between words and things. Surely we know, or think we know, what the words of our language refer to, but this is information (news) not contained in any translation book. Translation is a purely synthetic concept. Reference questions are not asked in the installation and are not decided upon. (...) The reference does not play any essential role in explaining the relationship between language and reality.

Davidson's conception is based on backgrounds that isolate language from its surroundings. Translation is a conceptual activity that cannot deny its belonging to the world and world perceptions, and therefore it cannot be a purely synthetic concept.

The discussion in its depth is related to the issue of reference, an issue that was widely debated during the structural stage and beyond. What is worth noting in the context of the field of translation is that the concept of reference is closely related to the cultural perspective of the language and the thought that it undertakes to transmit, promote and question:

We never talk about the external world as it is, but we always talk about the world from a cultural perspective, that is, we talk about specifications and characteristics built by the conceptual system that the observer adopts. Indeed, even at the level of elementary perceptions, concepts frame the picture of the external world. The issue of reference and this situation is closely related to translation and constitutes alongside it a great unity of thought that is transmitted through and through languages and through the transition between them:

The translation is a work with two eyes: an eye that does not separate from the text to avoid slipping, and an eye that turns to the reference trying to catch it despite its mercury property. The discussion about the reference and the cultural dimension in translation puts us directly in the face of the problem of interpretation, a confrontation that brings back to the debate the issue of congruence in the realization of meaning between two languages. The difference of cultures must be reflected in its primary carrier, which is language.

It is the hypothesis advanced by Sapir and Whorf that language is related to them with the experience of the human group in all aspects of life. "Language is not only an instrument of expression but an organizing device that frames the experience of the human group. Framing would not have been possible if there was no capacity to adapt information around the world. Language imposes classification, organization and reduction on the components of the world that it crystallizes and builds and imposes on the minds that circulate it, which is what linguists overlook, because every language cuts the world of its own. What a person perceives in one language differs from what a person perceives as belonging to another language. Perception itself is to the extent that a person is prepared for it, and language is an essential element in the formation of this preparation. Therefore, in order to understand the language of a people, we must approach the philosophy of those people in life.

### **Context centralization**

From all of the above, it becomes clear that we indirectly approach the role of context in understanding and interpretation. They are the two basic elements in measuring the quality of translation and its suitability to the requirements of the reference and linguistic reality that it conveys, as well as its suitability to the language that will accommodate this reality. When we talk about context in translation, we are faced with two basic operations of operation: signification and meaning. The meaning of the saying is not equivalent to the sum of the meanings that include the entire rhetorical process. The meaning is part of the content that the saying discloses, which remains constant independent of the contexts and situations in which the discourse is broadcast and received. The signified belongs to the saying as the realization of a semantic system, that is, the system of the minimum units of meaning. In contrast, meaning escapes from the inventory and from the semantic description, because it is part of the content associated with contexts and situations, and it is infinitely variable according to the data of these contexts and situations. The meaning in its relation to the elements external to the linguistic is a verbal act separate from the language.

The context in translation is connected to the meaning that represents the process of perpetual motion that is established over the course of the discourse. What gives life meaning then?

This question is related to identifying the factors that underpin the translator's path towards understanding the original message, and thus constructing a translation in which the meaning is based on the appropriate context. These factors are determined in:

1. the immediate verbal context
2. the extended verbal context
3. the context of the event or situation.

These three factors or levels place us in the depth of the development of meaning in the discourse, starting from a dynamic process that begins with zero degree corresponding to the first words in the discourse, and gradually begins to expand until the meaning is completed within its broad discursive context.

The direct verbal context is related to the ability of direct memory, that is, the simultaneous presence of the sum of the words in the memory.

The study of the direct verbal context explains to us that the multiplicity of meaning in the word is a state of language and not a verbal act. Every word isolated out of context represents a group of supposed meanings without any real meaning. As soon as the utterance is implanted in a direct context, the plurality rises and the appropriate acceptance is established within the compact linguistic forms.

As for the extended verbal context, unlike the first, it is the dynamic sum of the information conveyed by the course of the speech to the speaker. It is a context that magnifies as the pronunciation position expands, and with this contextual amplification, the reader succeeds in removing ambiguities in the text's sentences and constructing the following meanings.

If we combine the two contexts, we reach basic conclusions regarding the connection with the translation situation and the role of the translator, the most important of which is how we move from a limited context to a dynamic one that determines the value of the translated text in its final form. We should not forget here that the linguistic context is not at all isolated from the cultural context of the text.

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### المستخلص

يُعد الشعر كلام منظوم له من الخصائص ما يميزه عن كل ما عاده من أشكال أدبية، فهو زاخر بالبلاغة والصور والرموز والإشارات النفسية والثقافية والبيئية، بالإضافة إلى الواقع الموسيقي والأسلوب اللغوي والبنيوي الخاص الذي يميز كل شاعر عن غيره. وكما هو معروف يحق للشاعر ملا يحق لغيره في العدول بقصيده عن كل ما هو مأثور في الأدب، ويحق له أن يكسر بعض القواعد اللغوية واللفظية فيخلق أشكالاً جديدة منها لم يسبقها إليها أحد من قبل. وتلك أمور ذات طابع شخصي تفرض نفسها على القصيدة وتؤثر في قوتها وعلتها الخطابية وأثرها على المتلقي القاري. ولذلك فقد تُعجب القصيدة بعض القراء بينما ينفر منها البعض، وقد تترك أثراً جميلاً عند البعض، في حين لا تحرك ساكناً على الشعرا عومماً، فرب قائل أفضّل الشاعر الغلاني ولا يعجبني الشاعر الغلاني. والأسباب ليست واضحة ولا محددة بل هي محض شخصية وغير منطقية في كثير من الأحيان. ولهذا فإن المترجم لأي قصيدة يجب أن يحب تلك القصيدة لكي يتمكن من إدراك معانيها وأثارها الفكرية والنفسية، ومن ثم يستطيع أن "يقصص شخصية الشاعر المؤلف لها والهروب بها إلى ناصية الشعرية باللغة المترجم إليها، وعندئذ ستكون درجة الإبداع أكبر وأعمق وأضخم وقد نرى بعض أنفاس وأثار الشاعر المترجم على النص المترجم.

لقد كان أمبرتو إيكو واضحاً من خلال تقديم أمثلة تنتهي بنا إلى أن الخيانة الظاهرة (الترجمة غير الحرافية) هي في نهاية الأمر وفاء للنص. يمكن ما ينبغي أن تنهج الترجمة في عدم التعبير عن الكلمة بكلمة أخرى بل عن المعنى بمعنى وعن العالم آخر. إن مفهوم الوفاء – يقول إيكو- يندرج كذلك ضمن وضعية افتتاح بان الترجمة هي أحد أشكال التأويل وأن غايتها يجب أن تكون دائمة، مع انطلاقها من مشاعر القاري وثقافته، لا أقول نقل قصد المؤلف، بل قصد النص، أي ما يقوله النص أو يوحى به باعتبار اللغة التي كتب فيها والسياق الثقافي الذي نشأ فيه.

**الكلمات المفتاحية: أمبرتو إيكو – الوفاء للنص – خيانة الثقافة – ثقافة المترجم**