

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The originality of the foreign text is thus compromised by the post-structuralist concept of textuality. Neither the foreign text nor the translation is an original semantic unity; both are derivative and heterogeneous, consisting of diverse linguistic and cultural materials which destabilise the work of signification, making meaning plural and differential, exceeding and possibly conflicting with the intentions of the foreign writer and translator.

Lawrence Venuti (1992, p. 7)

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Translation is a task characterised by various difficulties. Some of these difficulties are ascribed to the linguistic gaps between the two languages of translation: the SL, the language we translate from and the TL, the language we translate into. Most of the translation difficulties, however, are attributable to cultural discrepancies and disparities between any two languages. Even when any two cultures involved in any translation process are not distant, González (2004) comments on the difficulty in decoding cultural signs as they can be “more problematic for the translator than semantic or syntactic difficulties” (p. 1), which has produced “the most far-reaching misunderstanding among readers” (Nida & Reyburn, 1981, p. 2).

Nevertheless, translation has always been a means of communication and interaction between languages and cultures. Had there been no translation, several cultures could not have flourished. In fact, some cultures have gained momentum through translation, for instance, Kelly (1979) states that Western Europe “owes its civilization to translators” (p. 1). In the same way, Arabs owe their civilisation to the huge works of Greeks they had translated.

Arabs’ meticulous efforts were culminated in Spain, through which their translated works and even their own productions were transferred worldwide. Arabic language was “the intellectual and scientific language of the entire scholastic world”

(Sallaoum & Peters, 1996, p. x). Therefore, it would be fair to assume that translation contributes a lot to the enrichment of several cultures.

It should be borne in mind that, a breakdown in communication may occur when translating across cultures. In reality, Snell-Hornby (1988) affirms the translatability of any text “when it is embedded in its own specific culture, and with the distance that separates the cultural backgrounds of the ST and target audience in terms of time and place” (p. 41).

Furthermore, translators are prone to encounter variegated difficulties when translating unrelated languages. The greater the linguistic and cultural gaps, the more problems are expected to be present in the course of translation. The fewer the differences, the less the difficulty will be. Arabic and English have little similarity in terms of linguistic systems and cultural roots. The former is a Semitic Language, whereas the latter is an Indo-European Language. Thus, according to Shunnaq (1993, pp. 89-98) it is reasonable to expect some problems owing to the numerous differences between those languages and cultures.

Therefore, it would be possible to say that cultural discrepancies and disparities between two languages can be a heavy burden on translators, noting a possible effect on the intercultural communication flow. Hatim and Mason (1990) briefly state that, “there is sufficient shared experience even between users of languages, which are culturally remote from each other to make translatability a tenable proposition” (p. 105). This research, however, aims at highlighting some of the translation problems the translators encounter during the translation of unrelated languages, such as Arabic and English.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Translation has been recognised as an important genre of communication. It plays a great role in breaking down the barriers between two different linguistic cultures, and

enables harmony and mutual understanding. The absence of such understanding would pose problems in rendering the intended meaning from one language to another. The translation process should, therefore, ensure that the translated text presents the key elements of the ST by incorporating it in new product to produce the same effect as was intended by the ST. The problem with translation lies in its complexity. Schulte, for instance, states that:

Translators do not engage in the mere transplantation of words [...] their interpretive acts deal with the exploration of situations that are constituted by an intense interaction of linguistic, psychological, anthropological and cultural phenomena. (1987, pp. 1-2)

This accentuates the fact that translation is not a mere transference of verbal signs, but involves higher levels of semantic, textual and situational contexts, and other extra-linguistic factors. Holmes' (1988) evaluation of the current translation theories shows that "it is still not very powerful in the sense that it does not explain the phenomena to extent that we should like to it" (p. 97). The difficulty in translation process can be understood by comparing the reading process in both the ST and the translated text. In reading the ST, there is a direct interaction between the SL author, the text and the source readers. In translation, however, the process is indirect and reveals a sequence of interdependent relationships between: (1) the translator and the source author; (2) the translator and the ST; and (3) the translator and his target audience.

In line with Holmes' (1988, p. 86) model of literary translation, he states that the translation of any text takes place on two planes: (1) a serial plane where one translates sentence by sentence; and (2) a structural plane where one starts with abstracting a mental conception of the ST and use this mental conception as testing each sentence when creating new translated texts. He (1988, p. 86) drew three-map artefacts that help translators in the process of literary translation: (A) the **linguistic artefact** (i.e.,

contextual information); (B) the **literary artefact** (i.e., intertextual information); and (C) the **socio-cultural artefact** (i.e., situational information).

The role of Semiotics in translation, on the other hand, was acknowledged by many translation researchers in earlier stages. However, the actual application to translation is rather a recent phenomenon. Nida (1964) acknowledges the role of semiotics in his approach to translation saying that:

Language consists of more than the meaning of the symbols and the combination of symbols; it is essentially a code in operation, or, in other words, a code functioning for a specific purpose or purposes. Thus we must analyze the transmission of a message in terms of dynamic dimension. This dimension is especially important for translation, since the production of equivalent messages is a process, not merely of matching parts of utterances, but also of reproducing the total dynamic character of the communication. Without both elements the results can scarcely be regarded, in any realistic sense, as equivalent. (p. 120)

Neubert and Shreve (1992) also note the connection between semiotics and translation which outlines the possibilities of language and restrains it from moving away from its signifier, by stating that “in text comprehension, the receiver builds a model of what the linguistic signs are supposed to mean” (p. 48). In general, the semiotic approach views translation as a semiosis process that deals with the interpretation of verbal signs.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims at pursuing the following objectives:

1. to draw examples of cultural signs and study these examples in the translation of the chosen novel;
2. to decide whether the translation is Source-Oriented or Target-Oriented; and
3. to examine the strategies employed in translating cultural signs and the extent to which they hamper communicative and affect cross-culture transfer of inter-semiotics values between two particular cultures.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions posed in this study are:

1. How are Arab cultural signs constructed in Mahfouz's novel, *The Harafish*?
2. To what extent does the translator of Mahfouz's novel, *The Harafish*, deviate from the original text?
3. What strategies are employed by the translator of Mahfouz's novel, *The Harafish*, in translating Arab cultural signs?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There have been major criticisms on the Arab writers' style when writing in English (Sa'adeddin, 1998). In particular, Arab writers carry out such devices as repetition, exaggeration, connectives, and many others (which are the main characteristics of Arabic writing style) onto the English text (whose brevity is the main feature). In recent times, however, a major shift has taken place in attempting to analyse the problem. Holes (1984) suggests that the research's focal point is to develop an approach that involves "recognizing and treating separately, levels of Arabic inference, with the emphasis on linguistic systems which operate at a textual level" (p. 228). As a result, this study is hoped to enrich the research of Arabic language and to eliminate any misconceptions either about the Arabic language, or the Arab culture. In this sense, it is hoped to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps between the two distance codes.

This study approaches the process of translation from linguistic and cultural perspectives. In general, recent studies have been dealing with translation within linguistics framework. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, few studies dealt with the Arabic literature translation from a purely semiotic perspective.

Finally, this study is particularly significant to readers and researchers who are non-native speakers of Arabic. It is also directed towards target readers who are

unfamiliar with the Arabic language and Arab culture. Hence, it is hoped they will have a better appreciation of the aesthetic values of Arabic literature; and they will learn more about the beliefs, attitudes and ways of thinking of the Arabs. In general, the study is hoped to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and to highlight the differences between two linguistic codes (Arabic and English) and their cultural association.

1.6 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The present study will consist of the following chapters:

CHAPTER (1): INTRODUCTION – This chapter discusses research problems, objectives, research questions and significance of the study.

CHAPTER (2): REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE – This chapter is on the review of pertinent literature on translation from linguistic, cultural, and semiotic perspectives.

CHAPTER (3): THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY – This chapter discusses some theoretical issues relevant to translation methods and strategies that are pivotal to translation activity. It also presents a hypothetical conglomeration of perspective and descriptive approaches to translation, with a view to pinning down the intricacies of the translation of cultural signs.

CHAPTER (4): TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL SIGNS – This chapter discusses various examples on cultural signs and their translation into English.

CHAPTER (5): RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – This chapter provides summary of research findings and recommendations for further studies.