

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Norms, rules and appropriateness conditions are liable to change. Translations made at different times therefore tend to be made under different conditions and turn out differently, not because they are good or bad, but because they have been produced to satisfy different demands. It cannot be stressed enough that the production of different translation at different times does not point any 'betrayal' of absolute standards, but rather to the absence ... of any such standards.

Lefevere & Bassnett (1990, p. 5)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The major concern of this research is to study some of the problems translators may encounter in pursuit of optimal translation for Arab cultural signs. This study is also intended to enrich the research carried out so far in the field of translation in general, and that on Arabic language research in particular. It is intended to explain the nature and causes of problems encountered during the process of translation in order to minimise any misconceptions about Arabic language and Arab culture.

5.2 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Translation was viewed by cultural translation researchers (Toury, 1985) as a TL oriented process. The norms of the target culture were taken into account by those researchers and they highlighted that the appropriateness of these norms must be considered. Equivalence, on the other hand, was viewed by literary translation researchers (Holmes, 1994 & Hickey, 1998), as the realisation of: (1) **Contextual Information** (the relation between features of the text and the linguistic continuum); (2) **Intertextual Information** (the relation between features of the text and the literary continuum); and (3) **Situational Information** (the relation between features of the text and the socio-cultural continuum). For translation to be communicatively successful, it

must engage target readers in the text and create an effect similar to the experienced by the source readers.

The analysis of translation shows that the features reflected in the genre of Arabic novel posed difficulties both on the linguistic level and cultural level. On the linguistic level, translation adapted the ST in order to render an intelligible text to target reader. This is evident in the translator's use of paraphrasing, transliterating, and literal translation. From linguistic perspective, translation transferred information only on the surface level. This caused gaps in the aesthetic characteristics of the source-author, and the literary style of dramatisation. Translation also ignored the semantic components and pragmatic forces of the ST. Therefore, it failed to provide target readers with the background knowledge essential to the decoding of SL situations.

On the cultural level, translation caused only some gaps on the surface level, but mostly on the deep level. This caused a gap in the source-culture attitudes, and eliminated the identity of the source author. In particular, translation resulted in the loss of connotations and concealed cultural information, which represent the realities through which the source author views the world. Translation, therefore, denied target readers the joy of viewing the world from different perspectives. In this sense, translation widened the distance between the two different cultures in question.

The use of Toury's terms adequacy and acceptability on one hand, and Hatim and Mason's Appealing Model to semiotic translation on the other hand, could be useful in handling cultural signs. In a sense, the combination can bring about a kind of translation that goes in harmony with the norms of the TL or SL, a translation caters for the signs within and across the boundaries of the SLT. Semiotic translation is aimed primarily at providing the translator with a way to look at discrete signs in such a systematic way and tries to enhance the chances of successful communication and to minimise the risk of misunderstanding or miscommunication.

With regard to Toury's norms, the study shows that in some translation samples, translator's decisions made during the process of translation could be based on conscious choice as to the main objective of the translation. While concerning Hatim and Mason's Appealing Model to semiotic translation, the phases are based on the principle of language competence and culture experience translators should possess to be able to identify a sign in a given text. Apart from linguistic competence, cultural competence is thought to be very important to the translator. The more bicultural translators are, the more they can provide the denotative and connotative meaning(s) of a sign. Moreover, translators should be well equipped with salient translation techniques and strategies to better render a sign.

The dominance of formal translation orientation has a possible impact on cross-cultural transfer of semiotic content between Arabic and English. The frequencies of functional-based translation strategies have not shown precise transference of the semiotic values across text boundaries between the SL and TL. In contrast, functional-based strategies could have helped preserve the semiotic content of cultural reference, provided that much effort has to be exerted for the sake of maximal communication. It is, however, evident that translation theorists' long-time debate over loyalty to the SL or TL seems not to come to an end, probably because translation cannot be entirely source-oriented, nor can be target-oriented. It is somehow in between.

Culture-bound expressions constitute a translation problem in translating Arabic literary texts into English. Owing to various signifieds a sign would designate, the problem of lexical incongruence could arise, bearing in mind that, a given culture views reality quite differently from another. Semiotic force of a sign is often lost when someone translates unrelated languages, and consequently a breakdown in semiotic communication may occur. Each language has its nuances and peculiarities; nevertheless, translation is quite possible provided that working strategies are employed

by a competent translator. The more two cultures are in contact, the fewer translation problems are expected to be present in the course of translation.

Macro-signs are probably the most difficult to deal with in translation. A problem arises from the disparity of text type and rhetorical strategies employed by language users. In some cases, the translator has to reorganise SLT to go in harmony with the norms of English discourse: opting for functional-based strategies in an attempt to render the macro-signs. It is, however, clear throughout the examples discussed that these strategies could be more conducive to better rendition than formal-based strategies, with macro-signs in mind. One can assume, then, that formal-based translation minimises TL macro-signs whereas functional-based translation maximises macro-signs.

Question (1): How are Arab cultural signs constructed in Mahfouz's novel, *The Harafish*?

Translation is viewed as a process of transferring one semiotic entity to another, the translator's task is to transfer as much as possible that entity. In some cases, the difference between Arabic and English cultures in perceiving reality makes the semiotic content so crucial that any mistranslation would result in a translation that is not only odd, but it is also detrimental to the spirit of the SLT.

Mahfouz's novel is a story of love, ethical choices, moral responsibility, and existential crises that characterise a culture that has undergone many external and internal changes. The construction of cultural signs in the novel in describing the lives of ordinary individuals caught in struggles of identity and faith that reveal the existential, spiritual, and material character of Egyptian Muslims. Mahfouz uses political and social transformations in his characterisations as representative of the shifting historical narrative of the individual subject, and Arab civilisation and culture. The multiplicity of cultures portrayed in the novel cannot be signalled out as one or the

other, but are a combination of the old, the new, the ancient, the corrupt, the religious, and the modern.

Mahfouz's literary perspective compares to the teachings of the Qur'ān, and how they both deal with similar themes, such as men, women, and children of Islamic culture. Mahfouz uses imagery that is both pre-Islamic and symbolic of Egyptian culture in particular, and Arab culture in general, to demonstrate the contradictions that permeate Egyptian society, such as the questions of wealth, class, religion, and state politics that are at the forefront.

Mahfouz has depicted the vast majority of the women in his novel as strong moral individuals who have been able to survive despite male oppression; however, he has also portrayed weaker women who have not been able to overcome obstacles. The novel expresses how the culture has been transformed and that the change that takes place is multi-faceted and includes external changes in the architecture, neighbourhoods, and everyday life, and internal changes in authority structures of the cultures, which have been split up into different forms.

In general, the use of words, names, symbols, places and settings in the novel as metaphors is to build a shared understanding within the readers. The novel is an attempt to reveal the religious, social and political history construction of Middle East in a secularised, comical and ironic manner. The construction of the cultural signs reveals Mahfouz's rhetorical power in reaching international readers and meeting the expectation of diverse readers on a structural and psychological level by awakening the feeling of belonging to one society. The novel, therefore, shows that Mahfouz is a product of multi-cultural backgrounds. His search for a common shared language between himself and his Arab readers is stimulated by his knowledge of the local and international rhetorical trends of his time.

Question (2): To what extent does the translator of Mahfouz's novel, *The Harafish*, deviate from the original text?

Language is a system of codes and of rules, in which the basic characteristic of that language is change, and those rules change, in space and time, endangering communication. For this reason, those rules may sometimes be explicitly stated and prescribed, in a rule book (the grammar of the language) for the purpose of enforcing them for social, economic, political and other reasons. Be it as it may, one way or another, those rules tend to become a norm, a standard to be respected, and emulated, and maintained – and deviated from.

Engaging in literary translation activity, therefore, can lead to literary innovations on its own right. Translation is, obviously, a rewriting of an original text regardless its intention; it reflects a certain ideological perspective that manipulates literature to function in a given society which can establish new concepts, genres and devices of literary innovation in shaping the power of one culture over the other.

Translators, therefore, are free to deviate from the original text by adopting a middle path between refining the original and retaining even the mistakes and defects. Translators, consequently, when noticing the original text ambiguous and vague, should opt a suitable meaning for the context of the whole passage, and the closest meaning to the original. However, trying to replicate the ambiguity of the original and make it unclear could indicate the translator's complete misunderstanding of the original text.

Although deviation can be allowed to a certain extent, due to the nature of two different languages, the translators should be aware of the pitfalls. In the novel a few deviations were made by the translator at different levels, the first deviation is concerning the morphological rules of word, sentence and phrase formation in writing. The problem of translating this deviation into TL was the problem of a policy decision rather than a problem of actual translation. In other words, the problem here was

whether to use the existing SL word or invent a new one. It would be suggested to use the existing words, sentence and phrases as it had been in the SL, since the novel contains a lot of other deviations for the translator to deviate in the TL.

The second level of deviation is concerning the use of pronouns in a manner breaking a number of grammatical rules of standard SL. In short, The *Harafish* used them as proper nouns and as names. As such, they can be used in all kinds of sentences (affirmative, interrogative, negative); they can have plurals and genders. With this in mind, it is relatively easy to understand the novel.

The third level of deviation is concerning the syntactic rules of sentences and their meaning(s) 'signal' the necessity for their merger. At first glance, there is nothing wrong with the text, but a good second glance, a detailed linguistic analysis, or an attempt at translating it, would reveal syntactic irregularities inside the sentences, as they are marked off by punctuation. An even more detailed analysis would show that there are really no syntactic irregularities, but deviations in punctuation in addition to some deviations in the organisation of the paragraphs.

In general, deviations from the norm or breaking the rules of language should be accounted for in every discussion on language and language communication, and in translation. Second, 'competent' translators may deviate from the norm but they follow certain systematic rules that are originated in the language system they deviate from. In other word, these deviations, no matter how arcane they might appear at first, lend themselves to analysis and, ultimately, to translation. And third, translation theory, as defined in this paper, can help translators, who are capable of rather detailed linguistic analyses, carry out their task with better success.

Question (3): What strategies are employed by the translator of Mahfouz's novel, *The Harafish*, in translating Arab cultural signs?

A large scale of strategies can be used when translating cultural signs, ranging from conservation (acceptance of difference by means of reproduction of the cultural signs in the ST), to naturalisation (transformation of the other into a cultural replica). These cultural signs contain multiple cultural levels: the linguistic, pragmatic, semiotic and socio-cultural level. Depending on the SL culture and TL culture, a translator can choose from several translation strategies when dealing with a problem concerning a culture-specific item.

The main translation strategies (i.e., literal, transliteration, transposition, paraphrasing, adaptation, and lexical creation) used by the translator to translate the Arabic version of Mahfouz' novel are among the numerous strategies that have been proposed, outlined or highlighted by translation scholars in handling the translation difficulties concerning culture-specific aspects.

In general, the translator of the novel has opted to use both translation strategies: functional and formal strategies. In opting for the functional-based translation strategies, the translator attempted to make the TL function the same way as the original language function. However, making the translation more readable, the translator may omit terms and concepts from the original text that do not seem to have TL equivalents. Such a translation can produce a readable text, but that text can convey the wrong meaning or inadequate meaning.

A translation which is based on such strategy is basically target-oriented translation, which rejects the traditional subjective judgement of translation that centres on the primacy of the ST and the notion of equivalence. Target-oriented translation, therefore, focuses on the mutual influence between a translation and its target culture and readers as a criterion for successful translation rather than examining whether the

target text is faithful to the ST. Such strategy helps expound the influence and significance of translation in cultural dissemination and the success of the translators' translation strategies.

On the other hand, opting for the formal-based translation strategies, the translator attempts to maintain the original language forms as much as possible in translation, though they are the natural way to express the original meaning. Despite the fact that, it has some weaknesses in terms of readability, they are helpful in understanding how meaning was expressed in the original text. They are also helpful in seeing the beauty of original idioms, rhetorical patterns and how individual authors used certain vocabulary terms uniquely.

Such strategy focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. In which it concerns that the message in the TL should match as closely as possible the different elements in the SL. This means that the message in the target culture is constantly compared with the message in the source culture to determine standards of accuracy and correctness. A translation which is based on such strategy is basically source-oriented; that is, it is designed to reveal as much as possible of the form and content of the original message. Such translation always renders a particular term in the SLT by a corresponding term in the TL, often resulting in meaningless strings of words.

In this study translation strategies were used to explain the transfer of culture-bound literary and stylistic devices from Arabic into English. The present study also demonstrated the validity of source-oriented and target-oriented translations by proposing equivalents but does not claim them to be the only possible accurate choices. A major advantage of source-oriented translation is that it makes the TL term predictable from the SL. The reasons for source-oriented translation can be summed up as follows: the speculative nature of concepts, the lack of integration of knowledge, and the descriptive rather than denominative nature of metaphor.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

The analysis of the Arabic text and its translation into English does not provide a scope wide enough to postulate a definite and comprehensive set of conclusions. Literary translators find themselves in the middle of a balance of forces, between the ST's author and the TT's readers. Caring for the interests of the latter does not mean disregarding the former, since the ST itself is not an isolated unit, but one which has to be embedded in a certain context and situation. Difficulties arise because the author addresses his text to readers different from those aimed at in and by the TT. The role of translators is to transform one piece of discourse (ST) into another piece of discourse (TT), which involves another act of communication.

Translators should be able to embed their TT into a new culture, context and situation, trying to keep disruptions to a minimum. In order to do this they have to keep in mind at all times the intention of the author, the effect he or she stimulates on his or her source readers, so that he or she can formulate a way of stimulating the same effect in a different reader. A rigid set of prescriptions to achieve the functional-equivalence strategy cannot be devised, but a close look at the macro-structural level and a thorough analysis of the text from a semiotic, pragmatic and stylistic point of view needs to be carried out in each particular instance. Translators, from within a set of translation strategies and procedures, have to evaluate the most suitable one in each particular case. They should not underestimate their readers' ability to decode and interpret, as context becomes a valuable source of information.

Moreover, translators need to have an insight into when and how these strategies and procedures can be used in a structural, stylistic, semiotic and pragmatic analysis will help them in this respect. Such a close study will help them to perceive the reaction

that the author was aiming for in his or her readers so that an equivalent effect can be sought in the reader of the translation.

In conclusion, the present study looked at the translation of cultural signs in prose narration. Yet it is possible for researchers to investigate different literary genres (how does the picture change when it comes to drama or poetry, or, audiovisual products?). The present study has dealt with translating Arab cultural signs into English. Translation can be made in reverse. Since the present study was conducted on two unrelated languages, what would the case be with other related languages? Would they have cultural interference? If there is any interference, what would be the level of such interference? Hence, studies can be conducted on linguistic interference and the effect on transferring cultural signs.