

## Aspects with Different Expressive Meaning: A Study of Translated Arab Short Stories

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### Abstract

The existence of some elements in a target language which have the same propositional meaning of the source language, but it may have a different expressive meaning poses a controversial issue in the area of translation. This point which is classified by Mona Baker as a case of non-equivalence in translation needs to be considered deeply by translators and translation theorists. This paper, mainly, aims at analysing the translations of four Arab elements that imply different expressive meanings as those in the target texts. These elements are extracted from select Arab short stories that have been translated into English by different translators whose cultures might not be the same as the writers' cultures. It is also very important to imply here what Thakur included in his book *Linguistic Simplified Semantics* that a word may mean the same thing as the referent of that word which is referred to as the denotation of that word. On the other hand, a word can have an incidental meaning that we associate with it from time to time that is referred to as the connotation of that word. He also added that "the connotation of a word is unstable and, compared to its denotation, peripheral to its meaning" (1999, p.14-15). The study comes to the conclusion that translating such element, really, represents a problematic issue in the area of translation. Moreover, the translator's superficial background of one of the texts he deals with may create a misleading and an inappropriate translation of those aspects with different expressive meaning.

**Keywords:** Different expressive meaning, Equivalence, target language, Source language

### Introduction

The process of translation involves a sound and a deep background in lexical, linguistic and cultural understanding of both the source language and the target language that the translator deals with. Concerning this point, it is very important to imply here what

Thakur included in his book *Linguistic Simplified Semantics* that a word may mean the same thing as the referent of that word which is referred to as the denotation of that word. On the other hand, a word can have an incidental meaning that we associate with it from time to time that is referred to as the connotation of that word. He also added that "the connotation of a word is unstable and compared to its denotation, peripheral to its meaning" (1999, 14-15). Baker points out that "there may be a target language word which has the same propositional meaning as the source language word, but it may have a different expressive meaning." (1992, 23). She also claimed that this feature can be more noticeable in some fields more than others "This is often the case with items which relate to ... religion, politics and sex". As pointed out by some linguists, lexical differences make translation extremely difficult. In English some words are more specific in their meaning whereas in Arabic the meaning of a word may be more broadly construed and vice versa.

This paper will mainly discuss the issue of translating aspects that imply a different expressive meaning as it is clearly noticeable in Arabic language. Based on that, I directly selected the short story as the point to be discussed in this paper since literary writings will, undoubtedly, be rich of such aspects. These terms and expressions may be considered as a case of non-equivalence based on Mona Baker's divisions of non-equivalence i.e. they may not have exact matching expressions in the target language to convey their exact intended meaning. Therefore, their translation needs not only to find their dictionary equivalents, but to find at least an approximate equivalence for them to give their message that the source text writer intends to convey.

A lot of Arab short stories were translated into English by translators who sometimes might not be of the members of the Arab culture. Generally speaking, the Arab short stories genre became clear to the non-Arab reader though there might be a kind of loss of some aspects of the translated text. This is the point that will be discussed here.

### **Statement of the problem**

The process of translation is extremely problematic since it is a mere transference of words, but a rendering of the essence of the text to be translated. This requires a deep

understanding from the translator of the linguistic, lexical, syntactical and cultural sides of the two languages he is dealing with. Differences in expressive meaning is an issue that poses a translation problem since some aspects may express more than one meaning in the source language that are not exactly expressed in the target language. In this case the translator needs to know about the hidden features of the languages he is mediating. In addition, appropriate strategies of translation should be used to convey at least approximate meaning of the source text.

### Discussion and Analysis

Here, four aspects that bear different expressive meaning will be selected from different Arab short stories which are translated by different translators (Arab and non-Arab). Those aspects will be analyzed referring to various Arabic dictionaries and interpretations so as to get their exact meaning in the source text. The translations of these aspects will be investigated, so that it can be clarified that the translation is appropriate or not and what translation methods might be most appropriate in conveying their approximant hidden meaning intended by the source text writer. The source text, its transliteration and its translation will be given in addition to providing a clarifying discussion and analysis.

**Source Text (1):** ربت سعدان على رأس حماره.

**Transliteration:** Rabbata Sa'adan Ala' Ra'si Himarihi

**Translation:** Sa'adan touched its head gently.

The above text is taken from an Arab short story entitled “The Harvest of the Bad Times” which was written by the Yemeni short story writer Ahmed Ali Al Hamadani and translated by Shirin Yassin Yar Mohammed who was born in Aden, Yemen but originally belongs to an Indian family. In this story, Al Hamadani discusses the unstable social situation at that time.

In the source text above, the writer used the term “rabbata” which is explained in most of the Arabic Arabic dictionaries as “to hit a person or an animal but very gently”. This is what Al Ma'ani Al Jame' Dictionary stated concerning the word “rabbata”. According to Mona Baker, aspects that have different expressive meanings in the source and the target languages are considered non-equivalents. She also points out that "There may be a target

language word which has the same propositional meaning as the source language word, but it may have a different expressive meaning." (1992: 23). The translator in her translation above used "touched gently" for the word (ربت) *rabbata* which may not give the exact meaning intended by the original text writer. It would be appropriate if the translator used the word "pat" instead of "touch gently" since it would much more closer to the target language reader's understanding and the register is very important in such cases. It can be inferred here that "literal translation" can do well in translating the above Arabic text.

**Source Text (2):** أي أستاذ قدير يعرف كيف يشغل حصته دون كتب.

**Transliteration:** ayyu ostathun qadeer.

**Translation:** A qualified teacher knows how to conduct his class.

The Arabic text above is taken from Ghassan Kanafani's story which is entitled "The Slope". Ghassan is a Palestinian writer who discusses the Palestinian-related issues in his writings. 'The Slope' is translated by Barbara Harlow and Karen E. Riley.

The word 'qadeer' قدير in the Arabic text above denotes a different expressive meaning in Arabic than that of the word 'qualified' that the translator used in his translation. This is counted classified as one of the non-equivalent types as stated by Mona Baker. The word 'qadeer' as most of the Arabic Arabic dictionaries state means someone who has unlimited power or someone who is efficient and appreciated by others. In the Arab societies, it is used to say that someone is respected and appreciated among others. On the other hand, and in accordance to most English English dictionaries the word 'qualified' which is used by the translator refers to someone having suitable knowledge, experience, or skills especially for a particular job. On the basis of the above discussion, the translator here might not provide the proper translation for the word قدير 'qadeer' since the target language reader will capture a different meaning than that intended by the source language writer.

To conclude, it is very important to point out that translation equivalence is a very hard matter to achieve since it depends on the text, the translator and the receptors. Whoever the translator is, the translation might lose or distort the meaning related to the original text.

**Source Text (3):** اسرائيل ناوية على نية كبيرة.

**Transliteration:** Israeel nawiyatun 'ala neatun kapeeratun

**Translation:** Israel has great plans

The underlined Arabic text above has been extracted from a short story written by the Yemeni writer Ahmed Al-Saeed and has been translated by Shirin. The Arabic text above which is mainly used colloquially among Yemeni people usually gives a negative indication which is completely absent in the translation above that only shows something great is going to take place ignoring the point of negativity of the original text. The indication of this Arabic text which can only be comprehended by people living in a specific area. In this sense, as Ghazala (2008) indicates that translation is mere transferring words from language to another, but in reality, it is a transference of one culture into another including the political, social and other conditions (p.193).

The translation of the source text above 'great plans' may denote a meaning which bears a different expressive denotation in the source language. It denotatively shows that great plans, good procedures might be carried out by Israel whereas the Arabic text implies a connotative meaning. In Arabic societies, this expression shows that some harmful procedures might be carried out by Israel. Accordingly, translators need to deeply know about the situations of using particular expressions. Rendering the meanings of such expressions requires some notes or clarification to give an appropriate conveyance of the intended meaning of the source text so that the target receptor understands what is exactly meant by the original text.

**Source Text (4):** كان الوقت عصرا

**Transliteration:** kan alwaqtu asran

**Translation:** It was afternoon.

The underlined word in the Arabic text above is taken from Gassan Kanafani's short story 'The Shore'. Differences in expressive meaning as stated by Mona Baker (1992) may be clearly noticeable or it may be confusing. It is an important issue to pose a problem in the process of translation in some given contexts. Adding expressive meaning for a specific word or expression is usually easier than to being left out (p.23). Based on that, it is more difficult to deal with differences in expressive meaning especially when the item in the target language is more specified than that in the source language. This issue often is more salient in the some contexts than others such as religion and politics.

According to that, the word *عصرا* in the source text above which indicates a definite period of time related to Asr prayer which is considered to be a religious term. This term as shown in most of Arabic Arabic dictionaries denotes ‘the time of performing Asr prayer’ which is known in the religious scope as a part of the afternoon period. Based on this analysis, we can find out that the translation of the word *عصرا* as *the afternoon* may confuse the reader since it does not exactly convey the meaning of the source text. Looking up the word ‘afternoon’ in the various English English dictionaries, it is found out that ‘afternoon’ is ‘the period which starts at about twelve o’clock or after the meal in the middle of the day and ends at about six o’clock or when the sun goes down’. In some other dictionaries it is stated that the word ‘afternoon’ indicates ‘the part of each day which begins at lunchtime and ends at about six o’clock’. Accordingly, It can be stated that the translator needs to add some explaining notes to produce an approximately accurate translation of such words.

### Conclusion

To conclude, differences in expressive meaning is considered to be one of the problematic issues that face translators. It is a type of non-equivalence that needs from the translator to master all the hidden features that characterize languages he needs to transfer. Producing an accurate rendering of the source text is what the translator has to achieve by using the most appropriate strategy in translating such aspects.

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