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The Sociocultural Analysis of Translating BBC News Media Text into English

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the nature of the structural changes in the Arabic translation of English political BBC news, which may be attributable to differences in cultural, ideological and sociolinguistic backgrounds of its target speakers. The main objective is to find out whether the lexical and cultural aspects change the quality of the translated message. The article has taken cognizance of Hatim's (1997) notions on translating across different nations and Fishman's (1972) notion that language to a certain extent is the sociolinguistic reflection of its speakers. Towards the end, a comparative methodology of the source text ST and target text TT has been adopted by examining the differences and the similarities of the structure and its correlated content. In conclusion, the study observes that the cultural background, ideological make-up and sociolinguistic perception of the target readers contribute to the nature of the structure of the translation output in Arabic news. Furthermore, the structural changes are attributable to TT speakers' differences in cultural, ideological and sociolinguistic backgrounds.

Keywords: culture, sociolinguistics, structure, translation, and news.

Introduction

Translation is considered a solid platform for communication among people of different cultures (Gerding-Salas, 2000). As he puts it, the main aim for translation is to serve as a cross-cultural bilingual communication vehicle among people.' Thus, any translator plays an important role as a bilingual or multi-lingual cross-cultural transmitter of different cultural aspects by translating the main concept and speech in a variety of texts as accurately as possible (Gerding-Salas, 2000, p. 2). Translators may use different strategies and techniques to cope with cultural elements in translation, such as transliterating and paraphrasing. While the former relies on rendering items in the source text, the latter gives a periphrastic explanation in a footnote (Farghal and Shunnaq 1999, Shunnaq, 1998, p. 43, as cited in Abdel-Hafiz, 2002).

In this article, a composite methodology derived from the ideas of Hatim (1997) and Fishman (1972) has been employed, which are summarized as follows:

Hatim's Concepts on Communication across Cultures

Hatim (1997) notes that careful consideration of a given text means, 'someone attempts to mediate in communicating its "import" across both linguistic and cultural boundaries..., and such an attempt is a way of making sure that we do not settle for a partial view of what goes on inside that text' (p. xiii). Hence, he suggests that the cultural element plays an important role in communication among nations and in the process of translation. Hatim has studied various texts which have discussion on both

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(a) the cultures of Western and Islamic-Arab and (b) the sociolinguistic element, (Hatim, 1997, p. 157). Hatim's ideas are to view a text within and across several cultural boundaries to enable the language used from either of the two cultures in question to operate felicitously within the rhetorical conventions, not only of the target culture but of their own too. Among other things, he noticed that What is at the root of cross-cultural misunderstandings is a set of misconceptions held by one party about how the other rhetorically visualizes and linguistically realizes of a variety of communicative objectives. Such notions would then be paraded as truisms about the nature of the language of those on the other side. (Hatim, 1997, p. 157).

Regarding English and Arabic texts, Hatim identifies two kinds of audiences that the procedures of the two texts assume: the counter-arguments, which are typically addressed to the sceptical, and the through-arguments, which assume a supportive audience (Munday, 2008). On the matter of the nature of the occurrence of audiences with respect to text, Hatim (1997, p. 173) states that some texts are going to be more oral than others during the translation. While this can certainly implicate text type, it does not necessarily make morality an exclusive property of Arabic, English translation text or any other language. Furthermore, he noticed that some languages would tend to show a particular preference for different strategy, but this does not make tendency in question.

Fishman Sociolinguistic Concept on Language Reflections

One of the major lines of social and behavioural science that arouse interest in the language during the past century (as in the case of linguistic relativity known as Whorfian Hypothesis [Whorf, 1940, 1941]) has claimed that the radically differing structures of the language of the world constrain the cognitive functioning of their speakers in different ways (Fishman, 1972, p. 286). Within the linguistic relativity view, Fishman (1972) states:

> the background linguistic system of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas, but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade.

To counter this view, Fishman (1972) opines that it is less likely that the entire language or entire societies are classified in such a general way. Consequently, he offers an alternative sociolinguistic explanation and stresses that (a) languages primarily reflect rather than create sociocultural regularities in values and orientations and that (b) languages worldwide share a larger number of structural universals than has heretofore been recognized. He argues and supports his contention by noting that:

> [t]he very concept of linguistic repertoire, role repertoire, repertoire range and repertoire compartmentalization argue against such neat classification once functional realities are brought into consideration. (Fishman, 1972, p. 288)

Taken as a whole, Fishman's sociolinguistic views hold that language reflects the sociocultural and the values and orientations of its speakers rather than it being regarded as a direct consequence or constraint of the cognition of its speakers. On this point, Fishman observes that there are ways in which lexicons and languages as a whole are a reflection of the speech communities that employ them, and he stresses that a language variety is an inventory of of those who employ it at any given time. If any part of this inventory shows different features not present in other parts this may be indicative of particular stresses or influences in certain interaction networks within the speech community as a whole (Fishman, 1972, p. 296)

To support the above point, Fishman cites examples from Hebrew and Arabic, where a few terms are retained in the language not only for traditional and sanctified objects but also for certain Germanic elements in order to provide contrastive emphases; for example, *bukh* which refers to 'a book' versus *seyfer* which refers to 'a religious book' or 'the scholarly book' and *lerer* which refers to 'a teacher' versus *melamed* or *rebi* which refer to 'a teacher of religious subjects' (Fishman, 1972, p. 297). Relative to other theories on language such as generative grammar, (Chomsky,1965,1981) or the Minimalist Program, (Chomsky 1995, 1997), which are basically cognitive, the language reflection view of Fishman is related to language as *la parole* (i.e., language as it is actually used) as well as to the cultural variation and social variation (Fishman, 1972, p. 299). Hence, it is obvious that Fishman favours the idea that language reflects the social organization that uses it and contends that the lexicon in particular, and the language as a whole are reflections of the speech of communities that employ them. He, however, acknowledges that there are residual areas in a language where the linguistic relativity (i.e., the Whorfian Hypothesis) view may be observed, such as in the structuring of verbal interaction and the structure of lexical components (Hatim & Mason, 2014).

For Lefevere, translation is sanctioned by authority (Lefevere, 1990, p. 23) and this authority draws the ideological parameters of what is acceptable, thus influencing the selection of texts for translating and the ways in which texts are translated (p. 19). Hence, Lefevere's concept of 'rewriting' of the source text and culture in the process of translation is 'firmly linked' to the interest of translation studies in ideology (Munday, 2008a, p. 138), and ideology, in Lefevere's view (1998, p. 48), consists of 'opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach texts'. For example, Faiq (2004) working from within an ideological and sociological perspective in his Cultural Encounters in Translation from Arabic emphasises the power relations that govern translations from Arabic. Citing examples from several orientalists' commentaries, he focuses on power imbalance in translation direction between Arabic and English. According to Munday (2008a, p. 137), research in translation from an ideological perspective focuses on uncovering manipulations in the TT that may refer to the translator's conscious 'ideology' or produced by 'ideological' elements of the translation environment, such as pressure from the publisher, editor or institutional/governmental circles.

In summary, in weighing the sustenance, changes or loss of the structure, and maybe the content and style preferences as well, in the Arabic translation of English BBC news in our analysis presented further, this study will take cognizance of Fishman's sociolinguistic view and shall invoke it in appropriate places. In our presentation of each case, both versions of the ST and the TT are provided.

Methodology

As derived from the ideas of Hatim (1997) and Fishman (1972) was employed. In translation studies, Hatim considered culture as a domain of enquiry that has had mixed fortunes over the years. The so-called 'cultural model' emerged as a reaction to earlier conceptions of translation geared primarily to account for 'equivalence' in terms of grammatical and lexical categories as elements of the linguistic system (p. 43). According to Fishman (1971), languages reflect rather than create sociocultural regularities in values and orientations and share a larger number of structural universals than has heretofore been recognized.

Data Collection and Discussion

The data presented in this article had been collected from the BBC news online from January 2005 to April 2006. The data were collected daily and sometimes weekly and this was dependent (i) on the availability of the ST and its Arabic version and (ii) on the point that if both articles had similar content of information. One hundred cases were collected as part of our study. However, for the purpose of this article, only seven pieces of the data were analysed.

Data Analysis

Data 1

a) ST: ***'Bin Laden call falls on deaf ears'***
B.B.C. Monday, 24 April 2006
U.S. intelligence believes the audio tape aired by an Arab T.V. channel is genuine, making it the fugitive Al-Qaeda leader's first message since January. US opposition politicians said it only showed up the Bush Administration's failure to capture Bin Laden.

b) TT: » بن لا دن « حرب صليببية غربية ضد الاسلام
قال أسامة بن لادن زعيم تنظيم القاعدة في تسجيل صوتي منسوب
اليه ان تحرك الغرب لعزل الحكومة الفلسطينيةبقيادة حماس
يعني أنه «في حرب ضد الاسلام

c) Trs: (Bin Laden: *hareb salebleebyah ded al eslam*) *(Qala osama ben laden za'eem tandeem al qa'eda fi tasjeel sawti mansub eleih ena taharuk alghrb l 'zel al hukuma al filisteenyh biqeyadat hamas y'ni enahu fi harb ded al eslm.)*. (Trs. = transliteration).

The underlined constituents of the ST in (1a), *the fugitive Al-Qaeda leader's*, is given a syntactic structure in (a'), its corresponding Arabic translation زعيم تنظيم القاعدة (*z'eem tandeem al qa'eeda*), is given the structure in (b') below:

(a') *...the fugitive Al-Qaeda leader*
(b') زعيم تنظيم القا عدة
(*za'eem tandeem 'al qa'eda*)
leader organization *al qa'edah'*

In the above example, it is noticed that the Arabic term القا عدة (Al-Qaeda) has been borrowed in the English political news in (1a). The translator has used the same determiner phrase in the TT in (1b) as evidenced by its transliteration in (1c). Syntactically, it is also noticed that the same determiner phrase is sandwiched between two constituents, the fugitive and the leader. As القا عدة (al-qa'eda) is an Arabic determiner phrase, the translator has retained it in the Arabic news as in (1b'). As for the phrase Al-Qaeda leader's which has the structure [D'-N'] as in (a’) above has changed to زعيم تنظيم القا عدة (*za’eem tandeem al-qa’eda*) which stylistically is [N-N-D’] sequence as in (b’) above. The structural difference is that the political terms Al-Qaeda’ has been written after two nouns, namely زعيم (*za’eem*) ‘leader’ and تنظيم (tandem) ‘organizing’. In addition, it is noticed that the translator has used the definite article ال (al) ‘the’ to make the noun definite in both the ST and the TT texts. In addition, it has been noticed that the lexical adjective word ‘the fugitive’ in the ST is changed into تنظيم (tandem) ‘organization’. These changes in the description of Bin Laden’s attributes are partly due to the ideological perspectives the translator might have in his/her mind about Bin Laden.

Data 2

a) *‘Our goal is not defending the Khartum government but to defend Islam, its land and its people’,*

b) *TT:* “ بن لا دن « حرب صليبيه غربيه ضد لا سلا م
أضاف «أن هدفنا ليس الدفاع عن حكومة الخرطوم وأنما الدفاع عن الاسلام و
“ ارضه و شعبه

c) Trs: (Bin Laden: *hareb salebeebyah gharabiyah ded al e‘slam*) *wa adafa ena hadafana leis al defa’ ‘an hukumat al khartum wa enama al defa’ ‘an al eslam wa ardeh wa sh’bih*.

It is noticed that the translator has respected most of the words when translating the ST into the Arabic text. It is also noticed that there is some structural-stylistic correspondence between the ST text and the TT text. That is, both are similar: one principal clause followed by a series of conjoined clauses. Hence, it is in keeping with a literal translation discussed under this heading. The only difference is that the Arabic sentence is introduced by a complementizer ان (*ena*) ‘that’. In addition, there is an obvious introduction of the definite article ال (*al*) ‘the’ in some of the Arabic words, such as الخرطوم (*al-Khartum*) ‘the Khartum’, الدفاع (*al-defa’*) ‘the defence’, الاسلام (*al eslam*) ‘The Islam’, when these definite articles do not exist in the corresponding ST text. This is in keeping with Hatim’s (1997, 2005) view that it is culturally inherent in Arabic to begin a sentence with a clause introducer, ‘a complementizer’, and to use a definite article when the discoursal content calls for the use of the definite article, such as in the case of الخرطوم (*al Khartum*) ‘The Khartum’, الدفاع (*al defa*’) ‘the defence’, to show the sharing of knowledge about entities. In addition, the translator has translated the complete direct statement in the way it should be in Arabic text. The full translation has reflected Bin Laden’s perspectives in terms of his ideological thinking towards Islamic nations worldwide and seems to make the international Islamic communities support his ideological campaign against the West.

Data 3

a) ST: Abbas moves to Gaza for pull out
Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas has announced he is moving his office to
Gaza until the completion of Israel’s withdrawal from the territory.

b) TT:
عباس ينقل مقره الى غزة لمتابعة الانسحاب الاسرائيليي
أعلن الرئيس الفلسطيني محمود عباسأ انه سينقل مكتبه إلى غزة حتى انتهاء ا
لانسحاب الاسرائيلي من القطاع

c) Trs:a‘bas yanqul maqarahu ela ghaza li mutaba’t al ensehab al esraeli A’lana al raees al filistini mahmud abas enahu sayanqul maktabahu ela ghaza hata entiha al ensehab al esraeeli min al qata’.

It is noticed that in points (a) and (b) above, the translator has changed the present continuous tense of the ST (...he is moving his office...) to a future simple tense س (*sa*) ‘will’ and ينقل (*yanqul*) ‘move’ سينقل ⍰ . Besides, the translator has kept the sentence structure [Spec- I’-V’-N’] (i.e., specifier-inflection-verb-noun) in both languages. While the basic structure remains similar, the shift in the tense is in keeping with the Arabic language’s inherent style, which is in congruence with Hatim’s (1997) view when translating across cultural boundaries. In Fishman’s (1972) sociolinguistic perspectives, this shift from a present continuous tense in the ST to a future simple continuous tense in the TT is regarded as a reflection of the perception of the Arab speakers about the world.

Data 4

a) ***Iraq poised to choose new premier***
A close ally of Mr. Ja’afri, he recently headed a committee that purged members of Saddam Hussein’s Bath party from public life, raising fear his nomination might be rejected by Sunni factions. However, Sunni politicians indicated they would not oppose him.

b) *TT:* يذكر ان المالكي قيادي في حزب الدعوة الذي يراسه الجعفري, و قد ترأس في
الاونة الاخيرة لجنة حظرت على اعظاء حزب البعث العراقي المشاركة في الحياة
السياسية.

c) *Trs: Yuthkar ana al maliki qeeyadi fi hezeb al da'wa al lathi yrasah al j'fari, wa qad taras fi al awena al akheera lejna hadarat 'la a'da hezb al b'th al 'raqi al mushareeka fi al hayat al seyaseeyah*

Here, the translator has translated the English adverb recently as Arabic في الأونة الأخيرة (*fi al awena al akheera* = *fi* 'in', *al awena* 'minute/period', *al akheera* 'last'). The structures of the ST and the TT are noticeably different in that the ST has the structure of [Subj-(A.D.V.)-V-Object] word-order, and this has changed to [Conj-I-V-P-ADV] structure in Arabic TT.

Data 5

a) *ST: Iraq poised to choose new premier.*
The main Sunni coalition, the Iraqi Accord Front, has shown initial agreement with Mr Maliki's nomination, a spokesman said.

b) *TT:* الجمعية الوطنية العراقية تنظر في ترشيح المالكي
وكانت جبهة التوافق العراقي و هي أبرز الجماعات السنية قد ا بدت يوم الجمعة موافقتها المبدئية على ترشيح جواد المالكي لمنصب رئيس الوزراء.

c) *Trs: Wa kanat jabhat al tawafeq al a'raqeeyah wa heya abraz al jama'at al suneeyah fi al bilad qad abdat al youm al jum'a muwafaqateha al mabdaeyah 'la tarsheeh juad al maleke lemansab reasat al wizara.*

The noun phrase of the structure [D'-N'] in the main Sunni coalition…of the ST has been changed into a complex conjoined noun phrase [conj-N-A-D'D'] in the Arabic TT as in:

> وهية أبرز الجماعات السنية
> *(wa heya abraz al jama'at al Suneeyah)*
> *'and- she- main -the group- the Sunnis'.*

Here, the translator has translated the above English noun phrase into Arabic with a different structural form as perceived by him and incongruence with his perception of the Arabic language. In particular, he begins his phrase with the conjunction و (*wa*) 'and' and adds the necessary determiners ال (*al*-) 'the' for each noun to become grammatically acceptable and easily understood by an Arabic reader. In terms of its content, the existence of two Iraqi political parties, namely 'Shia group' and 'Sunni group', in the ST which have been translated or paraphrased into the TT is a pointer to indicate that the Iraqi government has been politically and ideologically divided into these parties.

Data 6

a) *ST: Iraq poised to choose new premier'*
Members of Iraq's new parliament meet on Saturday to vote on a new prime minister and other posts after months of wrangling over candidates.

b) *TT:* الجمعية الوطنية العراقية تنظر في ترشيح المالكي
تعقد الجمعية الوطنية العراقية (البرلمان) اجتماعا اليوم السبت للمصادقة على عدد من المناصب السيادية في الدولة بما فيها اكثر هذه المناصب اثارة للجدل و هو منصب رئيس الحكومة .

c) *Trs: T'aqed al jam'eyah al wataneeyah al 'raqeeyah (al barlaman) ejtema'an al youm al sabt lil musadaqa 'ala adad min al manaseb al seyadiyah fi al dawlah bima fiha akthar hatheh al manaseb ethara lil jadal wa huwa manseb raees al hukuma.*

What used to be a verb phrase complement in the ST, on Saturday v[to vote on a new Prime Minister] has been translated into Arabic TT as a series of determiner phrases and prepositional phrases. There is no verb. So, the structure is completely changed. The verb to vote in the ST text has been translated into TT as a postposition determiner phrase للمصادقة على (*lil musadaqa 'la*) 'the endorsement on' = [D-N-P]. The translator has translated it according to his perception of the Arabic language, thereby making it appropriate to the Arabic readers. This is congruent with Fishman's (1972) ideas that language reflects the sociocultural properties and the values and orientations of its speakers.

Data 7:

a) *ST:* ***U.S*** *troops on Iraq abuse charges he said the abuses were allegedly carried out while the soldiers were on operations in Baghdad.*

b) *Trs: Bi sua mua'mala muhtajazeen khelal al 'maleyat al- a'skareeyah fi Baghdad*

The structures in both the ST and the TT are similar in a way that in both cases the prepositions are retained within the general structure of [P-D'] = preposition-determiner phrase. There is a difference, however, in the prepositions that are being used to suit the nature of the perception of the Arabic speakers. This is in congruence with Fishman's (1972) views that the nature of the language used, especially in the repertoire range, and the network of interactions of linguistic elements within a society are, to a large extent, the sociolinguistic reflections of its speakers.

Conclusion

It has been found that translating from English BBC news texts into Arabic has involved many linguistic forms (phrases, clauses and sentences) that have cultural, ideological and sociolinguistic imports. The structure of the linguistic forms of the ST has been seen to have changed in the TT. Arabic translation and such changes seem to have been attributed to the nature of the cultural backgrounds, the ideological perspectives and the sociolinguistic perception of the Arabic speakers.

Furthermore, the translator seems to have various stylistic strategies to translate the English source texts into Arabic, but also seems to have done so eclectically; that is, his choice of any one of these styles seems to be dependent on the following:

(a) The nature of the ST (sentences, clauses, phrases, words) at hand;
(b) The availability of finding corresponding equivalents (sentences, clauses, phrases and words) in the TT;
(c) The possibility of expressing the content of the ST in a TT that is congruent with the sociolinguistic and cultural contexts of the Arabic speakers.
(d) With respect to translating style in general, it is here concluded that all the above styles seem to have been able to somehow sustain the message when used in translating ST news into Arabic.

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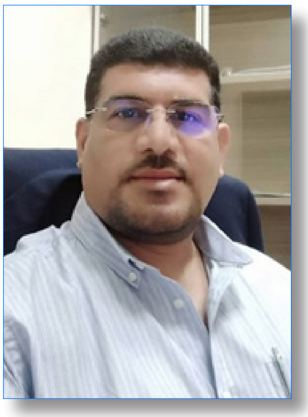

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