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**Critical Reflections on Translating the Yemeni
Mohammed Abdul-Wali's Novella, Yamutuna
Ghuraba (*They Die Strangers*): Its Cultural
Specificity, Metaphor, Intertextuality and
Euphemism^(*)**

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Critical Reflections on Translating the Yemeni Mohammed Abdul-Wali's *Novella, Yamutuna Ghuraba (They Die Strangers): Its Cultural Specificity, Metaphor, Intertextuality and Euphemism*

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Abstract:

This paper is based on the researcher's translation of the Yemeni novelist Mohammed Abdul-Wali's Arabic novella *Yamutuna Ghuraba (They Die Strangers)*. The translator's avowed purpose of his translation is to promote Yemeni literature and help lift the 'embargo' imposed on Arabic literature in general. The translator is keen on preserving the source culture and its specificity by adopting 'foreignization' as the main strategy. As the translator aspires to see his translation published and widely circulated, he finds adhering to a single strategy (a foreignizing strategy) throughout the translation is impractical. The paper focuses on four major areas of difficulty in translation: problems relating to cultural specificity, problems in translating the metaphor, problems in translating intertextuality and problems of translating euphemism. The paper also investigates the nature of the difficulties and viable procedures to tackle them.

It is not always clear to what extent the problems encountered in the translation are representative of the problems of translating general Arabic fiction into English, but it is quite certain that this study provides some insights into the main problematic issues in translating Yemeni Arabic literature into English.

Keywords: Literary translation, Arabic fiction, culture, intertextual relations, metaphor, euphemism, Yemeni literature.

تأملات نقدية حول ترجمة رواية محمد عبد الولي "يموتون غرباء": الخصوصية الثقافية، الاستعارة، التناص والتلطف في التعبير

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الملخص:

ترتكز هذه الورقة على ترجمة الباحث لرواية "يموتون غرباء" للروائي اليمني محمد عبد الولي، والغرض المعلن لترجمة الرواية هو الترويج للأدب اليمني والمساعدة في رفع "الخطر" المفروض على الأدب العربي بشكل عام حيث يحرص المترجم في ترجمته على الحفاظ على ثقافة النص الأصلي وخصوصياتها من خلال تبني "التغريب" كاستراتيجية رئيسية. ولأن المترجم يطمح لرؤية ترجمته منشورة وموزعة على نطاق واسع، يجد أن التقيد بإستراتيجية واحدة (إستراتيجية التغريب) في كل مراحل وأجزاء الترجمة أمر غير عملي. تركز الورقة على أربعة مجالات رئيسية للصعوبة في الترجمة: المشاكل المتعلقة بالخصوصية الثقافية، مشاكل ترجمة الاستعارة، مشاكل ترجمة التناص ومشاكل ترجمة التلطف في التعبير. كما تبحث الورقة أيضاً طبيعة الصعوبات والإجراءات القابلة للتطبيق لمواجهتها. بالرغم أنه ليس من الواضح دائماً إلى أي مدى تمثل المشكلات التي تواجهها هذه الترجمة مشاكل ترجمة الروايات العربية إلى الإنجليزية بشكل عام، ولكن من المؤكد تماماً أن هذه الدراسة تقدم بعض الأفكار حول المشكلات الرئيسية في ترجمة الأدب العربي اليمني إلى اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة الأدبية، الرواية العربية، علاقات التناص، الاستعارة، الأدب اليمني، التلطف في التعبير، الثقافة.



Introduction

Translation is as old as human civilization. Human beings use different languages in different parts of the world. As interaction among people belonging to different linguistic communities is inevitable, translation is also inevitable. Translation has always played a crucial role in human communication, helping in creating understanding among human beings. It has also provided access to otherwise inaccessible knowledge. It is undeniable that throughout history translation has been instrumental in transmitting cultures across barriers and advancing civilization. "It is impossible to separate the history of translation from the history of languages, of cultures, and of literatures--even of religions and of nations" (Berman, 1992, 2).

Translation has been carried out for different purposes but perhaps, the main purpose which has motivated, rather made translation necessary, is communication, communication among individuals, communities and nations. As no cultural community exists without interaction with, dependence on and relation to other cultural communities, translation is the only way that makes the cultural products of different communities available to each other.

The number of literary texts translated from Arabic into European languages remains insignificant in comparison with literary texts from other languages like Japanese, Chinese and even classical Greek and Latin (Büchler & Guthrie, 2011). According to a survey of the literary translations from Arabic into English in the UK and Ireland conducted by Büchler and Guthrie, the numbers of literary works translated from Arabic into English in the period between 1990 and 2010 are as follows:

Fiction (novel)	Memoir	Miscellaneous	Poetry	Short Fiction	-Plays
192	11	1	37	65	3

A large percentage of these works are from Egypt. The same survey shows that three of the most-translated six Arab authors are from Egypt (Naguib Mahfouz, Nawal ElSaadawy and Yousuf Idris) (21).

But the extensive survey lists only one work from Yemen. Even the Three Percent Website, Part of the University of Rochester's translation



program and dedicated to providing translation database on a yearly basis, lists only three literary works from Yemen translated in the period between 2008 and 2019. Even those works translated from Arabic are not translated for their literary value. Büchler and Guthrie's study concludes that with some exceptions, interest in books coming from the Arab world is determined by socio-political factors rather than by the desire to explore the culture of the Middle East and North Africa for its own merits. This means that books from this region are approached primarily as a source of socio-political commentary or documentary, rather than as literary works per se (Büchler & Guthrie, 2011, 7)

The situation, however, is much more complicated than the statistics and surveys above show. Arabic literature is under triple 'embargo', to use Edward Said's term: first, the choice of literary texts is often in favor of works whose treatment of issues 'substantiate[s] western preconceptions of Arab Others' (Ismail, 2015, 916). A second type of embargo is executed by translators themselves- some of them at least- who work hard to remove the differences, appropriate foreign texts for domestic consumption and seek to produce 'fluent' texts conforming to the norms and conventions of the translating culture and language. The third type of embargo comes after translation; this one is practiced by the mainstream media, critics and reviewers in the west and targets texts translated from Arabic, particularly those works that 'do not reiterate the usual clichés about 'Islam', violence, sensuality and so forth' (Said, 1990).

Even though it is obvious that translation does not provide a panacea to the invisibility problem Arabic literature finds itself in, it remains an important first step towards lifting or –at least- easing the 'embargo' imposed on it. With all this in mind, I have chosen to translate Mohammed Abdul-Wali's Arabic novella *Yamutuna Ghuraba* into English hoping to help make Arabic literature (especially that from Yemen) available to more readers.

So my aim, through this translation, is to promote this Yemeni writer in the English-speaking world, and by extension and through this novella of his, promote Yemeni literature which is noticeably limited in the number of translations compared to other Arabic literatures.



Many factors affect the translation process. Peter Newmark (1991) talks about ten factors that may actually or potentially ‘impinge semantically on a text’. However, the discussion in this study will be limited to those factors that have considerably affected the translation of the novella. These are: the linguistic norms of the SL, the culture-specific content items in the SL, the linguistic norms of the TL, and the culture-specific content items in the TL. Though these factors will not be discussed one by one, they will provide a sort of framework for the discussion.

Many theorists, such as J.C. Catford, talk about two important reasons for difficulties in translation: linguistic and cultural, but it is not always possible to draw a line between the two. A language represents an important aspect of a culture and the culture often manifests its presence or specificity through the language. A word or an idiom does not exist in a particular language, sometimes simply because that particular culture does not have the phenomenon that word or idiom represents. Bassnett (81) puts it in this simple way: “Try as I may, I cannot take language out of culture or culture out of language”. Ironically, the factors that are considered responsible for the main difficulties in translation (linguistic and cultural factors) are the *raison d’être* of translation. In this regard, Peter Newmark says, “Translation is an instrument of education as well as truth precisely because it has to reach readers whose cultural and educational level is different from, and often ‘lower’ or earlier, than that of the readers of the original” (Newmark, 1998, 6).

There are many strategies for translation and they are given different labels and terminologies by different theorists and scholars. Each strategy opens up certain possibilities and closes others. Due to the goals I have set for my translation of this literary work, I adopt a translation strategy that ensures that the original text cultural nuances are captured and relayed into the translation; this strategy is called “foreignization” by Lawrence Venuti whose book *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995) examines two important translation strategies: foreignizing and domesticating. Venuti shows in his historical survey that the domesticating translation has been widely practiced in the West for a long time. He emphasizes that

By producing the illusion of transparency, a fluent translation [domesticating translation] masquerades as true semantic equivalence



when it in fact inscribes the foreign text with a partial interpretation, partial to English-language values, reducing if not simply excluding the very difference that translation is called on to convey (Venuti, 1995, 21).

It is this domesticating translation that Antonie Berman calls a bad translation as “generally under the guise of transmissibility, [it] carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work” (Berman, 1992, 5).

It is understandable that an advocacy of a foreignizing strategy in opposition to a domesticating strategy is meant to resist “dominant target-language cultural values so as to signify the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text” (Venuti, 1995, 23) and this may help ease the ‘embargo’ imposed on Arabic literature. However, it is hard to adhere rigidly to such a strategy, given the fact that translation is meant for readers outside the source culture. A translator may retain the “foreignness” of his/her text as much as he/she wishes but he/she cannot ensure its legibility to its intended readers. The target text might turn too clumsy or hard to attract readers and publishers. That is why it is important that translation should take into account considerations of accessibility and readership even if it has to sacrifice some of the peculiarities of foreign text and its language and culture. If a translation, no matter what strategy it employs, remains inaccessible, its very purpose is defeated.

So it needs to be emphasized again that howsoever determined a translator is “to leave the author in peace as much as possible and move the reader towards him” (to use Schleiermacher’s words), he may find himself compelled to “move the author towards” the reader so that they meet halfway (Qtd in Venuti, 1995, 21). Sometimes, the movement of the author (with all that he represents) towards the target reader is inevitable. But it is the duty of translator to decide how, to what extent and under what conditions that movement should be and the decision is usually guided by the purpose of his/her translation.

Keeping in mind the practices of some translators and the purpose for which I have set out to translate Abdul-Wali's novella, my translation of the novella has been done with due respect for the nuances of the text and its language and culture. It aims to represent the source culture as faithfully as possible and within the limits and constraints imposed by the receiving



language and culture. The translation is as keen on representing the source culture and its specificity as it is on finding reasonable readership.

The translator's purpose is to produce a translation which does not do away with the local color and socio-cultural mores but to render them in such a manner that they are intelligible to a reader who is not familiar with the source culture. Such a translation may retain certain "alienating" features giving the text receiver the onus of sorting out their cultural significance with the help of paratextual devices. This is supposed to involve the receiver actively in exploring the source culture and getting familiar with some of its aspects. Though the purpose is to preserve the cultural peculiarities of the source text, it is not, as stated earlier, always possible to ignore the conventions of the translating language and culture, and the sensibilities of the text "receivers that have at their disposal an established system of representation with its own norms for production and consumption of texts" (Faiq, 2004, 35).

In trying to achieve this kind of translation, I have encountered some problems. These problems, for the sake of convenience, are discussed under four headings: cultural problems, problems in translating the metaphor, problems in translating intertextuality and problems of translating euphemism.

Cultural Problems

The renowned English anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor defines culture in his book *Primitive Culture* (1) as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Peter Newmark defines it tersely as the "way of life and its manifestations peculiar to one speech community" (Newmark, 1998, 103). Societies differ in the degree of similarity and difference between their cultures. Generally speaking, the bigger the gap between the SL and TL cultures, the more difficult the translation is. Though many cultural peculiarities are described in ordinary language, language (in its lexis, grammar and idioms) reflects or at least is tinged by the culture it represents. Translation, therefore, is inevitably a process of cultural transmission. Cultural peculiarities, whether they are encapsulated in language items or not, make translation a



challenging task. “In fact, differences between cultures cause many more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure” (Nida, 1964, 130).

An Arab-Islamic culture with many Yemeni cultural peculiarities acts as the backdrop of Mohammed Abdul-Wali’s novella. Its events take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a Christian country and some of its characters are Christian. This in turn complicates the setting against which the events take place.

One of the main problems encountered in the translation of this novella is the translation of those passages, concepts, and even words which are not as much familiar to the translation reader as they are to the source text reader. These concepts, words and idioms represent phenomena which are specific to the Arab-Islamic or Yemeni culture and, therefore, have no ready equivalents in the receiving language and culture. The strategy that has been followed in rendering such culture-specific words and concepts is in line with the purpose of preserving the cultural specificity of the source text and at the same time achieving the highest possible degree of readability.

The examples discussed here are meant for illustration. The first couple of examples have to do with those aspects of culture peculiar to the Yemeni society.

Muwallad (مولد) is a word used in Yemen to describe a person who is of a foreign mother and a Yemeni father or vice versa. These people (*muwalladun*, plural of *Muwallad*) are looked down upon in Yemen, especially if one of the parents is black-skinned. The word is a key word in the novella as one of its major themes is the sense of alienation and rootlessness these people (*muwalladun*) suffer from due to the social discrimination against them. In translating this word one may think of the English word ‘hybrid’ but this word cannot convey the intended meaning of the original as the context does not help. Moreover, the word “hybrid” nowadays has about it some positive connotations. Another word that occurs to the translator’s mind is ‘half-caste’ which is usually used derogatorily to mean “a person whose parents are from different races” (OALD). According to the Longman Dictionary, ‘half-caste’ is “a very offensive word for someone whose parents are of different races”. So it appears the term



captures the derogatory meaning intended by the source text and relays it into the translation. So it has been decided to use “half-caste” in order to recapture the offensiveness of the original term and highlight one of the major themes of the novella.

Another culture-specific word used exclusively in Yemen is *qabili* (قبيلي). This word has been the hardest one to translate. It was the last one to be given an equivalent though not a satisfactory one. The literal meaning of the word *qabili* is a “tribal man”. In Yemen to say that someone is *qabili* means either a person with crude manners (usually associated with tribal people) or an honorable, generous, magnanimous person who does not accept and should not accept any insult inflicted on him. It can also have both meanings at the same time. In its positive sense (honorable and magnanimous person), it is used by Yemenis as a powerful word of praise. At the connotative level, the word actually means much more than the sense given above. The sense in which this word has been used in the source text is the positive one. One of the options that one may think of as a translation of this culture-specific concept is “honorable”. But if one compares the range of meanings of the ST word *qabili* (قبيلي) and the meaning of “honorable” one will realize that this translation is inadequate and strips the ST from its foreignness. Moreover, the suggested TL word denotes only one sense of the many senses of SL word. So in addition to this loss at the denotative level, there is also a loss at the connotative level. The word *qabili* triggers in the SL reader many positive associations related to tribal values. For all these reasons the original concept has been transliterated and the meanings of the ST word and its connotations are explained through paratextual devices, namely footnotes.

Another language item that describes a custom peculiar to the Yemeni society is the verb *yuqayyel* (يُقَيِّل). *Yuqayyel* is to chew *qat* or take part in a session where *qat* is chewed. *Qat* is green leaves of a plant grown in Yemen and some African countries. Many Yemenis gather to chew *qat* and discuss their current affairs. It is like a get-together where people from all walks of life sit under one roof. For the obvious reason of absence of an equivalent in English and for preserving the local color and some of the cultural “strangeness” expressed through this word, the verb *yuqayyel* has been rendered into “take part in a *qat*-chewing session”. As this custom is



unknown to the reader unfamiliar with the source culture, the word *qat* has been paratextually explained in the footnote to provide the reader with information necessary to make reading possible and acquaint him/her with one of the source culture customs.

Some Arabic words are sometimes used in Yemen in a slightly different way from the way they are usually used in standard Arabic. *Faqih* (فقيه) - literally a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence-, for example, is the Arabic word used in Yemen to describe a person who teaches children the Holy Quran and writing and reading. *Faqih* does not teach at a school. He teaches children at his home or at a special corner at a mosque or an adjacent room to it and children's parents pay him regularly. In the forties and fifties of the last century systematic school education was not prevalent in Yemen. The lack of formal education was one of the reasons why Yemenis revolted against the regime in 1962. So the word *Faqih*, has been retained and explained in the footnote in order to avoid the misleading information presented by the word "teacher."

There are concepts which are not peculiar to the Yemeni culture only but to the Islamic culture at large. Some of these have to do with the distinct Islamic rituals and beliefs. One of these is the concept of *janaabah* (جنابة). *Janaabah* is an Islam-specific concept which indicates the state of uncleanness of a person after having sexual intercourse with his/her spouse or after having a sexual discharge in a wet dream. A person in such a state cannot perform his/her prayers or touch the Holy Quran till he/she performs *ghusl* (bath). A concept like this does not have an appropriate equivalent in the receiving language, English. One may be tempted to render it to "ceremonially unclean" but this phrase does not cover the meanings of the original language item. Moreover, the phrase seems to be a Christianity-specific term. As the translator's purpose is to foreground the distinct color of the text and to resist the dominant norms and conventions of the translating language and culture, the source language word *janib* (adj. of *janabah*) has been retained and paratextually explained in the footnote.

Another Islamic concept which English does not have an equivalent for is *i'tikaaf* (اعتكاف). *I'tikaaf* means seclusion in mosque for the sole purpose of worshipping Allah. The person who is in *i'tikaaf* should not have sexual



relations with his wife and is not allowed to leave the mosque except for very urgent necessity e.g., answering the call of nature or joining a funeral procession of a relative or a close friend. As there is no word in English which conveys the meanings mentioned above, the Arabic word has been retained. One may think of using “religious retreat” but this rendering falls short of capturing the SL sense. It also has its Christian connotations. The word *i'tikaaf* has been annotated in the footnote in order to convey the SL sense and also the Islamic specificity of the concept.

Fiqh (فقه), in Islam, is that part of religious education which is concerned with the way ritual practices should be performed, what should be avoided and what should be observed, etc. It is also concerned with the laws and rules which govern social life from an Islamic perspective. The retention of this word is for the obvious reason of absence of an English equivalent which captures the meaning in the SL.

Problems in Translating the Metaphor

Metaphor exists in all languages of the world and all language forms—literary, non-literary, everyday, etc. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This can be easily observed as “We cannot get through three sentences of ordinary fluid discourse without it” (Richards, 1965, 92). In general, metaphors pose difficulties for the translator at two levels: first the translator has to figure out its meaning and its importance intralingually, i.e. in the source text; second, s/he has to face the usually more serious difficulty: finding out the best way to transfer it into the target text.

Different scholars have proposed different methods and procedures with regard to metaphor translation. Peter Newmark talks about six types of metaphors and seven different procedures of translating them. According to Newmark, among the different types of metaphors i.e., cultural, universal and personal, the cultural one is the most difficult to translate. When translating such a metaphor, one should keep in mind both its rhetorical function and its cultural specificity: two problems at a time. For Dagut, however, “What determines the translatability of a SL metaphor is not its ‘boldness’ or ‘originality’ but rather the extent to which the cultural experience and semantic associations on which it draws are shared by speakers of the particular TL” (Dagut, 1976, 28)



Although traditionally treated as a language matter, the metaphor is considered by Lakoff a matter of “thought and reason” involving “understanding one domain of experience... in terms of a very different domain of experience”. The mapping through which metaphors work is “a fixed part of our conceptual system, one of our conventional ways of conceptualizing [things]” (Lakoff, 1993, 206).

Taking cues from studies of different scholars, translation of the metaphorical expressions in the novella sticks to the main strategy of the whole translation: preserving the maximum of the ST cultural nuances and markers. Below, a cultural metaphor is examined.

Kaaba (كعبة) is the Arabic word for that holy structure in Mecca towards which all Muslims turn when praying. The word *kaaba* in Arabic is also used metaphorically to mean a stronghold or center. *Kaaba* of oppression, for examples, means its center or stronghold. In the heated discussion between Hajj Abdul Latif and his secretary at the end of chapter five of *They Die Strangers*, the word *kaaba* is used eight times. Hajj uses it literally, meaning the real holy *kaaba* in Mecca, when he talks about the prediction of the book he has read. As Hajj claims, the prediction says that “*kaaba* will be demolished by people who come from Habasha (Ethiopia). These people are in no way connected to Habasha except by birth ties”. The secretary, who is of a Yemeni father and an Ethiopian mother or (*Muwallad*)- to use the term used in the novella- agrees to this but he cleverly qualifies his agreement; “Yes, we will demolish *kaaba* but which *kaaba*? We will demolish the *kaaba* of oppression, corruption and regression”. The play on the two senses of the word (literal and metaphoric) undoubtedly enriches the meaning of the source text. It also appears that the retention of the metaphor and the play on the two uses does retain the richness in the translation. This is possible partly due to the context in which the word has been used. So the metaphor has been retained and explained in the footnote.

While some metaphors can be rendered literally, some have to be paratextually annotated and some others have to be modified in order to ensure their clarity to the translation reader. The word *toofan* (flood) in the ST is used metaphorically to mean destruction or devastation. The word figures in the ST in a sentence which translates literally, “sins keep



accumulating and ultimately they become flood”. This literal rendering is not likely to convey the intended sense clearly. Rather, it might be misleading. In order to achieve clarity with minimum change in the metaphor, the sentence has been rendered into “sins keep accumulating till they turn into a devastating flood”. The adjective “devastating” has been added to make the sense presented by implication to the ST reader, explicit to the translation reader. Thus the metaphor has been retained with minimum changes.

However, sometimes retaining a metaphor may trigger off unintended effects or result in a funny rendering. *Yaltahimuha bi'aynayhi* (بالتهمها بعينيه), for example, translates literally: “to devour her with his eyes”. This is an “original” metaphor used to emphasize the sexually bizarre way the protagonist is ogling the woman he is talking to; it is one of the author’s devices used to highlight an important characteristic of Abdo Saeed: passion for women. Since the image part of the metaphor is not important, and since there is a risk in rendering it literally, the metaphor has been reduced to its sense; it reads “he was ogling her”. However, it is to be mentioned here that the source text metaphor suggests additional shades of meaning the English rendering fails to suggest. This is an example of the inevitable losses in translation.

Here is another example where the metaphor has been reduced to its sense only for fear of a rendering that appears awkward to the translation reader. The word *'aruus* (bride) in Arabic is sometimes used metaphorically to describe the beauty of things like house, city, car, etc.. In the source text, it is used to describe the protagonist’s house. The sentence in which the metaphor occurs translates literally as “the house was the bride of the village”. It is a ‘cliché’ metaphor which is used as a substitute for description. Keeping in mind the insignificance of the image and the fact that its rendering into English will appear awkward, this metaphor has been reduced to its sense only. The translation reads “The new house was the most beautiful one in the village”.

Problems in Translating Intertextuality

This part will discuss intertextuality and its relationship with translation and strategies used to ensure that the foreign text intertextual relations are maintained in the translation and the loss resulting from the inevitably



incomplete and imprecise translation is minimal. Intertextuality, a term first coined by Julia Kristeva, simply means the interdependence of texts. In her article “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, Kristeva talks about the omnipresence of intertextuality in all texts: “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is an absorption and transformation of another” (37). So, a literary text cannot exist in a vacuum and there is no text that is completely original. In Lawrence Venuti’s words, “Every text is fundamentally an intertext, bound in relations to other texts which are somehow present in it and from which it draws its meaning, value and function” (Venuti, 2009, 157). Intertextuality may involve echoes of other texts, parody, appropriation or direct allusions. Lemke identifies two types of intertextual relationship: relationship between elements of a given text; and relationship between distinct texts (Hatim & Mason, 1990, 125). The discussion here will be restricted to the translation of the second type of intertextuality.

Generally speaking, one of the most daunting difficulties for the translator is translating intertextuality. The foreign text is basically meant for readers who are well-versed in the source language and culture and familiar with the tradition(s) from which the text draws and on which it depends. The translation reader, however, is usually not aware of the hypotext(s) and traditions that were involved in the construction of the foreign text. An intertextual relationship becomes even more challenging when cultural connotations are incorporated into it.

Ordinary Arabic speakers usually use Quranic phrases, phrases from Prophet Mohammed’s tradition (*hadith*), literary tradition and folk lore even in their daily conversations to enhance their discourse, lend it credibility and make it more forceful and appealing. For the same purposes, Mohammed Abdul-Wali’s novella employs intertextual relationships that involve the Holy Quran, Islamic tradition and Arabic literary tradition. While such intertexts are accessible by and familiar to Arabic readers (readers of the foreign text), they are not expected to be recognized and appreciated by the translation readers. Thus, a successful translation of intertextuality is bound to be problematic.



So, the first step in translating intertextuality is to recognize the intertextual relations in the novella and assess their significance both for foreign text and the translation. This is not hard for a competent translator. The problem, however, lies in relaying those intertextual relations into the translation whose readers are not familiar with the anterior texts Abdul-Wali and his characters use, appropriate or refer to.

One of the strategies suggested by translation scholars to deal with the translation of intertextuality is to establish an equivalent intertextuality in the translation by providing analogous intertexts specific to the receiving language and culture (domestication). But this is not only a hard task; it also risks creating a translation totally removed from the foreign text. Opting for a semantic translation alone is also very likely to result in the complete loss of the intertextual relations. Although I accept that the “intertextual relations established by and within the foreign text are rarely recreated in the translation with any completeness or precision” (Venuti, 1995), I try, through certain procedures, to minimize the loss of intertextuality and compensate for it. Therefore, in addition to the lexicographical correspondence, the translator resorts to paratextual devices, mainly footnotes, to delineate the intertextual relations, re-establish the links between the text and its hypotexts and ensure that they are recognized and appreciated by the translation readers.

When the novella uses direct Quranic quotations, the translator uses a type of English akin to that used in sacred texts like the Bible to distinguish them from the main text and evoke their Quranic associations; for this I rely on Yusuf Ali’s translation of the Holy Quran available online⁽¹⁾. Footnotes are also necessary to make it clear to the translation reader that such quotations are from the Quran, the meaning they have in the Quranic context and the intended meaning in the context of the novella.

An example of direct Quranic quotations is the following: إن الله لا يضيع أجر من أحسن عمل (74)

(1) Both the translation of the novella and this paper rely on Yusuf Ali’s translation of the Quran available on this website: <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp>



It has been translated into: *verily, Allah shall not suffer to perish the reward of any who do a (single) righteous deed* (64) as it directly reverberates the Quranic verse:

إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ مَنْ أَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا (سورة الكهف- 30)

which is translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali as follows: *verily, We shall not suffer to perish the reward of any who do a (single) righteous deed* (18-30)

In the story of the novella both Hajj Abdul-Latif and Saleh Saif are trying to persuade Abdo Saeed to accept to take responsibility for raising his illegitimate son. They don't want to see the child being brought up by an 'ill-reputed' Christian woman. Their motives are clearly religious. So their language needs to be forceful and highly persuasive. That is why they deliberately use phrases that echo Quranic phrases and sometimes quote the Quran almost verbatim.

It is to be pointed out here that the majority of the intertextual relations in the novella are intertextual signals – a term given by Hatim and Mason to refer to those elements of a text that “do not constitute the intertextual reference as such but are crucial pointers to it” (Hatim and Mason 1990). Intertextual signals are even harder to retain. The examples discussed here are some of the many intertextual signals in the text. Let us consider the first example. The original sentence is: *على جبهته علامة سوداء من اثر السجود* (52) It has been translated into: *On his forehead he has a dark spot left by regular prostrating* (41).

Semantically, the sentence in English conveys the sense adequately. The narrator describes Sayyad as a person who is fervently devoted to God. He prays and prostrates to God so much that visible dark traces are left on his forehead. However, the original sentence sends us back to the context of the Holy Quran where the prophet and his companions are described in similar terms. These are the Quranic lines:

محمد رسول الله والذين معه أشداء على الكفار رحماء بينهم تراهم ركعاً سجداً يبتغون فضلاً من الله ورضواناً سيماهم في وجوههم من أثر السجود... (الفتح- 29)

Muhammad is the messenger of Allah; and those who are with him are strong against Unbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other. Thou wilt see them bow and prostrate themselves (In prayer), seeking Grace /



From Allah and (His) Good pleasure. *On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration* (48: 29).

The English translation is a mere physical description of the person. It does not trigger these Quranic associations and the resonance they have. So the intertextual relation is completely lost. The only procedure that can minimize this kind of loss is using a footnote that explains this intertextual relation in the original text.

Astafaka (اصطفاك) is the phrase which comes in the original sentence that translates: *Allah has chosen you to save him* (67). Here, Sayyad Amin is addressing Hajj Abdul Latif who, as Sayyad claims, has been chosen by Allah to save the child, Abdo Saeed's illegitimate child. Sayyad's purpose is to persuade Hajj to do his best to save the child from becoming an 'infidel'. Since the motive is religious, the speaker is using religious texts to help him bring his point home. The very choice of the phrase *astafaka* (has chosen you) is in line with this purpose. The phrase *astafaka* is laden with Quranic associations; Quran uses this phrase on many occasions including when talking about how prophets have been chosen by Allah, in preference to others, to carry and spread His message. Undoubtedly, Sayyad's use of this phrase makes him more persuasive and his message more forceful. The use of the phrase *astafaka* is deliberate and evokes in the foreign text reader all these Quranic associations which the English phrase "has chosen you" fails to do. These are some of the Quranic lines where *astafa* is used:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَ آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَ آلَ عِمْرَانَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ (آل عمران -33)

Allah did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of Imran above all people (3:33).

Another Quranic verse where the phrase *astafa* figures out is the following:

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ لَكُمْ طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ يُؤْتَ سَعَةً مِنَ الْمَالِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مَلَكَهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ (البقرة- 247)

This is its translation according to Yusuf Ali:

Their Prophet said to them: "Allah hath appointed Talut as king over you." They said: "How can he exercise authority over us when we are



better fitted than he to exercise authority, and he is not even gifted, with wealth in abundance?" He said: "*Allah hath Chosen him* above you, and hath gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess: Allah Granteth His authority to whom He pleaseth. Allah careth for all, and He knoweth all things."

Again, *Teena mukhtalifa* (طينة مختلفة) simply means "different nature" but the original phrase which literally translates "different sorts of clay" sends the foreign text reader to the story of the origin of mankind i.e., clay. The original seems to suggest that the people in question were originally, when created, made of different sorts of clay. So they have different natures. As we notice the resonance of the original is lost and that seems to be inevitable.

Furthermore, *al-khamru umu al-masaib* (الخمير أم المصائب) is another sentence, which literally translates "wine is the mother of all disasters" (69), echoes a well-known saying in the Islamic tradition: Wine is the mother of all evils. (الخمير أم الخبائث)

While the reader of the source text sentence perceives this intertextuality easily, the ordinary translation reader is very likely to miss it. Sometimes the meaning of a text depends totally on the recognition of the intertextual relationship. If the reader fails to recognize this relationship the meaning is completely missed. However, intertextuality in most of the cases in this novella is introduced to enrich the meaning and make the discourse more effective and persuasive. The discourse does not depend entirely on intertextuality. Therefore, translation may not retain the intertextual relations of the foreign text, but it remains far from being defective.

Translation of Euphemism

Euphemism is a word or an expression usually used to refer to something we feel embarrassed to say directly. Sometimes it is used to make an unpleasant thing seem more acceptable or less unpleasant. As embarrassing and unpleasant things vary from one culture/society to another, even from one individual to another, things which are expressed through euphemism may also vary. Sometimes different linguistic communities may agree on the unpleasantness of a particular object or phenomenon, but they may follow different euphemistic ways of referring to them. So a euphemistic



expression used by one community or in one culture is not necessarily intelligible to readers from another community with a different culture. Ideally, the duty of the translator is to retain the euphemistic expressions of the foreign text in the receiving language as they are important socio-cultural markers. Sometimes the literal rendering, with the help of the context, is as clear and intelligible to the translation reader as it is to the foreign text reader. Sometimes some modifications are necessary. In certain cases, however, a literal rendering might prove vague or even funny. This novella, though sometimes uses direct and bold words and phrases, employs euphemistic expressions to describe things that have to do with sex, immoral behavior, excrement and death.

Consider the following example:

Khaatiah (خاطئة) comes in the sentence which literally means “I work as a sinner”. The woman addressing Sayyad uses this euphemistic expression to say that she is a “prostitute”. The literal rendering of this euphemism, given above, does not seem to convey the intended sense. It does not sound like an English idiom either. In order to retain this euphemism and avoid a blunt rendering, the sentence has been translated as “I earn my livelihood through sinning”. Even this sentence in isolation might not convey the sense of the original as there are different ways of sinning which can make money. Other possibilities of meaning are excluded by the sentences that follow the sentence in question:

You know I earn my livelihood through sinning. But what can I do? I have to live, earn my bread. In the future, I will lose my youth and I will not find anyone interested in me. So I have to keep some money that will be of help to me when I lose the visitors who frequent my house now. I know that nobody will accept me as a wife but...(41)

Sometimes an SL euphemism finds an appropriate equivalent euphemism in the TL. For example, the text employs the phrase which translates “doing the necessary things” to indicate “defecating and urinating”. Since English has its own euphemistic expressions to indicate the same activity, the ST euphemism has been replaced by one of the TL euphemistic expressions i.e., “answer the call of nature”.



However, finding an appropriate equivalent is not always possible. For example, the original text uses a sentence which translates literally, “made a woman of her” to indicate the act of “deflowering”. As the literal rendering does not convey the ST sense, the ST sentence has been rendered into a direct expression, which used to be considered euphemistic but lost its euphemistic meaning due to the euphemism treadmill: “deflowered her”.

Sometimes different euphemistic expressions are used to refer to one thing. For example, the original text uses more than three different euphemistic expressions to mean: indulgence in illegal sexual relationship with women. Rendering these euphemisms literally does not convey the intended sense of the original. Rather, the translation may be misleading. “To be acquainted with more than one woman” and “to be close to various women” are examples of literal renderings. These two expressions were rendered into euphemisms in the TL i.e., “to have contact with more than one woman” and “to have intimate relationship with various women”.

Conclusion

Though translating Arabic literature does not solve its invisibility problem, it remains a necessary first step. Depending on his/her purpose, it is the translator’s choice whether to suppress differences and produce a ‘fluent’ translation that conforms to the traditions and conventions of the receiving language and culture or produce a translation that preserves the foreignness of the source text. In the translation under consideration for this paper, the translator’s choice was the second one and he thought a foreignizing strategy would serve the purpose. On the basis of the researcher’s own translation of the Yemeni novella “*Yamutuna Ghuraba*”, this paper has addressed some of the most common areas of difficulty in translating Arabic fiction and the strategies adopted to tackle such difficulties. One may decide upon a translation strategy that preserves the foreignness of the foreign text but practically it is just hard to adhere to a single strategy throughout the translation, especially when the translator wishes to see his/her translation published and read by a good number of readers. It is true that the translation tries its best to preserve most of the culture-specific terms and intertextual relations with the help of explanatory additions. But Most of the euphemistic expressions in the novella relating to



themes usually euphemized in both English and Arabic have been replaced with equivalent euphemistic expressions in English. Even some metaphors, though metaphors are important socio-cultural markers, as we saw, have been reduced to their senses for fear of an awkward rendering. In-text explications are avoided as they are likely to produce an expanded and clumsy translation. Instead, paratextual devices, though they relegate those relations and cultural specificity to a place outside the text, are economically used.

Therefore, one may conclude that a foreignizing strategy that keeps in mind issues of accessibility is a reasonably appropriate strategy. However, there is no readymade prescription for achieving this. It is the competent translator's job to strike the balance so that the translation produced becomes the first genuine step towards solving the invisibility problem of Arabic literature. With regard to this translation on which the paper is based, it must be pointed out that knowledge of the source text socio-cultural mores, metaphors and intertextual relations, undoubtedly, contributes to a full appreciation of the text but sacrificing some of them for reasons of expediency and wider circulation won't produce a defective translation.

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