

**Translating Culture-Specific Items in Khairy Shalaby's
"The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets":
A Semiotic Approach**

Mohamed Tohamy,
Faculty of Arts & Humanities,
Suez Canal University

Abstract

Translating culture-specific items is recognized by translators and translation researchers as a problematic task, particularly when the translator is alien to the source culture. This study aims at analyzing culture-specific items in Cooperson's translation of Kairy Shalaby's /raḥalāt ḥalṭoršagi ḥalḥalwagi/ (1991), as "The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets" (2010, 2016). An adapted version of Peirce's three-dimensional model for semiotranslation (Representamen, Object, and Interpretation), and Dalabastita's (1993) transformation processes (substitution, repetition, deletion, addition, and permutation) are used to analyze the selected extracts. The analysis is restricted to 10 extracts, containing 27 culture-specific items which are randomly selected from the first four chapters of the novel. These items are in colloquial Egyptian Arabic and carry cultural, historical, and environmental connotations. The results show that out of 27 culture-specific items, the translator fails to deliver the semiotic representation of 15, which may result in the loss of some aspects of the meaning intended by the ST author. It has also been found that the transformation processes that are extensively used by the translator are addition and deletion. These two processes are used to compensate for the absence of a semiotically equivalent sign in the Target language.

Key words: Culture-specific items – Peirce's semiotic model – Transformation processes – semiotranslation

مستخلص

تعتبر ترجمة المفردات الثقافية الخاصة واحدة من الإشكاليات التي يواجهها المترجم والباحث في الترجمة، خصوصاً عندما يكون المترجم غريباً عن الثقافة التي ينقل منها. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل المفردات الثقافية الخاصة في ترجمة مايكل كوبيرسون لرواية خيرى شلبى "رحلات الطرشجى الحلوجى". ، ولتحليل الأمثلة المختارة وعددها ١٠ أمثلة تحتوى على ٢٧ مفردة ثقافية بالغة العامية المصرية ، اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج تشارلز بيرس للترجمة السيميائية ، وكذلك استراتيجيات التحويل لديلاباستيتا. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن المترجم لم يوفق في نقل المدلولات السيميائية للعدد الأكبر من المفردات التي تم تحليلها، ونتج عن ذلك فقدان النص المترجم للكثير من المعاني والمفاهيم الضمنية للنص الأصلي خصوصاً، وأن تلك المعاني تحمل الكثير من المفاهيم والمضامين الثقافية والتاريخية والبيئية للنص الأصلي.

Translating Culture-Specific Items in Khairy Shalaby's "The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets": A Semiotic Approach

Mohamed Tohamy,
Faculty of Arts & Humanities,
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1. Introduction

The main objective of this study is to conduct a semiotic analysis of the translation of colloquial Egyptian Arabic items in Khairy Shalaby's novel "رحلات الطرشجي الحلوجي" /raḥalāt ṭarṣagi ṭalḥalwagi/ (1991), translated as "*The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets*" by Michael Cooperson. Translating colloquial Egyptian items/signs requires that the translator have thorough and deep understanding of Egyptian culture, especially those aspects that represent "a cultural gap or distance between the source language and the target language" (Newmark, 1988, p. 103). This study seeks to identify the extent to which the meanings of cultural signs/items are successfully transferred from the source language (i.e. Colloquial Egyptian Arabic; henceforth CEA) to the target language (i.e. English). To do this, the selected items are analyzed connotatively and denotatively in both the source and the target texts. By conducting a comparison between the SL and the TL, it is possible to find out how semiotic analysis helps to evaluate whether or not the translator could deliver the meanings and achieve the same effect that is intended by the author of the source text.

Translation is regarded by many researchers as a semiotic act which involves the transmission of a message from one semiotic system (conventionally known as source language), to another (target language) (Petrilli, 2013; Kowrdis, 2012; Bassnett, 1991). The term semiotranslation was introduced by Gorlee (1994) to highlight the close relationship between semiotics and translation. Torop (2008) argues that semiotranslation relies on the recognition that "culture works in many respects as a translation mechanism" (p. 257).

The connection between translation and culture is best identified when translation is approached from a semiotic perspective. Eco and Niggaard (2001) describe translation as "an intertextual and intercultural drift" (p. 218) which can be recognized as transmission of the 'a' text which is encoded according to a particular semiotic system to the 'b' text which is encoded according to another semiotic system. In addition,

Jakobson's (1959, p. 133) typology of translation as intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic is recognized by semioticians as an influential typology in the field of translation studies. Torop (2002, p. 593) points out the fact that semioticians adopt this typology as the base for understanding how cultural items/signs are translated from one semiotic system to another.

This study is based on Delabastita's (1993) definition of translation as "a kind of operation aiming... to transfer the meaning of an original text across linguistic and other borders" (p. xiii) (my emphasis). Delabastita's phrase "other borders" appeals to the Saussurian concept of meaning which distinguishes between denotation, or "the inherent semantic structure of a sentence", and interpretation or connotation which refers to understanding "the same sentence... in each unique case of language use", (Kooij, 1971, p. 117). The term interpretation, in this context, is related to Saussure's concept of non-linguistic semiotic systems.

Kordis (2015) mentions that semiotranslation studies include, among other topics, "the translation of connotation... [and]... the translation of semantic isotopies" (p. 315). Translation of connotations, according to Barthes (1967, p. 91), relate the cultural system included in the source language signs to the target language sign. Translation of semantic isotopies or, sense levels, enhances the concept that semiotic translation is, in fact, a translation of cultural signs.

2. Literature Review

Recent translation studies have shown an increasing tendency to bring together semiotics and translation theories. However, most of those studies focus on Jakobson's notion of intersemiotic translation showing how it is possible to translate from one semiotic system to another, such as "translating" a novel into a film. Such studies use the term translation metaphorically because it is extended to include a larger notion of translation than just translation from one natural language to another (Dusi, 2015). Perez-Gonzalez (2014, p. 120) comments on the lack of consensus on views regarding intersemiotic translation of literature. While some scholars such as Gottlieb (1997) and Remael (2001) regard intersemiotic translation as the transfer of meaning from one media system to another, others consider it a shift from one variant to another within the same sign system.

It is observed that studies that adopt a semiotic approach to analyze and evaluate translations are very few. Parlog (2019) refers to the fact that semiotic approaches to translation are "less studied than other fields of knowledge, such as linguistics, semantics, phonetics, translation studies,

.... [i]t is paramount to the clarification of relations between different types of signs whose signification changes according to... significant elements involved in the process of constructing meaning" (p. 1). For example, Kurniasih, Nuriman, and Jaelani (2019) studied verbal-visual intersemiotic translation of advertisement slogans in Indonesian context. They investigate the translation of selected advertisement slogans from English into Indonesian, adopting Jackendoff's (1990) conceptual structure and Jakobson's (1959) intersemiotic translation approach. They find that the translation of verbal message from English into Indonesian has undergone various types of shifts, but the visual message remains the same.

Ali (2020) studies the translation of iconic language in the Holy Quran. He investigates how iconicity is rendered in Zidan's and Al-Hilali & Khan's translations of the Quran. Examining the cognitive processes associated with the semantic and semiotic representation of selected lexical items, Ali finds that the iconicity of the Quranic language conveys pragmatic and communicative meanings which represent a challenge to the translator.

It is worth mentioning that the scarcity of related literature gives more significance to the present study as it is one of the few studies that, so far, have adopted the Peircean three dimensional model to analyze the translation of cultural signs from CEA into English.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Peircean perceptive on translation as developed by Torop (2008), Delabastita (2008) and Gorlee (2004). Peirce's model introduces the sign as having three constituents: the Interpretant, the Representamen and the Object. The Interpretant refers to ideas and meanings conveyed by the sign, or more precisely, it refers to the mental effect the sign has on its interpreters (Peirce, 1931-58). The other two components of Peirce's three-dimensional model are the sign itself, referred to as the representamen, and the object, the referent which is something the sign refers to.

In this Peircean model, the sign, or the representamen, comes first as it is the first element in the communication process that interpreters perceive before they start interpretation. The object comes in the second position "as it antecedes the sign as the knowledge which we have to interpret" (Nöth, 2012, p. 28). The third position is occupied by the interpretant as it interprets the ideas carried by both the sign and the object. Ellström (2014, p. 91) considers the interpretant the most essential and "perhaps the most problematic" as it "comprises the notion of

something being produced in the mind”. It is the result of thinking and interpreting. Ellström (2014) uses Peirce’s description of the interpretant as “a more developed new sign in the mind of some person” (p. 91).

The current study adopts the notion that the translated text is the interpretant as translation “depends on the interpretation of both individual sign and sign system” (Torop, 2000, p. 606). Thus, translation activity is the process of crossing the boundary between the original and the translation to reach the recipient culture (p. 599). To understand this activity, it is essential to analyze it in the light of Pierce’s triad, where the interpretant is the result of translation activity, or a new developed sign placed within the recipient culture. This concept is shown in Figure 1, where the representamen (or the source text) is understood and processed by the translator who refers the sign to a referent (object/ background knowledge). This process results in a translated text carrying the mental effect the representamen has on the translator.

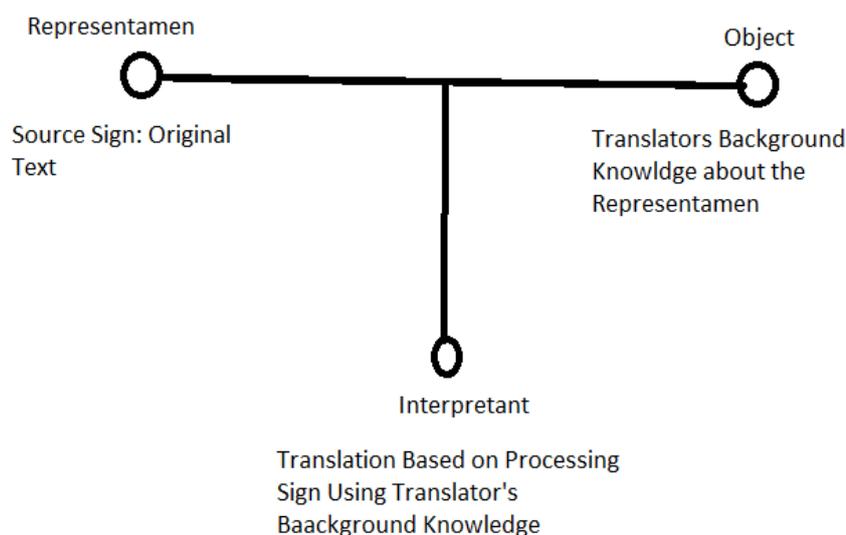


Fig. 1: Applying Peircean Model to the Translation Process

The journey of the sign from the representamen through the object to the interpretant passes one or more of the five transformation processes suggested by Delabastita (1993, pp. 33-39), namely substitution, repetition, deletion, addition, and permutation. Table 1 is Delabastita’s configurations of those five processes in the light of source/target language code, source/target cultural code, and source/target textual code.

Table 1: Transformation processes in translation (adapted from Delabastita, 1993)

Code Operation	SL code → TL code	SL culture → TL culture	SL textual code → TL textual code
Substitution	higher or lower degree of linguistic equivalence	- naturalization - modernization - topicalization - nationalization	acceptable text adaptation
Repetition	- total: non-translation, copy - partial: calque, word-for-word translation	- exoticization	non-acceptable text
Deletion	- reductive translation - expressive reduction	universalization through the removal of foreign cultural signs	- TT is a less typical specimen of a (target) text type - neutralization of stylistic peculiarities
Addition	- paraphrase - over translation - expressive amplification	exoticization through the positive addition of foreign cultural signs	TT is a more typical specimen of a (target) text type.
Permutation	metatextual compensation	metatextual compensation	metatextual compensation

Table 1 shows that substitution, which is the replacement of an ST item by an equivalent TT one, represents the major relationship between the representamen and the interpretant (see Fig.1). Certain substitutions may achieve a higher degree of equivalence, but there are other cases where substitutions are “characterized by a ... less equivalent relational value” (Delabastita, 1993, p. 33). The second transformation category suggested by Delabastita is repetition where an item is “repeated or transferred directly from the ST into the TT”. Siskin (1987, p. 310) puts repetition under the larger category of translation homologues. Examples of translation homologues are the adoption of loanwords into TL, and the spread of religious cultural items in specific languages through the translation of religious texts. The third component is deletion according to which an item in the ST “is not rendered in the TT” (p. 35). Deletions cannot be avoided as translators may find themselves obliged to sacrifice certain ST items for the sake of rendering a TT text with a maximal

degree of cultural equivalence. As for addition, the TT contains linguistic, cultural, or textual signs which “have no apparent antecedent in the ST” (p. 36). Translators show a strong tendency to expand the TT for reasons of clarity and coherence.

The last component in Delabastita’s five-point inventory is permutation, which refers to the “respective textual positions [of signs] within the ST and the TT” (p. 36). This means that the position of signs within the TT does not necessarily reflect their relative position in the ST. Permutation is shown at the metatextual levels where translators use footnotes, parentheses, bold fonts, or italics.

4. Research Questions

- 1 - To what extent does the translator succeed in delivering the semiotic representation of the original?
- 2- Does the cultural background of the translator affect his ability to transmit the cultural semiotic representation of the original?

5. Data

Khairy Shalaby (1938-2011) is an Egyptian novelist who is best known for portraying socially marginalized characters in his novels, short stories and plays. Shalaby’s novel رحلات الطرشجي الحلوجي /raḥalāt ṭaṭoršagi ṭalḥalwagi/ (1991), and its translation as “*The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets*” by Michael Cooperson (2010) represent the data for this study. It is about a fictional time-traveler, named Ibn Shalaby, who wanders through time, moving from the 1990s to the Fatimid dynasty in the 12th Century, the Mamluk era in the 14th century, and back again to the 1990s.

The main feature of Khairy Shalaby’s style, in his novels, is his ability to create a unique amalgam of Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth MSA) and CEA to form well-structured and coherent sentences. It may be true that Egyptian literary fiction contains stretches of CEA, especially in dialogues. However, Khairy Shalaby’s writing is different in that he considers MSA and CEA two varieties of language that have to be equally appreciated and respected. In an interview that was published eleven years after his death, Shalaby admitted that he uses an artistic language with multiple levels of expression. The items which are commonly known as colloquial are considered by Shalaby as originally standard words that have undergone some phonological and sometimes semantic changes. When these items are used in Shalaby’s novels, they are etymologically returned to their origin as standard words, and subjected to the rules of Arabic grammar and parsing (Aldostor, 2019). This phenomenon is illustrated in the following examples taken

from the novel under study. Words that are known as belonging to CEA are highlighted.

Example 1:

يبدو أن المقريري توسم في أني ابن ناس طيبين. (p. 20)
He must have realized that I was a <u>person of some importance</u> . (p. 16)

Example 2:

وكنت أفكر في أن الواحد يمكن أن يبيع ماء الذهب هذا لأي صائغ إذا فشلت الدعوة أو ضربني السلك. (p. 21)
... thinking that even if the visit did not work and I found myself <u>busted flat</u> I could sell the gilt to a goldsmith. (p. 16)

Example 3:

حرفوش مصري يجري ورائي ولا يأنف من حمل البقجة على رأسه كالسيدات. (p. 45)
The boy was a typical Egyptian <u>harfush</u> , not too proud to carry <u>the bundle</u> on his head as a woman would do. (p. 44)

Culture-specific concepts represented by the underlined items in examples 1, 2 and 3 may be challenging tasks for a non-native translator. Michael Cooperson, the translator of /raḥalāt ʔaltoršagi ʔalḥalwagi/, is an American who studied Arabic in the department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. As shown in his Curriculum Vitae (<https://nelc.ucla.edu/person/michael-cooperson/>), he just spent a couple of years in Cairo, a period which is too short for anyone to get acquainted with those culture-specific items that are deeply rooted in Egyptian culture. For these reasons, this study focuses on analyzing the translation of such items from a semiotic perspective. For consideration of space, 10 extracts, containing 27 culture-specific items, are randomly selected from the first four chapters of the novel to be analyzed using the Peircean model for translation analysis.

6. Procedures

The qualitative method is adopted for data analysis. CEA expressions in the selected extracts are focused on to find out whether or not the translator has successfully rendered these expressions into English. First, CEA expressions and their translations are decoded as signs based on the Peircean model. Second, these signs are identified according to the three-dimensional Peircean model as follows:

- **The Representamen:** Source sign or the CEA form in the ST.
- **The Object:** Translator’s background knowledge about the representamen.
- **The Interpretant:** Translation based on processing the sign using the translator’s background knowledge.

The model consists of the linguistic sign (Representamen) which generates meanings based on translator’s background knowledge (object) which, in turn, is significant to identify the meaning of the sign and deliver a translation (Interpretant) that can achieve appropriate semiotic equivalence between ST and TT. Semiotic equivalence means that the effect of the TT sign on the TL reader is somewhat similar to that the ST has on the SL reader. In this study, semiotic equivalence is investigated through analyzing the relationship between the Representamen and the Interpretant using Delabastita’s (1993) five transformation processes: substitution, repetition, deletion, addition, and permutation. This relationship is examined in terms of the plus mathematical symbol (+) as a positive sign showing that the translator uses this specific transformation process in his translation of the item, and the minus symbol (-) to show that the transformation process is absent.

7. Analysis

Extract 1: Title

ST	رحلات الطرشجي الحلوجي /raḥalāt ʔalṭoršagi ʔalḥalwagi/
TT	The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
رحلات الطرشجي الحلوجي /raḥalāt ʔalṭoršagi ʔalḥalwagi/						The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets
1- raḥalāt	+	-	-	+	-	time-travels
2- ʔalṭoršagi	+	-	-	+	-	the man who sold pickles
3- ʔalḥalwagi	+	-	-	+	-	(who sold) sweets
	Journeys of a man who makes/sells pickles and sweets					

The Arabic title of the novel carries a number of cultural semiotic implications. The title contains three signs (the terms “words”, “signs” and “items” are used interchangeably), *raḥalāt*, *ḥalṭoršagi*, and *ḥalḥalwagi*. The first sign *raḥalāt* rendered as *time-travels* refers to the act of moving from one location to another. However, the events of the novel show that this sign is intended by the author to refer to the protagonist's time dislocations. Ibn Shalaby's movements between different points in time are what the author, Khairy Shalaby, thought about when he used the sign *raḥalāt* in the title of his novel. Taking this into consideration, the translator renders it as *time-travel*, where the item *time* is added to achieve an interpretant which is equal to the representamen posed in the original. The second sign in the title, *ḥalṭoršagi*, which was first used during the Fatimid Era in the 10th century (Wassef, 2004, p. 904), refers to preserving vegetables in salt water and vinegar. Amin (2013) considers *ḥalṭoršagi* a unique Egyptian phenomenon that he has not seen in other countries. Moreover, he notes that “the poor live on eating a lot of it” (p. 342). The translator does not render this word as a single noun like the original; rather, he translates it as a relative clause, *the man who sold pickles*. This means that the original sign is subjected to two transformation processes (namely substitution and addition) before it occurs as the interpretant *the man who sold pickles*. The translator follows the same strategy with the third sign in the title, *ḥalḥalwagi*. However, to avoid repetition, he reduces the (bracketed) relative clause as follows:

The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and (who sold) Sweets

The title itself signifies a number of iconic connotations which can be stated as follows:

- Daily life of an ordinary Egyptian is a mixture of salt (pickles) and sweet.
- The history of Egypt contains days of victory and power (sweet), and others of defeat and weakness (pickles).

It is clear that Cooperson, who studies Near Eastern languages and civilizations, takes these connotations into consideration when he translates the title of this novel. Thus, semiotic equivalence between the Arabic title and its translation is highly achieved.

Extract 2:

ST	<p>فإذا به يهتف قائلاً و لكن بالخواجاتي طبعاً : بس قابلتك مرة في المغرب في مجلس الخليفة الفاطمي المعز لدين الله. قلت يا سلام، ثم تعانقتنا و سرنا</p> <p>/faʔiða bihi yahtif qaʔelan wa lakin bilɥwagati ʔabˈn: bass ʔana ʔabiltak marrah fi ʔalmaɣreb fi maɣlis ʔalɥalifa ʔalfaʔimi ʔalmuˈiz lidiin illah. ʔult ya salam, tumma taˈanqna wa serna/ (p. 7)</p>
TT	<p>when he suddenly exclaimed (in Foreignish, naturally), “Got it! It was in North Africa, at Mu‘izz’s court in Qayrawan.” “How about that!” I exclaimed. We embraced and set off (p. 2)</p>

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
1- bilɥwagati ʔabˈn	+	-	-	+	+	(in Foreignish, naturally)
2- bass	+	-	-	+	+	Got it!
3- ʔalmaɣreb	+	-	-	+	-	North Africa
4- maɣlis ʔalɥalifa ʔalfaʔimi ʔalmuˈiz lidiin illah	+	-	+	+	-	at Mu‘izz’s court in Qayrawan
5- ya salam	+	-	-	+	+	“ How about that! ”
	Non-Egyptian speaker is involved–speaker has a different culture – speaker speaks Arabic with a European accent.					

In this extract, the speaker, who is trying to remember where he met Ibn Shalaby, is non-Egyptian. The object of this extract shows that the speaker has a different culture and does not speak Arabic. “الخواجة” /alɥawaɣah/ in the Egyptian culture is a sign that is used to refer to a Christian European who used to live and work in Egypt (Amin, 2013, p. 199). Because those foreigners need to interact with Egyptians in their daily transactions, they try hard to speak CEA. The translator adds the brackets () in order to highlight the uniqueness of this word in CEA. He uses the brackets “(in Foreignish, naturally)” as supplementary information which can be removed without changing the structural flow of the sentence. Then, the writer continues the dialogue between the two men using the sign “بس” /bass/ which means “but” or “only”. Egyptians

sometimes use “بس” as a filler which gives the speaker a chance to think of what he/she is trying to say. However, it is delivered in the TT through the meaning of the abbreviated sentence “Got it!”, (its full form being is “I have got it!”), which can be back translated as “وجدتها” /wağdtuha/. The translator deals with the sign “بس” as an idiom in which he uses the permutation technique trying hard to deliver the meaning of this Egyptian filler. This means that the person finds what he is trying to remember.

The translation of “المغرب” /almağrib/ into “North Africa” depends on the historical events of the Fatimid State which has been extended along the Mediterranean coast from Morocco to Egypt. These wide regions have been called North Africa. “مجلس الخليفة الفاطمي المعز لدين الله” /mağlis ʔalḥalifa ʔalfatimi ʔalmuʔiz lidiin illah/ is translated into “Muʔizz’s court in Qayrawan”. This part contains many changes in the translated text. For instance, the phrase “الخليفة الفاطمي” /alḥalifa alfatimi/ is not deleted in the TT. The translator just refers to the name of the caliph “Muizz” without mentioning his social rank in the Fatimid Era. The sign “Qayrawan” is not found in the source text. It is added as the regular place of the caliph at that time. The interpretation of this extract depends mainly on the historical background of the writer, the translator and the reader.

“يا سلام” /ya salam/ is a sign of surprise. It is followed in the TT, but not in the ST, by the exclamation mark (!). It doesn’t have any relation to the original meaning of the word “سلام” /salam/ which means “peace”. The exclamation appears clearly from the rising tone which stresses the last syllable /yə slɑ:m/. The paralinguistic features such as pitch, sound quality and tone are substituted in the translation by inverted commas and exclamation mark: “How about that!”.

Semiotically, the translator finds it difficult to deliver the meanings of culture-based items in this extract. However, he resorts to some strategies, particularly addition and permutation, to make the TT signs able to carry the ST cultural features as much as possible. For example, he finds a linguistic equivalent to the sign “بالخواجاتي” /belḥwagati/ which is “Foreignish” although this word is not included in the entries of many English/English dictionaries. This equivalent sign makes it easy for the readers of the target text to understand how this character is speaking. Besides, he does not mention the social rank of “Muizz” in this extract directly. He mentions it in the chapter’s title “The Caliph’s Invitation” “دعوة للإفطار على مائدة المعز لدين الله الفاطمي” /daʕwa lilʔiftar ʕala maʔidat

ʔalmuʕiz lidin illah ʔalfaʔmi/ which delivers the meaning appropriately. Additionally, his translation of the colloquial expression “يا سلام” /ya slam/ is suitable for its original Egyptian meaning. The translator achieves the semiotic equivalence by adding the word “**exclaimed**” which adds to the meaning of the question “**How about that!**”. On the other hand, he does not succeed in delivering the meaning of the sign “بس”. Semiotic equivalence is not achieved here although he adds (!).

Extract 3:

ST	خوaja أروب يعرف كل شيء /ħawağah ʔarub ya ʕrif kul šayʕ/ (p. 8)
TT	Lane-Poole was a wily foreign gentleman who knew all there was to know about everything..... (p. 2)

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
ħawağah ʔarub	+	-	-	+	-	wily foreign gentleman
	Foreigners are clever, knowledgeable, cunning, and know what they want.					

This sign is interpreted as the person who is very clever at getting what he wants. The sign “الخواجة” /alħawağah/ is analyzed semiotically and translationally in extract (2). Concerning the Egyptian culture, “أروب” /ʔarub/ is an adjective which is given to the person who knows different things in many fields. It is an iconic sign for the person’s cleverness. The translator adds a compensated sign for “أروب” which is “**wily**”. He also makes a paraphrastic translation for the sign to make it clearer. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2005:1685), “**wily**” means “clever at getting what you want, and willing to trick people”. Besides, “**gentleman**” is defined as “a man who is polite and well educated, who has excellent manners and always behave well” (p. 621). This sign is repeated three times in this chapter. It is also translated in the same way to deliver the same concept in the translator’s mind.

Semiotically, the translator could not find a sign in the TT that is equivalent to the ST sign /ʔarub/. In Egyptian culture /ʔarub/ is not necessarily a gentleman, so the use of the word “gentleman” is redundant in this context.

Extract 4:

ST	قالوا أى مقهى وأى حساب يا عبيط يا مخلول .. الحساب الحقيقى سوف تراه الآن جزاء اقتحامك منطقة البناء! /qalū ʔay maqha w ʔay hisab ya ‘abīṭ ya maḥlul .. ʔalḥisab ʔalḥaqīqī sawfa tarah ʔalʔān ǧazaʔ ʔeqṭhamak mantiqat ʔalbināʔ/ (p. 8)
TT	“Café?” they said. “Bill?” “The only thing you’ll be paying is the penalty for trespassing on a building site!” (p. 3)

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
1- ḥisab	+	-	-	-	-	bill
	Price for drinks in popular coffee shops					
2- ya ‘abīṭ	-	-	-	-	-	-
	foolish, stupid					
3- ya maḥlul	-	-	-	-	-	-
	crazy, suffering from mental disorders					
	Someone is described as being foolish and crazy because they interfere with others' affairs.					

Three forms of the representamen in this extract are omitted in the interpretant. That is why the ST signs /ḥisab/, /ya ‘abīṭ/, and /ya maḥlul/ are not represented in the TT. The first sign /ḥisab/ is used to mean “price for articles services”. It is often used in popular coffee places to mean “price for drinks”. Using the TT sign “bill” as translation of /ḥisab/ reduces the cultural semiotic connotation of the word. If the translator used the addition strategy and translated the word as “coffee price” rather

than “bill”, the TT sign would have achieved a higher level of cultural connotation.

The whole sentence is interpreted as that the speaker is annoyed of the foolish behaviour of the addressee. The signs /‘abīṭ/, and /maḥlul/ are used in CEA to describe someone who behaves in a foolish and stupid way. “عبيط” /‘abīṭ/ is translated by Spiro (1991, p. 33) as “silly or foolish”. This is an Egyptian adjective which describes a stupid person whose behavior does not show good sense or judgement. Besides, “مخلول” /maḥlul/, in Egyptian culture, refers to a crazy person who suffers from mental disorder. In fact, these two signs used in CEA to insult others, particularly those who cause annoyance by their misbehaviour. Unfortunately, the translator completely ignores these two words, which might make this particular situation confusing to the TT reader. It would be possible for the translator to use other linguistic signs such as “**crazy or foolish**” to deliver the intended meaning, but he did not; and this results in meaning loss in the translated texts. These signs can be put in the form of exclamations like “**How crazy are you! /How foolish are you! /What a foolish guy! /**”. The translator fails to use any of the five transformation strategies to deliver these signs in the TT text. He uses the deliberate omission technique by the removal of these two semiotic cultural signs.

Extract 5:

ST	<p>قلت رغم محنتي بكل صفاقة : ميلزمش خدمة ؟؟..صاح بكل بساطة: يلزم. سابت مفاصلي ، خفت أن يطلب فلوسا او مؤازرة ، لكنه.....</p> <p>/qult raġm miḥnatī bikul šafaqah: maylzaṃš ḥidma.. saḥ bikul basaṭa: yilzam. sabit mafaṣlī ḥuft ?an yaṭlub flusan ?aw mu?azara lakinahu... / (p. 9)</p>
TT	<p>Despite my predicament, I had the effrontery to shout, “If you need any-thing, just let me know!”</p> <p>He called back, “Now that you mention it, I do.”</p> <p>My knees went weak... What if he needed money? Or someone to take his side in the argument he was having?.....(p. 4)</p>

Translating Culture-Specific Items in Khairy Shalaby's "The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets": A Semiotic Approach

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
maylzaṣṣ ḥidma	+	-	-	+	-	If you need any-thing, just let me know!
	offering help					
yilzam	+	-	-	+	-	Now that you mention it, I do
	accepting offer					
sabit mafaṣṣlī	+	-	-	+	-	My knees went weak
	having no potential to help					
	Offering help without having the potential to be helpful					

This extract shows that someone is telling another that he needs something. However, the addressee feels that he is not prepared to offer help. The object of the whole extract can be interpreted as offering help to someone despite having no potential to be helpful. The object in this example, shown in the offer “میلزماش ḥidma” /maylzaṣṣ ḥidma/, reflects the magnanimity and the chivalry of ordinary middle-class Egyptians. The sign “خدمة” /ḥidma/ is not translated literally as “service”. The translator deals with the connotation of this word “**If you need anything**”. Besides, the answer to this offer is very concise in the TT “يلزم” /yilzam/ which shows the speaker’s reluctance as to whether to accept the offer or not. It is rendered as a complete statement “**Now that you mention it**”. The translator adds this clause in the interpretant to show the reluctance of the speaker in the representamen /yilzam/. This clause is followed by another simple clause “**I do**” which can be understood as “**Yes, I need something**”.

The ST idiom “سابت مفاصلي” /sabit mafaṣṣlī/ is a very famous Egyptian idiom which expresses strong feelings of fear. The translator gives an equivalent idiom in the TT “**My knees went weak**” giving the same meaning.

Cambridge Online Dictionary
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/weak-at-the-knees#:~:text=If%20you%20go%20weak%20at,go%20weak%20at%20th>

[e%20knees](#).) defines this idiom as “lose your strength and feel you are going to fall over, usually because of... something unpleasant or frightening”. Both ST and TT are iconic signs for the feeling of fear. This is one of the few examples in the novel where the ST idiom has an equivalent TT one.

Cooperson has successfully rendered the meaning of this extract. The interpretant delivers the meaning of the object related to Egyptian culture. A high level of semiotic cultural equivalence is achieved because the translator uses the transformation techniques, substitution and addition, appropriately to deliver the meaning intended by the ST author. He uses some target cultural signs which are relevant to the ST signs.

Extract 6:

ST	فزغدها شيخ عجوز ببوز عكازه ثم برطم: /fazağadha šayḥ ‘ağuz bibuz ‘ukazuh tumma bartṭam...../ (p. 23)
TT	Poking at her with his staff , an old man launched into a rant :..... (p. 18)

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
1- fazağadha	+	-	-	-	-	Poking
2- šayḥ ‘ağuz	+	-	+	-	-	an old man
3- bibuz	-	-	-	-	-	-
4- bartṭam	+	-	-	-	+	launched into a rant
	An old man pokes a girl with his walking stick and starts to speak angrily.					

This extract shows that someone pokes a girl with his staff and starts to rant. The old man is ranting about the Mamluks whom no one knows where they are from. The object explains this representamen as an old man who pokes a girl with his walking stick and starts to speak angrily. "فَزْ غَدَهَا" /fazağadha/ is a CEA expression which means poking someone physically with something. As a result, the meaning of this sign is delivered through the translator's ability to process the cultural references of the sign in his mind. The sign, "شَيْخٌ عَجُوزٌ" /šayḥ 'ağuz/ is symbolic of an old-aged man. It is translated as "an old man", which partially delivers the meaning, because in addition to old age, the Arabic sign /šayḥ/ refers to dignity and solemnity. This aspect of meaning is absent in the TT. Then, "بُوزٌ عَكَازُهُ" /buz 'ukazuh/ is an iconic sign for the oldness of the man who cannot walk without this curved stick which is similar to his curved back. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, "staff" is an old-fashioned or formal word that refers to "a long stick used as a support when walking or climbing, as a weapon or as a symbol of authority" (2005:1433). As for the sign "بِرْطَمٌ" /barttam/, it is used in CEA to show how angry a person is. It is a symbolic sign for the old man's anger and disapproval of something. The translation of this sign into "rant" reflects that the old man's loud and angry comments continue for some time.

Cooperson achieves semiotic equivalence in three cases out of four. He uses some suitable linguistic equivalents for the Egyptian Arabic signs used in this extract. "Poking" is used as an equivalent sign for "فَزْ غَدَهَا". However, the translation of the sign /buz 'ukazuh/ as "staff" ignores the part in the stick which is used to poke the girl with. It seems that the ST author uses the word /buz/ as he wants the readers to imagine the scene. Accordingly, the deletion of this word in the translation results in the loss of some aspect of meaning. Finally, adding "launched into" delivers the correct meaning of the man's continuous angry comments.

Extract 7:

ST	<p>أيه أخبارك؟ بخير و الحمد لله ، رأسه و ألف سيف أن يعزمني على نارجيله مع القرفة . أهلاً يا أبو شلبي قلت لو لم يكن سريع الحلقان ، /ʔahlān ya ʔabu šalaby ʔih ʔaḥbarrak biḥir wa alḥamdulillah raʔsu wa ʔalf sayf ʔan y'zimny 'la nargila m'a ʔilqirfa qult law lam yakun sare' ʔilḥilfan/ (p. 25)</p>
TT	<p>"Hello, Ibn Shalaby! How's it going?" I told him I was fine, and he swore that wild horses couldn't stop him from treating me to a water pipe filled with cinnamon tobacco. I replied that since he has sworn an oath, I had better accept. (p. 21)</p>

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
1- ?abu šalaby	+	-	+	-	+	Ibn Shalaby
someone whose (father) is named Shalaby						
2- ?ih ?ahbarrak	+	-	+	+	+	How's it going?
greeting, social interaction						
3- ra?su wa ?alf sayf	+	-	+	+	-	wild horses couldn't stop him
someone insists on doing something						
4- nargila m'a ?ilqirfa	+	-	+	+	-	a waterpipe filled with cinnamon tobacco
smoke a waterpipe and have a cinnamon drink						
5- law lam yakun sare' ?ilhilfan	+	-	-	+	-	since he has sworn an oath, I had better accept
someone insists on inviting another by swearing						
	Warm greeting and invitation to smoke a water pipe and drink cinnamon					

This extract is an example of a speech act of greeting and showing hospitality in a purely Egyptian way. The speaker insists on inviting Ibn Shalaby to smoke a waterpipe and have a famous Egyptian drink, cinnamon. The representamen contains a number of culture-based signs/expressions which may lose some of their connotations when translated into English. The first sign to be discussed is /?abu šalaby/ which is rendered by Cooperson as “Ibn Shalaby”. Literally /?abu/ means “father” and /?ibn/ means “son”. It seems that the translator got confused between the two signs as he does not have a background about how these signs are used in CEA. According to Amin (2013), /?abu/ in CEA is sometimes used to mean son; so /abu yousof/ is used to call someone whose father is named Yousof (p. 27). The translator fails to render this cultural taste when he deletes the sign /?abu/ and substitutes it with /?ibn/. However, the translator replaces the full stop (.) in the representamen with an exclamation mark (!). In English, exclamation marks are used to

show strong emotions such as delight or surprise. The translator uses the exclamation mark in this situation as a paralinguistic feature to reflect the warm reception that Ibn Shalaby receives in this extract.

The linguistic sign /ʔih ʔahbarrak/ is used as a filler to make the dialogue friendlier. Literally, it means "What is your news?". However, in CEA it is not related to getting someone's news. It is just a way of socializing when people meet. The translator successfully processes the object of this sign and translates it as "How's it going?"

The Arabic expression /raʔsu wa ʔalf sayf/ means that someone insists on doing something without any regression. Literally, it can be interpreted as "he can put his head under the blades of a thousand swords to achieve and get what he wants". The translator uses "**wild horses couldn't stop him**" as a substitution for the representamen /raʔsu wa ʔalf sayf/. According to *Macmillan Online Dictionary* (2020), this spoken phrase is used for emphasizing that someone is determined to do something. It is acceptable to use a TT idiom to translate an ST one although the translation may not cause the same effect of the original because idioms often reflect the history, culture and environment of the native speaker.

The extract contains an example of the translator's misunderstanding of the ST. He understood /nargila m'a ʔilqirfa/ as a sort of tobacco mixed with cinnamon. In fact, cinnamon is a known drink served in Egyptian popular cafes. Taking this background into account, this sign could be translated as "a waterpipe and a cup of cinnamon drink" rather than "a waterpipe filled with cinnamon tobacco". The translator's misprocessing of the object results in an interpretant that diverges from the representamen.

Culturally speaking, the CEA expression /law lam yakun sare' ʔilhilfan/ is used when we have to accept someone's offer or invitation though we are not willing to do. Literally, it can be interpreted as "if he did not swear so swiftly (I might not accept the invitation). Cooperson processes the object appropriately and renders it as "since he has sworn an oath, I had better accept". His almost literal translation of this sign makes it possible to retain the native cultural taste of the original.

In his attempt to achieve semiotic equivalence between the representamen and the interpretant in this extract, Cooperson repeatedly uses the addition and deletion techniques. In (1) he deletes /ʔabu/ and added /ibn/, in (2) and (3) he deletes the whole signs (/ʔih ʔahbarrak/, raʔsu wa ʔalf sayf) and adds ones which are not lexically related to the

original (“How’s it going?”, “wild horses couldn’t stop him”), and in (5) he adds the clause “I had better accept”.

Extract 8:

ST	<p style="text-align: center;">و لحق بي هامساً في تودد كبير : (ما أوصيش سعادتك .. لو خاتم بفص للذكرى ..)</p> <p>/wa laħiq bi hamisan fi tawadud kabir : mawšiš sa‘adetak .. law ħatim bifaš lilzikra../ (p. 29)</p>
TT	<p>then caught up with me, whispering as if we were old friends, “If it’s not too much trouble, sir, could you save me something, even just a ring with a gemstone in it, as a souvenir?” (p. 26)</p>

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
mawšiš sa‘adetak	+	-	+	+	+	If it’s not too much trouble, sir, could you save me something
	request					
	I politely request a ring with a gemstone as a souvenir.					

This extract is a speech act, a request, coded in CEA. The addresser, who occupies a lower position on the power hierarchy, is politely requesting a souvenir from the addressee who is a superordinate, or higher on power hierarchy. That is why the addresser initiates his request with /mawšiš sa‘adetak/ which, in the Egyptian culture, is an iconic sign for reminding others of what they may do for us. Literally, it can be translated as “I do not recommend you do it”, but this is not what it means. The translator processed the representamen appropriately and understood it to be a request. Thus the interpretant, “if it is not too much trouble”, yields the intended meaning despite being void of ST cultural flavour. It is also noted that the negative structure in the representamen has been rendered in the form of a conditional if-clause followed by the independent clause, “could you save me something”, to make the whole sentence understood as a request. To show the differing power relations between the speakers, the translator uses the sign “sir”.

Cultural semiotic equivalence could not be achieved in this extract as the translator has to delete the sign /mawṣīṣ/, and compensate for it by adding a whole conditional sentence. Permutation is also present in this extract where the translator adds extra information, like the dependent clause “could you save me something”.

Extract 9:

ST	<p>حينئذ عطف على جندي مغربي فنظر في وجهي من فوق كتفه قائلاً: أيه .. ذهب .. ما تعرفش الذهب؟ قلت : ((يا خير أسود .. يسكبون الذهب على عتبة الباب هكذا كأنه الأسمنت؟)) /ħinaʔiɖin ʔaʔafa ʔalya ġundi maġrabi fanazar fi waġhi min fawq kiʔafhu qaʔilan aih ɖahab mateʔafeš ʔaldahab ʔ qult ya ħabbar iswid .. yaskubuna ʔaldahab ʔala ʔatabit ʔalbab hakada kaʔanahu alʔasmant/ (p. 32)</p>
TT	<p>A Moroccan soldier leaned back and surveyed me over his shoulder. “It’s gold. Never heard of it before?” “Holy cow! They pour gold out on the threshold like cement?” (p. 30)</p>

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
ya ħabbar iswid ..	+	-	+	+	+	Holy cow!
It is great astonishment to see gold poured on the ground.						

In his time travels, Ibn Shalaby found himself in the era of the Fatimid State that is known for its luxury and opulence. Seeing gold being poured on the threshold like cement, Ibn Shalaby exclaimed surprisingly /ya ħabbar iswid ../, which is a symbolic sign for bad news. It shows that it is unbelievable to pour gold on the ground. It can be literally translated as “What a black piece of news!”, which is associated with the black colour and its negative connotations in Egyptian culture. The translator uses the expression “**Holy cow!**” which is an informal idiom used as an interjection to express surprise or excitement (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Semiotically speaking, semiotic equivalence is achieved in this example though it loses some of its cultural connotations. The translator uses three transformation strategies in his attempt to find a semiotically equivalent translation for this expression. Like the previous example, he deletes the whole ST sign and adds a TT one which is

lexically unrelated to the ST. To highlight the feeling of astonishment, the translator uses an exclamation mark instead of the dots used in the ST.

Extract 10:

ST	فهز رأسه و قال فى اقتضاب : (أي نعم .. أنت أبو شليس على سن و رمح). /fa hazz raʔsahu w qal fi ʔiqtiḏab ʔay naʕm ʔinta ʔabu šalaby ʕla sin w rumḥ/ (p. 43)
TT	He nodded and said curtly, “Indeed we do. You’re the famous Ibn Shalaby. ” (p. 42)

Representamen (ST sign)	Object: processing representamen by translator					Interpretant (TT sign)
	Substitution	Repetition	Deletion	Addition	Permutation	
/ʕla sin w rumḥ/	+	-	+	+	-	famous
	well-known, dignified, respected, great					

The representamen in this extract can be interpreted as “Ibn Shalaby, the protagonist of the novel, is a well-known, respected and dignified person”. In the Egyptian culture, the object of this extract means that people sometimes glorify and appreciate each other trying to break the ice and create a sociable atmosphere when they use expressions such as /ʕla sin w rumḥ/ to praise someone. The ST sign contains two elements /ʔinta ʔabu šalaby/ and the very colloquial Egyptian expression /ʕla sin w rumḥ/. This element is not translated literally in the TT (i.e. you are on the spearhead). Taymour Pasha (2016, p. 57) explains that this is a metaphoric expression used in CEA to refer to dignity, greatness, respect and prominent status in society. The original expression “سِن الرمح” /sin ʔalrumḥ/ has undergone changes and become the CEA “على سن و رمح” /ʕla sin w rumḥ/. The translator introduces only one aspect of the meaning of the representamen when he renders it as “**the famous**”. He misprocesses the object as he interprets it as just “the famous” ignoring other connotations of the sign. Semiotic equivalence is not achieved in this extract as the translator deletes the whole ST sign and adds one that is not semiotically related to the ST.

8. Conclusion

This study focuses on culture-specific items in Michael Cooperson's translation of Khairy Shalaby's novel *The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets*. The novel is immersed in Egyptian culture and history; therefore, it arouses linguistic and cultural difficulties for the translator. Ten extracts containing 27 culture-specific items are studied and analyzed using Peirce's three-dimensional model as developed by Torop (2008) and revised by the author of the present study. The two research questions that are posed on the study revolve around whether or not the translator is successful in delivering the semiotic representation of the ST items, and the extent to which the translator's cultural background affects his ability to transmit the semiotic connotations of the ST items. It has been found that out of 27 culture-specific items, the translator fails to deliver the semiotic representation of 15, which may result in the loss of some aspects of the meaning intended by the ST author. Being a nonnative, the translator lacks the appropriate cultural semiotic background to assume the task of translating a literary work that is abundant in culture-specific items. To process the representamen (ST sign), the translator resorts to some transformation strategies, particularly addition and deletion, before delivering the interpretant (TT sign). These strategies are extensively used when the translator finds it difficult to render a semiotically equivalent sign. The results also show that some items are ignored, or deleted, when the translator fails to process the object using his own cultural background. The permutation process is rarely used by the translator although it could have been useful if the translator added some metatextual elements in the form of footnotes or parenthetical information to compensate for the absence of equivalent signs in the TT.

Integration of semiotic models in translation studies widens the borders of appropriate research methodologies that are adopted when the cultural component of a translation is analyzed. As Sutiste and Torop (2008) put it, semiotranslation expands "the possibilities of methodological synthesis between translation studies and semiotics" (p. 203).

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LIST OF TRANSLAITRATION SYMBOLS

The following symbols, adopted from Rietbroek (2010), are used to represent Arabic consonants and vowels for the transliteration of the ST.

Arabic Sound	Symbol	Description	Arabic Sound	Symbol	Description
ا	a ā	Front, open, spread, short Back, open, neutral, long	ع	ʿ	Pharyngeal, fricative, voiced
ب	b	Bilabial, stop, voiced	غ	ġ	Uvular, fricative, voiced
ت	t	Alveodental, stop, voiceless	ف	f	Labiodental, fricative, voiceless
ث	t̤	Interdental, fricative, voiceless	ق	q	Uvular, stop, voiceless
ج	ġ	Velar, stop, voiced	ك	k	Velar, stop, voiceless
ح	ħ	Pharyngeal, fricative, voiceless	ل	l	Alveodental, lateral, voiced
خ	ħ	Uvular, fricative, voiced	م	m	Bilabial, nasal, voiced
د	d	Alveodental, stop, voiced	ن	n	Alveodental, nasal, voiced
ذ	d̤	Interdental, fricative, voiced	ه	h	Glottal, fricative, voiceless
ر	r	Alveodental, trill, voiced	و	w ū	Labiovelar, glide, voiced Back, close, close rounded, long
ز	z	Alveodental, fricative, voiced	ي	y ī	Palatal, glide, voiced Front, close, spread, long
س	s	Alveodental, fricative, voiceless	ء	ʔ	Glottal, stop, voiceless
ش	ʃ	Alveopalatal, fricative, voiceless	ى	ā	Back, open, neutral, long
ص	ʂ	Alveodental, emphatic fricative, voiceless	أ	a	Front, open, spread, short
ض	ɖ	Alveodental, emphatic stop, voiced	إ	i	Front, half-close, spread, short
ط	t̤	Alveodental, emphatic stop, voiceless	ؤ	u	Back, half-close, close-rounded, short
ظ	ʒ	Interdental, emphatic fricative, voiced			