

*Original article*

## Translations of Fear and (Basic) Fears of Translation - "The Little Foxes that Spoil the Vine"

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### **Abstract**

*The article explores some of the major sources of fear, or anxiety, in translating, and occasionally interpreting, between English and Arabic, based on input from a limited sample of Arab university students, focusing on textual, linguistic and technical aspects, and makes some informal notes on the effects of hatred and ignorance and how fear of translation translates in practice. The fears this article addresses are fear of the unknown and the unfamiliar, including fear of technical vocabulary and neologisms, fear of idioms and metaphors, fear of ambiguity, fear of mistranslation and of written texts, fear of mechanics, and fear of rhythm and rhyme. The article does not offer a panacea for any of these basic fears. It rather provides some options and strategies to overcome each of them.*

**Keywords:** Ambiguity, Fear of translation, Idioms and metaphors (trophophobia), Neologisms, Rhythm and metrophobia, Unfamiliar.

### **1. Introduction: Where translators (and interpreters) fear to tread**

The adaptation of Alexander Pope's line in this subheading is not meant to establish any parallelism between "translators" and "angels". Quite on the contrary, translators and interpreters are human ideologues and culture-carriers. They have their aspirations, ideals, interests, affiliations, biases and their fears. Those fears translate, i.e., manifest themselves, differently in different contexts and circumstances and with different translators/ interpreters. Where do those fears come from? There could be many speculations, but very few final answers, in response to the question.

Basically, those fears have to do with any or all of these: (1) the text (mode and medium, purpose and genre, register and vocabulary, tone and related aspects), (2) the translator (gender and personality, education, training and background) and (3) the context of translation (time and place, clients and censors, audience), including the cultures where the text is produced and where it is translated – the Mother culture and the Other culture, so to speak. The fears relating to text, translator or context are

legitimate. Translation is always a dangerous encounter between these two cultures, between self and other mediated by text or talk. It is also a bridge (at least metaphorically; see Mazid, 2007). The encounter, or the crossing of the bridge, "involves all kinds of risks, simply because decisions have to be taken constantly, especially with a view to acceptance by readers, editors, religious leaders and political powers" (Monteiro, 2006: 65).

The article addresses some of the basic fears of translation between Arabic and English. The article was inspired by, but goes far beyond, my discussion, of what is frightening and what creates tension and anxiety in translation and interpreting, with my students in the Department of Translation Studies at the UAE University during the academic year 2008-2009. Their responses include

- a) fear of not writing like a native writer;
- b) fear of metaphors and idioms;
- c) of not sounding idiomatic enough;
- d) of not being able to put translation theories into practice;
- e) of translation theories as such;
- f) of certain genres and text domains such as political, medical, legal and technical discourse;
- g) of not being able to establish cohesion in a paragraph;
- h) of mechanics and grammar, and occasionally of transcription;
- i) fear of critical and embarrassing situations in interpreting, especially in medical and political contexts;
- j) of not being able to meet the deadline;
- k) of not communicating the exact meaning of the original text, of translating one's own culture, of dealing with "foul" language, and
- l) of conference interpreting.

Not all of those fears are addressed in this article – and the list is not exhaustive of all possible fears of translation and interpreting, either. Although cultural, ideological and political fears of translation and interpreting merit serious research attention, those that are treated here are rather basic and mostly have to do with the text – its linguistic, mechanical and technical aspects – rather than the translator, the context of translation, or the audience. Some of the fears listed above, as well as others, e.g., fear of dealing with foul language and fear of political authority, are discussed in Mazid (2006, 2007). There, they appear under other headings such as issues and problems, not fears.

## **2. Fear, ignorance and hatred**

### **2.1. A vicious circle**

"If you are feeling anxious, you are certainly not alone.... Fear is a basic human response. A healthy fear protects you from real harm but an irrational fear, or phobia, can control you and keep you from living life to its fullest...." (Johnson, J. Accessed July 5, 2009. <http://www.anxietytreatmentcenter.net/index.htm>)

Fear is a basic human emotion. It is arguably the strongest of human emotions. Some believe that the entire history of humanity is a history of fighting or fleeing from fears and the many shades between fight and flight (Massumi, 1993). From the fear of floods and hurricanes, to the fear of darkness, to the fear of wars, hot and cold, to the fear of anthrax, AIDS and swine flu, to the telefear of watching wars on TV, to the fear of strangers and Islamophobia, humanity continues to prosper, or stumble, at least

partly, as result of how it strives to handle fear. Common fears today include fear of terrorist attacks, fear of spiders, fear of death, fear of failure, fear of war, fear of heights, fear of crime/violence, fear of being alone, fear of the future and nuclear war.

The list of fears, which become phobias, when left untreated, is too long. No matter what its source might be, fear does not exist in a vacuum. "Hatred has a twin brother, and it's fear" (Reese, 2007) and "A man is an enemy of anything he does not know/ Ignorance breeds hostility", thus the Arabic adage goes. Perhaps earlier, Lucius Accius puts it in Latin thus, Oderint, dum metuant ("let them hate, so long as they fear"). Fear, ignorance and hatred can be thought of as a triangle or a vicious circle. Which of them breeds which is difficult to determine, but they are inevitably interrelated. The triad should always be situated in a context. It is an oversimplification to argue that we hate whatever we fear or we fear whatever we hate.

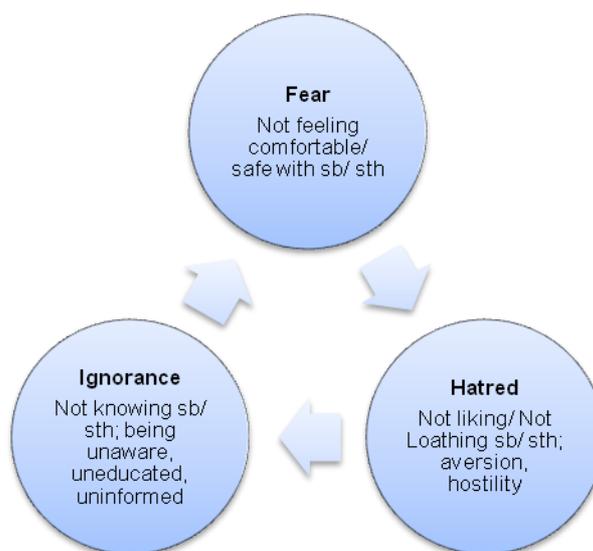


Fig. 1: Ignorance, Hatred and Fear: A Vicious Cycle

## 2.2. In translation

"Saying that 'if you can speak a language, you can translate it' is like saying 'if you can breathe, you can be a pulmonary specialist'" (Ronald Wolfe, qtd in Russell-Bitting, 2003)

In the context of translation, lack of adequate knowledge of, for example, idioms or proverbial in the target language (TL) may result in anxiety and tension when dealing with these forms of expression. Poor achievement due to anxiety and tension can contribute to developing a feeling of hatred toward the TL. Alternatively, an antagonistic stance toward a foreign culture, for religious or political reasons, may manifest itself in a wholesale avoidance of its language or in developing a pragmatist attitude where idioms, jokes, and so on, are unnecessary for doing business or simply communicating information in that language. The approach to and methods of teaching and learning the foreign language can be responsible, through their focus on reading and writing and decontextualized grammar instruction, for lack of knowledge of the cultural package the language is wrapped in. With lack of knowledge come hatred and fear or fear and hatred. One case in point is that of grammar teaching and learning – an area of trouble in most Arabs schools and universities. Because of poor teaching, grammar has come to be one of the most hated and feared aspects of language, both mother and

foreign. The fear and the hatred are carried over, as discussed below, to translating between the two languages – English and Arabic.

Thus, wherever the circle of ignorance, fear and hatred starts, it can come full circle – the other states or feelings are likely to develop. The three enemies of translation are often referred to in translation studies as problems or difficulties of translation or issues in translation – euphemistic expressions for whatever translators and interpreters fear or hate or do not know. Seen positively, those enemies can become friends if productively redirected: ignorance can underscore and stir a desire to know; fear can motivate a desire to challenge and confront; hatred, since love is often blind, can ensure a critical stance toward "foreign" texts.

In order to redirect the fears of translation and interpreting, it is necessary to explore where they come from and how they translate, i.e., manifest themselves, in both, into, for example, fighting, flighting, evading, slanting, and so on (more or less variations on the fight, flight, or freeze fear response toolbox reported in the Mental Health Foundation's undated *In the Face of Fear*: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)), the areas translators and interpreters "fear to tread" and the sources of their fears. The fear the article is concerned with is the not the same as the translation anxiety that readers of Walter Benjamin are quite aware of – the anxiety of the reader of a translation about the fidelity of the translation.

Before examining some fears of translation, some translations of "fear" – its various meanings in English and Arabic as well as its manifestations in social life and translation – are discussed below.

### 3. Translations of fear

“... fear has legs, because it can walk ...” (Sirvyde, 2006: 85).

The Dictionary.com lists a large number of meanings for the noun fear, which designates a basic, innate human emotion, taken from major dictionaries: "a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined; the feeling or condition of being afraid (usually accompanied by a desire to flee or fight)"; "a specific instance of or propensity for such a feeling: an abnormal fear of heights"; "concern or anxiety; solicitude: a fear for someone's safety", "reverential awe, esp. toward God"; "that which causes a feeling of being afraid; that of which a person is afraid: Cancer is a common fear". Example phrases and sentences: "They hushed it up out of fear of public reaction", "the fear of God", "the Chinese reverence for the dead", "The French treat food with gentle reverence", "his respect for the law bordered on veneration". Some of the interesting details in the entries about fear include the difference between fear of and fear for, the latter being a synonym of "care about" and "concern for".

Fear translates into Arabic as khawf ("fear") ruḥb ("horror"), qalaq ("anxiety"), rahbah ("dread"), halaḥ ("panic"), jazaḥ, fazaḥ ("apprehension", "fright", or "alarm"). When fear means fear of God, it translates into khashyah, makhaafah ("fear") and taqwa ("piety"). It is interesting that the Arabic root r-h-b can give ḥirhaab ("terror", "terrorism") as well as rahbaaniyyah ("asceticism", "mysticism"). When fear is morbidly habitual, when it is excessive and crippling, it becomes phobia. Arabic had to coin two neologisms to translate "phobia": khuwaaf and ruhaab.

This translational gymnastics is not what fear is all about. Nor is its characterization as an innate emotion adequate. It is learned and socially-conditioned, thus fear experts tell us (for example, Olsson and Phelps, 2007; <http://psychcentral.com/news/2007/03/16/how-fear-is-learned/691.html> and

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17705342>). By "learned", those experts seem to mean that one can develop a certain fear out of a painful experience. By socially-conditioned, they perhaps mean that we come to fear objects and states because other people around us fear them. Fear can very well be contagious, as many human emotions are.

As indicated above, fear can manifest itself in a variety of social and physical symptoms. In communicative and interpersonal spaces, it can translate into a desire to flee, freeze or fight. In translation and interpreting, unless translators or interpreters are capable of facing it at their own, or some other party's expense, it translates into a myriad of strategies for omission, avoidance, chunking up, down, or sideways, domesticating, skewing and slanting - fleeing from translational dangers or threats, ignoring or taming them. Granting that language is a socio-cognitive semiotic behavior, it is interesting to examine how reactions to fears in social and interpersonal encounters parallel or index reactions to fears in translation and interpreting, but this is beside the point(s) of the present article.

#### **4. ... and fears of translation**

"Translation is difficult and risky" (Solomon, 2004: 107).

A conclusive list of the areas where translators and interpreters "fear to tread", not to mention different ways of handling those areas, or different degrees of fighting, freezing and flighting from translational demons and panics, so to speak, is beyond the scope of any single article. The headings below point to some major areas of fear and trouble in translation and interpreting, specifically in the context of Arabic and English; they do not seek to provide a final map of "dangerous territories", as it were, in translation and/ or interpreting. They do not provide final solution to those fears, although they contain ideas for how to handle them. Synonyms of fear such as anxiety and apprehension are occasionally used to mean more or less the same thing. No attempt is made to establish any semantic boundaries between them.

##### **4.1. *Fear of the unknown, the unfamiliar***

"Fear for the unknown,  
Fear for the known,  
Fear of everything combined,  
Fear is what makes me blind ..."

(David Daveres: Fears of a Teenage Mafioso,

<http://odonnellerinvgq.wordpress.com/2010/04/05/fears-of-a-teenage-mafioso-bydavid-daveres/>)

Many translation students (I have taught in three Arab countries) panic when working with a technical text. They feel relaxed when working with literary and social texts. There is nothing inherently difficult about a technical text if translators are well-trained and exposed to enough technical translation and have access to relevant terminologies. One explanation of this fear can be found in the nature of technical vs. non-technical texts and the terminology which the former contain. There are fewer options when it comes to picking up the right word in translating a technical term. In a non-technical text, depending on context, the options are obviously more.

One example is the word "fear" itself. Arabic, as already shown above, has a large number of equivalents to the word, depending on how strong it is. The word "molecule", on the other hand, can only translate into the Arabic *juzay?*. Intuitively, the more technical a word is, the fewer the options available for translating it into another language. The feelings of unease, tension, or anxiety under limitation are only too human to merit a lot of speculation. Those feelings can be complicated further by the

fact that simply picking the right equivalent to a technical term, something a translation machine can do, is often not enough. The translator needs to have some background knowledge about the subject of the text where the term occurs. In many cases, the subject of the text, for example, nanotechnology, genetic engineering, or non-organic chemistry, is a dark area for the translator.

Fear of the unknown explains a great deal of the anxiety and tension felt by an interpreter "waiting with bated breath" for what is to come next. The anxiety and the tension can be minimized if the interpreter has enough background about the subject and the content of the discourse to be interpreted. Intuitively, the more "critical" the interpreting situation and the less background the interpreter has about it, the more the anxiety and the tension. An interpreter may also be worried about not being able to remember, about losing track of what s/he heard especially when doing consecutive interpreting in an information-dense context. Taking notes can be a good strategy to conquer "the fear of losing the information" (Huang et al., 2009: 20).

Many elements in the target culture (TC), the culture of the language we translate into, can be dark areas: "One result is fear of foreign writing, fear of not knowing enough about the culture where a foreign work was written in order to be able to appreciate it" (Venuti, 2008, see Editors). The more culture-specific, the more indigenous and home-grown an expression or word is, e.g., words for foods, clothes, festivals and places and locations, and so on, the more difficult it is for a translator who does not have enough experience with the TC. Translation, which is reiterating the very obvious, involves a lot of decision-making and it does so more conspicuously in translating cultural references – to keep the reference as is but simply transliterate it, to explain it, to find an equivalent in the TL, or to ignore it altogether (e.g., Mazid, 2007).

Fear of the unfamiliar in the context of translating from Arabic may be responsible for staying away from texts in Classical Arabic – the Arabic of the Quran and pre-Islamic poetry, of the great Islamic civilization down to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. One way of helping translation students overcome this fear is to train them on intralingually translating a text in Classical Arabic into Modern Standard Arabic – the Arabic of news broadcasts and newspapers in Arab countries, or to their own local varieties of Arabic - and then interlingually translate it into other languages, e.g., English (for a more detailed discussion and illustration of this process, see Mazid, 2009). My predominantly literal translation of the following example could be made more beautiful, but this is not the goal here.

qaala baṣḌu Z-Zurafaaʔ fi l furaaqi muṢaafaḥatu t-tasliim wa rajaʔu l ʔawbah wa s-slaamatu min l malal wa Ṣimaaratu l qalbi bish-shawq wa l ʔunsu bi l mukaatabah wa kataba abu Ṣabdillaah izzinjyyu l kaatib jaza llaahu l furaaqa Ṣanna khayra fa ʔinnama huwa zafratun wa Ṣabrah ḥumma ṢtiṢaamun wa tawakkul ḥumma taʔmiilun wa tawaqquṢ wa qabbaha llaahu t-talaaqii fa ʔinnama huwa masarratu laḥZatin wa masaaʔatu ʔayyaam wa btihaaju saaṢatin wa ktiʔaabu zamaan (Abu Mansour Al-Thaalibi, taḥsiinu l qabiiḥ wa taqbiiḥu l ḥasan, Beautifying the Ugly and Uglifying the Beautiful)

A satirist/ humorist said, "In parting, there are many things - the handshake and the hope of coming back, freedom from boredom, the inhabitation of the heart by longing and the delight of corresponding. Abu Abdullah Al-Zinji the scribe wrote, May God reward parting on our behalf! It is a sigh and a tear, followed by patience and trust in God, followed by hoping and waiting. Damn

the coming back; it is a moment's joy and misery for days, an hour's delight and depression for a long time.

In the original text above, the following expression can be particularly difficult for a translation student: *rajaʔu l ʔawbah, ʔas-slaamatu min l malal and ʕimaaratu l qalb bish-shawq, ʔal ʔunsu bi l mukaatabah, jaza llaahu l furaaqa ʕanna khayra, zafratun wa ʕabrah, ʔiʕtiSaamun, taʔmiilun and qabbaḥa llaahu t-talaaqi*. They could be intralingually rendered as *tamanni l ʕawdah* ("hoping to come back"), *ʕadam l malal* ("no boredom"), *ʔimtilaaʔ l qalb bishshawq* ("the heart being filled up with longing"), *saʕaadat u l muraasalah* ("happiness of writing and reading letters"), *yajib ʔan nashkura llaaha ʕala l furaaq* ("we have to thank God for parting"), *ʔaahah wa damʕah* ("a sigh and a tear"), *ʕabr* ("patience"), *ʔamal or rajaʔ* ("hope, wish"), and *ʔat-talaaqi qabiih* ("coming back or reunion is bad").

The intralingual translation is not simply a simplification; it helps overcome the barrier between a contemporary speaker of Arabic and a variety of the language which is daunting and unfamiliar. Emotional attachment of Muslims and Arabs to the Arabic of the Quran and of Islamic civilization is one thing; today's Arab students' ability to handle a text in that variety is quite another. The distance contributes to the fear of Classical Arabic texts; the fear often translates into avoidance. That is perhaps why there are not many texts in that variety in most translation textbooks for Arab translation students. Other reasons for the scarcity of such texts do exist, e.g., the futility of old texts in a job market-oriented, pragmatic, business-dominated curriculum. However, the fear factor should not be disregarded.

This fear of "old" Arabic is in fact closely related to a more general fear of translating from Arabic, a more widespread fallacy that translating from Arabic to English is more difficult than translating from English to Arabic. This seems to be a translational universal, as it were – that translating from one's own language to another is more difficult than translating from another language into one's own - and it is more conspicuous in the case of Arabic. Reasons for this fear are many. The polyglossic nature of Arabic is one very important reason. Another is that English is more widespread and well-served by technology and education than Arabic. At the heart of the fear is a conviction that the translation into English will not sound English enough. The conviction is well-founded, and so is the fear. For this fear to disappear, translation students in the Arab world should realize that their translation will remain a translation. They should be exposed to more authentic English in various contexts and genres and should be trained on how to work with and "tame" unfamiliar Arabic texts, as already explained above.

Words that belong to an older variety of the source language (SL) are not the only cause of fear of vocabulary. Neologisms can be frightening as well. One example is "incomunicado". A newly coined word, a neologism, such as this one, is a problem for translators and translation students who are not trained on using context clues, including the morphology of the word and the structural slot it occupies, and on using up-to-date dictionaries and glossaries often available online. The morphology and the context of the example word above indicate that it has to do with being in jail or being imprisoned as well as being out of contact with others which results in an Arabic equivalent such as *ḥabs infiraadi* – Lit. "isolated imprisonment, being isolated in jail". Other neologisms are easier to handle perhaps because of their popularity, e.g., "webmail", "spam".

Fear of neologism can be conditioned in any of the following ways: (1) Ignore it altogether - unless it is a key word in the text, (2) Generalize, for example, use *jihaz*

("device") in translating "ipod", (3) Keep it as is - ?ai bud for "ipod". Another example is "facebook" which has remained so, albeit in Arabic letters, when translated into Arabic (feisbuk), (4) Explain – "ipod": jihaaz li hifZ wa tashghiil malaffaat il muusiiqa waS-Suwar ("a device for storing and playing music/ audio and graphics/ video files"). The last strategy could be used with almost all neologisms if the goal is not to ignore them and not to keep them foreign. For example "facebook", a social networking utility where photos, news and opinions are shared, could be rendered in Arabic as wujuuh wa kalimaat ("faces and words") or malaamiḥ wa kalimaat ("features and words").

Understanding where a neologism comes from sure helps. Here are more examples, mostly taken from Paul McFedries' Word Spy (www.wordspy.com). Some of these are portmanteaus, some are compounds, and some are semantic extensions. Possible translations are provided: "affluenza" ("affluence and influenza") – ḥumma r-rahba fi l maziid, ḥumma T-Tamaṣ ("fever of desiring more", "fever of greed"); intoxicated ("preoccupied by reading or sending text messages, particularly while driving a car"); "camgirl" ("a girl or young woman who broadcasts live pictures of herself over the WWW) - fataah Ṣala l kaamira; "time porn" ("television shows and other media that portray characters as having excessive amounts of spare time") – ?al ?ihaam bi l faraagh ("giving an illusion of free time"); "micro-expression" ("a very short facial expression of an intense, concealed emotion") – taṣbiir muqtaDab; "wedsite" ("a website where a couple posts information about their upcoming or recent wedding") – mawqiṣ l ?afraah wa l munaasabaat. Translating the last one into mawqiṣ iz-zawaaj ("marriage website") would confuse it with a dating site.

Neologism is as culturally and ideologically loaded as other aspects of language and translation. Neologisms are often produced in major languages such as English and French to name and describe devices, gadgets, phenomena and entities that develop mainly in the West. The stance an Arab takes toward those neologisms – whether or not to Arabicize them, naturalize, calque, or neutralize them, e.g., to use tilifoun or haatif for "telephone" – is part of this person's attitude to the Western Other as well as to his/her own language and culture.

The stance may be mandated by pragmatic or economic factors, but, again, the ideological part, which may include hatred, fear or ignorance of the Other, should not be belittled. The way products of modern Western culture and civilization are named or talked about in Arabic can be analyzed as one symptom of a more overarching politics where attitude to the Western Other is central and defining – pan-Arabism, liberalism, Islamism, cultural cringe, and so on. The importance we attach to our language, vis-à-vis other people's languages, especially English, as part of our identities, to a certain variety of the language as more defining and crucial, and our tolerance of other languages are important factors that shape our treatment of neologisms. Thus, systematic choices in the translation of neologisms into Arabic can index translators' attitudes toward the cultures where those neologisms come from.

#### **4.2. Fear of idioms and metaphors – tropophobia**

"Wall Street has more of an eat-what-you-kill mentality," she said.

(Patrick McGeehan, "Sometimes the boss wasn't paid the most" The New York Times, April 6, 2003).

It is easy to find idioms of fear – a long list: "afraid of one's own shadow", "waiting with bated breath" "someone's blood running cold", "someone breaking out in a cold sweat", "someone being a bundle of nerves", "to have butterflies in one's stomach", "to be like a cat on hot bricks", "to be on the edge of one's seat", "to get one's fingers burnt", "to have one's heart in her/ his mouth", "one's heart missing a beat",

"holding one's breath", "someone jumping out of her/ his skin", "nerves of steel", "to be on pins and needles", "to be scared out of one's wits", "to shake like a leaf", "to be tenderhooks", or "tongue-tied", or "at his/ her wits' end" - but there is very little, if any, about fear of idioms, especially by translators working under the pressures of time or the lack of resources.

One cause of the fear is that idioms do not always translate straightforwardly; in fact, they are often difficult to comprehend easily by a learner of a foreign language who is not exposed to enough spoken discourse. The idioms of fear listed above provide examples for this cause of fear: "to be afraid of one's own shadow" is both easy to comprehend to translate into Arabic – *ykhāaf min khayaaluh* or *ykhāaf min Daraah*, with the two words in bold both meaning "shadow" in some varieties of Arabic. This is also the case with the "nerves of steel" idiom - *ʔaṣṢaabuh ḥadiid* in many varieties of Arabic. This is not the case with the idiom of "blood running cold", because in everyday Arabic blood "dries up" - *yanshaf/ yinshaf* - rather than "runs cold", from fear. It can run cold in standard Arabic – *yatajammad* ("freezes").

In the same vein, there are so many metaphors of fear, e.g., "planting fear", "defeating or overcoming fear", "shivering from or being engulfed in fear" (cf. Sirvyde, 2006), and the Arabic *maraaratu l khawf wa halaawatu l ʔamaan* ("bitterness of fear and sweetness of safety"), *baḥru l khawf wa barru l ʔamaan* ("sea of fear and seashore of safety"), FEAR IS CONQUERER in *ghalabani l khawf* ("fear overwhelmed me"), FEAR IS DEATH in *yamuutu min al khawf* ("to die of fear") and FEAR IS PRISON and *ʔaghlaal* ("shackles") in "free yourself from the shackles of fear". The so-called war-on-terror has taught us that fear can become a commodity to be promoted and exported as in "panic/ dread merchants" and the Arabic *taṢdiir u l khawf* ("exporting fear"). Fear is also a point on a scale, a step on a ladder or staircase: "A person who is in apathy, when his tone is improved, feels grief. A person in grief, when his tone improves, feels fear. A person in fear, when his tone improves, feels anger. A person in anger, when his tone improves, feels antagonism. A person in antagonism, when his tone improves, feels boredom. When a person in boredom improves his tone, he is enthusiastic. When an enthusiastic person improves his tone, he feels serenity" (CSI, 2001: 7).

However, there is very little about fear of metaphors when handling a source text (ST) that is very culture-specific or heavily metaphorical. While several metaphors appear to be universal, e.g., "anger is fire" in English and *naar il ghaDab* ("fire of anger") in Arabic, the ways these metaphors are expressed often vary. Some metaphors can translate easily from English to Arabic and still retain their original tenors and vehicles, e.g., "lion's share" and *naSiib il ʔasad*; "axis of evil" and *mihwar ishsharr*. Others may not translate as easily, e.g., the host of metaphors in Shakespeare's *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day* – perhaps because summer is not as beautiful in the Arab world as it is in England. Other examples do exist: "sacred cow", "character assassination", "melting pot" and "scapegoat". An ad verbum translation of any of these into Arabic – e.g., *baqra muqaddasah* and *ʔightiaal ishshakhSiyyah*, for the first two - can sound ridiculous. An ad sensum translation can make more sense – *khuTuut ḥamraaʔ* ("red lines"), *tashwiih u ssumṢah* ("defaming someone's reputation"), *maziij min al bashar* ("mixture of people") or *bawtaqa tanṢahir fiiha aḥḥaaqaafaat* ("a pot where cultures melt and mix"), and *kabsh fidaaʔ* ("a sheep to be sacrificed")

The choice of a strategy for handling metaphors in an original text is often determined by cultural and ideological factors, in addition to factors relating to the translator's experience and skill – whether to avoid the metaphor altogether, to

transform it into a simile, to translate it literally, or to find a close equivalent. One example discussed in Mazid (2007) is the "carrot and stick" metaphor. Choosing to literally translate it into the Arabic *ʔal ʔaṣa wa l jazarah* might be regarded as an instance of surrendering to the Bush administration's rhetoric at the expense of local versions such as *ʔat-targhiib wa t tarhiib* ("inciting" or "attracting to" and "warning against"). One aspect of translators' fear of metaphors is this ideological and rhetorical confusion they often involve. There is always a critical decision to be taken, a tough situation for people with decidophobia (i.e. fear of making decisions), and whatever choice is made, something is lost in the translation. Another aspect is the difficulty of finding an equivalent metaphor in the TL when the decision is to sound "foreign".

One more sense in which "fear of metaphors" is discussed (Askari, 1965) is more profound and has to do with the creation, rather than the translation, of metaphors. This is the sense in which metaphor implies a "grave danger" for some people, because they construct "a narrow rational system", "a fortress of reason", so to speak, which is threatened whenever a metaphor "raises its head in their mind". A metaphor for them is a departure from the reasonable and the rational (Askari, 1965: 233). Although there is no direct link between the two kinds of fear in the case of metaphors and other figures of speech, it is very likely that someone who is uncomfortable dealing with a metaphor in his/ her own language will have difficulty translating it into another language.

#### **4.3. Fear of ambiguity**

"Weapon of mass distraction is a pun-perfect play on weapon of mass destruction..." (P. McFeries, Word Spy.

<http://www.wordspy.com/words/weaponofmassdistraction.asp>)

The tendency to resist multiplicity of meaning, to stick to what is conventional and observe the one-form-one-meaning principle, in everyday discourse seems to be universal (Nerlich and Clarke, 2001). In an environment where critical thinking is not encouraged, there is very little, if any, tolerance of ambiguity. Translation students in this environment are not trained on how to deal with ambiguity in a ST. What they normally do is take the conventional, superficial meaning of a sentence and thus the original ambiguity is lost in translation.

In the newspaper headline "Iraqi head seeks arms", both "head" and "arms" are ambiguous – "head": "part of the body" and "chief" or "leader"; "arms": "parts of the body" and "weapons". My students translated the sentence invariably as *raʔs ʔiraqiyya tabhaθ ʔan thiraaʔayn* – favoring the body-part interpretation and missing the leader-weapon one, *ʔar-raʔiis u l ʔiraqi yabhaθ ʔan ʔasliħah*. The Arabic sentence *ʔakaltu l ʔaysha bi l jubni*, where *ʔaysh* and *jubn* are ambiguous, can lose its punning effect if rendered as "I ate my bread with cheese" or as "I have earned my living by being a coward, i.e., by sucking up to my superiors".

In order to diffuse translation students' fear of ambiguity, they have to first learn to accept it as a fact of life, learn how to spot it in a sentence or text, and learn how to render it in their TTs. The real challenge here is not to select the relevant translation. It is easy to know that "bank" in (d) below means "financial institution". The real challenge is to reproduce the ambiguity in the translation. The following examples in English come from Ben-Ari et al. (1988). They are followed by their potential translations into Arabic. Since an ambiguous word or sentence in one language is not necessarily ambiguous in another, a translator can provide the two or more possible meanings, or choose the relevant one and add a footnote on the other(s).

- a) The management requests control information.

*ʔawaamir il ʔidaarah tataħakkam fi l maʔluumaat*

- ʔal ʔidaara taTlub maʔluumaat ʕan ʔasaaliib it-taħakkum
- b) Visiting grandfather will take up the whole day.  
ziyaaratuna li jaddinaa sawfa tastaghriqu l yawma kullah  
ziyaaratu jaddinaa lana sawfa tastaghriqu l yawma kullah
- c) Good boys and girls go to heaven.  
ʔal ʔawlaadu T-Tayyibuuna wa l banat yadkhuluuna l- jannah  
ʔal ʔawlaadu T-Tayyibuuna wa l banatu T-Tayyibaat yadkhuluuna l- jannah
- d) Dan walked to the bank.  
daan maDa ʔila Daffati n-nahr
- e) The thief stole two million dollars from the bank.  
saraqa l – liSSu milyouni dular mina l bank or mina l maSrif
- f) The stone hit the shop window and it broke.  
ʔaSaaba l hajaru naafithata l maħall fa tahashsham (The stone broke.)  
ʔaSaaba l hajaru naafithata l maħall fa haTTamahaa (The window broke.)

Ambiguity is particularly difficult to capture in translating poetry. It is perhaps one reason why poetry is described as untranslatable – other reasons are addressed elsewhere in this article. The following short lines come from a poem by the contemporary Egyptian poet and academic Moustafa Ragab. The original title of the poem is tarbiya wa taʕliim – both meaning "education": qaalat hindu / yaa ʔustaatha n-nahwi / ishrah li / baaba D-Dammi wa baaba l – fath / fa tamallakani il khawf / wa qultu li hindin / ʔana laa ʔafhamu ʔilla fi baab il ʕaTf. Here is my translation:

Hind said,  
"My dear grammar teacher,  
would you teach me, please,  
the causative and the nominative,  
gently so and with ease?  
I was scared and told her,  
"I can only teach con-junction  
Kindly, an' no tease".

Hind, the object of a lot of ghazal or love poetry by the classical Arabic poet Omar Ibn Abi Rabi'a, is a recurrent motif in Ragab's poetry. The difficulty has nothing to do with Hind, however. It has to do with the two layers of meaning, the two semantic spaces, so to speak, in the original lines. At one level, the poem is about teaching – a series of questions on grammar, algebra and morphology by a student each followed by a response by her teacher. In the lines about grammar, she asks a question about Damm and fath – which respectively mean in Arabic the nominative and the causative case markers, as well as "embracing" or "hugging" and "opening".

In order to maintain the ambiguity in the translation, I have added "gently" and "ease", so that the nominative and the causative can have an sensual-emotional dimension, and "kindly", so that conjunction is not merely a grammatical concept but also a synonym of kindness and sympathy. The word "tease" is added just to maintain a rhyme scheme. It is difficult to maintain ambiguity in a translation without a number of additions and modifications – I am not quite I have maintained it in the translation above. One important reason for the difficulty is that an ambiguous word in one language is not necessarily ambiguous in the same way when translated into another language.

#### **4.4. Fear of (sabotage by) mistranslation and graphophobia**

"The 'terror' of mistranslation has yet to be fully diagnosed, and the increasing turn to machine translation as a solution does little to assuage

fear. ... But the results [of machine translation] proved to be unreliable, and in the worst cases fatally flawed. The stakes of mistranslation are deadly, for in the theater of war a machinic error can easily cause death by “friendly fire” or misguided enemy targets” (Apter, 2005: 12, original emphasis).

"This is also partly a fear of translation, I suspect, a fear that translation contaminates, deceives, doesn't give you the source text—it never did!—a misconception about translation that also needs to be addressed somehow" (Venuti, 2008, see Editors).

The fear of the ST Venuti refers to is part of a more comprehensive fear of the written text. So much can be said about this fear, which can amount to graphophobia, especially in cultures that center around a sacred text. Respect for the sacred texts seems to have been consistently conflated with respect for any written text. When the text is in a foreign language or when it should be transferred to a foreign language, the responsibility of making its translation "close enough" doubles and the fear of distorting it can intensify and multiply.

The more "serious" the ST, the closer its translation should be; the less serious and the more "routine", the less close the translation needs to be, thus Newmark (2008) confidently puts it. Newmark suggests that serious texts are texts about life and death, about good and bad, right and wrong and so on. It is very easy to argue against the dictum as well as the explanation. A cartoon text can be about life and death, not necessarily the same way a novel is. However, the statement by one of the founders of Translation Studies can, at least partially, explain the fear translators have when dealing with what is commonly regarded as serious discourse – a religious text, a political speech, a medical speech event, a courtroom hearing, and so on. Perhaps one factor that helps determine how serious a text is how serious the consequences of a mistranslation thereof might be.

Mistranslation can cause a lot of trouble. One case in point is the 2005 comment of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that Israel must be “wiped off the map”. The original text of this in Farsi is “The imam said this regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time”. What is a prediction, supported by many Islamic authorities, in the original has become a threat in the translation (Kern, 2008).

It is this fear of the original and of mistranslating it that explains so many literalisms in translation. The fear is very noble and merits respect, but the consequences can be very awkward and sometimes repulsive. What starts as respect for the original can end up in driving readers away from this original because of its literal translation.

Literal translation can be harmless, e.g., the Arabic *yaDaʿuḥaa fii mawqifin muḥrij* into "he puts her in a critical situation", sometimes funny, e.g., the Arabic *khaṭar ʿala baali* into "danger on my mind" where *khaṭar(a)* meaning "occurred to me" is confused with *khaṭar* meaning "danger", occasionally ambiguous, e.g., "well-founded fear" into *khawfun ḥasanu t-taʿsiis* ("fear which is built well") instead of *khawfun lahu ma yubarriruh* ("fear that has a justification"). A literalism can slow down the reading of a translated text and can make it sound unnatural, e.g., "at the end of the day" into *fii niḥayat il yawm*, and "the most trusted man (in America)" into *ʿar-rajulu l ʿakṯar ʿiḥaaʿan biṯṯiqah*.

That literal translation remains pervasive in many contexts can be traced back to the origin of most translation traditions. These traditions began with translations of

sacred and "serious" texts such as the Bible, works of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and so on. Another reason why literal translation still lingers when functional translation is more appropriate is the false dichotomy of free vs. honest translation (see Al-Hmeidan, 2007). This is an obviously wrong opposition; "honest" should be opposed to "dishonest", and not every free translation is dishonest. The translation of "camel milk" into the Arabic *halibu l jamal* ("milk of the he-camel") is literal but not honest, because a he-camel does not give milk.

Moreover, an ad verbum translation is not always bad, unless, among other things, the original is "literally" misunderstood. For example, *Zarf* *z-zamaan* and *Zarf* *l makaan* can never be rendered as "envelopes of time" and "envelopes of place", respectively (Cf. Solomon, 2004). Although *Zarf* in Modern Standard Arabic can mean "envelope" and is almost identical with *maZruuf* and synonymous with *mughallaf*, classical Arab grammarians did not know envelopes when they coined the two terms. A more fitting, and still literal, translation of the two terms is "circumstantial of time" and "circumstantial of place". "Adverbial" is fitting, but not as literal as "circumstantial", which means a condition surrounding or accompanying an action, a state, or an event.

Literalism is closely associated in the Arab world and maybe elsewhere to reverence to and misuse of dictionaries. Translation students in this environment trust the dictionary, normally the first entry for each vocabulary item, e.g., *yadd* for "hand", *raʔs* for "head", *jamiil* or *jamiila* for "pretty", which is something a good machine translator can do, and have very low confidence in their ability to infer the meaning of a word from its linguistic and non-linguistic contexts, e.g., *musaaʔada* ("help"), *raʔiis* ("chair"), and *tamaaman* ("quite"), as potential equivalents of the three words above, respectively. In a typical midterm or final exam, these translation students spend most of their time on looking words up in their print and/ or electronic dictionaries, with very little time left for careful reading and editing.

### **3.5. Fear of mechanics**

"Some people write well but allow themselves to be disabled by a fear of punctuation and grammar ..."

(G. Olson,.

<http://lilt.ilstu.edu/golson/punctuation/intro.html>).

"People have reason to fear punctuation because the rules have changed and they continue to do so" (J.

Straus, [\[http://www.cyber-spy.com/ebooks/ebooks/The-Fear-of-Punctuation-\\(ebook\\).pdf\]\(http://www.cyber-spy.com/ebooks/ebooks/The-Fear-of-Punctuation-\(ebook\).pdf\)\).](http://www.cyber-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

Translation students, at least those I have known, are not very comfortable with mechanics – spelling, punctuation marks, and layout and so on. In the context of translating into Arabic, troublesome areas include the glottal stop (hamza) and where to place it, numbers and how they agree with the nouns they determine. In translating into English, grammar, spelling and punctuation are all troublesome and occasionally frightening.

This fear of mechanics, as already suggested above, is rooted in ignorance which results from non-functional, non-creative methods in teaching grammar, spelling and related areas in the Arab world. Ignorance and fear join with hatred as learners continue to avoid spelling, grammar and related aspects of the foreign language as well as their own language. Mistakes tend to stigmatize to a point where teachers can do nothing except to blame students for their low proficiency.

Whether these aspects of language are worthy of attention or not depends on which language teaching method(s) and approach(es) a teacher adopts, and on whether the ultimate goal is excellence or mediocrity. However, translation teachers should insist on correctness, on mastering the mechanics, or, in Biblical metaphorical terms, "the little foxes that spoil the vines" (Song of Solomon, 2: 15), because so much can be (already) lost in translation, or, to quote the rest of the metaphor, the "vines have tender grapes", and it would only further damage the translation product if mechanics and grammar were also compromised.

Here is an example of a translation, which is far below mediocre, of two lines from *la taṣṭhilihi* ("Blame Him Not") by Ibn Zuraiq Al-Baghdadi, by an intermediate translation student. The original lines are followed by a transliteration, then by the translation:

و من لا يسوس الملك يخلعه	رُزِقْتُ مُلْكًا فَلَمْ أَحْسِنِ سِيَاسَتَهُ
شكر عليه فإن الله ينزعه	و مَنْ عَدَا لَابِسًا ثَوْبَ النِّعَمِ بَلَا
ruziqtu mulkan fa lam ʔauhsin siyaasatahu	
wa man la yasuusu l mulka yukhlaṣuhu	
wa man ḡhada laabisan ṡawba n-naṣiimi bi la	
shukrin ṣalayhi fa ʔinna l – laaha yanzaṣuhu	

I have got an ability or kingdom and I didn't managing  
 It well, and when the king don't know How to  
 manage his kingdom he should fired  
 and if someone going with wearing good clothes  
 and he going without said thanks to God  
 the God with get it from it  
 or he will lose it

It is very easy to find fault with the translation; in fact, it is extremely difficult not to. Here is a prose translation of the two lines: "I have been endowed with a property which I could not manage very well; it was taken away, as it often happens with someone who fails to manage her/ his resources. Someone dressed in clothes of bliss and well-being, but ungrateful to God for that will sure be deprived thereof". It is easy to see how much damage has been caused by problems in grammar and punctuation.

Quite related to the fear of mechanics in the present context is the fear of transliterating Arabic source script into a Roman target script. The reasons for the fear are many, including the lack of adequate practice. They also include the polyglossic nature of Arabic – Classical, Modern Standard and a host of Local Colloquials – as well as the confusion of various transcription and transliteration systems.

To illustrate, the Arabic pharyngeal voiceless fricative can be transcribed as /h/ or /H/ in a word such as *Haqiqah* - or *ḥaqiqa* ("truth"). The word itself illustrates a dialectal variation in Egyptian Arabic between the pharyngeal sound and the glottal stop /ʔ/. Thus, it can also be transcribed as *Haʔiiʔah* or *ḥaʔiiʔah*. Dialectal variation occurs in almost every variety of Arabic. One popular example in the Arabic of the UAE is the variation between /y/ and /j/ in a word such as */rayli/ / rajli/* ("my man", "my husband"). There is also the issue of whether to keep the final /h/ or to drop it and whether to keep the case marking or to simply ignore it, e.g., */ḥaqiqa waaDiha/ /ḥaqiqah waaDihah/ /ḥaqiiqatun waaDiha/* ("an obvious truth").

Notwithstanding the variations and the difficulties, transliteration should remain an important part of translation education and training in the Arab world, not only as a necessity in translating proper nouns and names of places and so on, but also as an

ideological option, e.g., in translating Islamic expressions such as *subhāna llaah* ("Glory be to God"). Translation should also be distinguished from transcription, although they are used interchangeably above. Transcription is a rendering of a word in a given script, based on how the word is pronounced rather than as a process of converting of one script into another. Thus, the variants of "Ahmed" vs. "Ahmad", "Muhammad" vs. "Mohammed" vs. "Mohamed", "Ali" vs. "Aly", "Mariam" vs. "Miriam", or "Muslim" vs. "Moslem" are variants in transcription. Which symbol to use in writing down a certain sound, e.g., /H/ vs. /h/, is a transliteration issue (Cf. Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transliteration>).

Transcription variation is more ideologically revealing than variation in transliteration – which is more or less a matter of practicality and feasibility. "All transcripts", Bucholtz (2000) argues, "take sides, enabling certain interpretations, advancing particular interests, favoring specific speakers, and so on. The choices made in transcription link the transcript to the context in which it is intended to be read. Embedded in the details of transcription are indications of purpose, audience, and the position of the transcriber toward the text. Transcripts, thus, testify to the circumstances of their creation and intended use" (1440).

The "politics of transcription" (Bucholtz, 2000) is too advanced to be introduced early in an undergraduate translation program. It would only add to the fear of transliteration and the confusion often associated with it. Awareness of this politics is very important, but translation students have to learn the basics of transliteration first.

#### 4.6. *Fear for rhythm – meterophobia*

"What I want is a complete rendering of a passage of some great creation of the human spirit, some magical passage of the world's greatest poetry, which will transfer the full effect of words, metre, sound and sense from one language to another. Of course, I cannot have it. But the attempt to find it is still fascinating, none the less; even if it only leads us to sit back and, after all our attempts at translation, to read and re-read our author in his own words, in the language which he knew and of which he was such a master" (Oldaker, 1938: 100).

The *belles infideles* metaphor has been most closely associated with the translation of poetry, perhaps because so much is likely to be lost in its translation. It is not the information that is likely to be lost, because poetry is not about information. The likely loss in music, rhyme, metaphor and style has motivated long standing arguments for the untranslatability of poetry. Ambiguity is another motivation that has already been touched upon above.

However, poetry continues to be translated from one language to another and Arab translation students still face the task of translating poetry in their classroom activities and exam questions. The lines below come from a famous poem by the late Lebanese poet-in-exile Elia Abu Maadi:

هو عبءٌ على الحياة ثقيل  
 من يظنُّ الحياة عبئاً ثقيلاً  
 والذي نفسه بغير جمالٍ  
 لا يرى في الوجود شيئاً جميلاً  
 huwa ʕibʔun ʕala al hayaati ʕaqaalun  
 man yara al hayaata ʕibʔan ʕaqiila  
 wa l – lathī nafsuhu bi ghayri jamaalin  
 la yara fi wujuudi shayʔan jamiila  
 It is an imposition on life –  
 the one who thinks life is an imposition.

The one with an ugly soul  
cannot see any beauty at all.

This is a very good translation by an Arab intermediate university student of translation, given the fact that it was part of a final exam, except for the use of "It" instead of "He" in line 1. There are seeds of music in the translation – e.g., "soul" and "all". Empowered and reinforced, and not constrained by exam time, the student can produce something far more beautiful and honest as well.

The fear of rhythm is in fact very often a fear for rhythm. When the music of the original piece is not reproduced in the translation, so much is lost, because a great deal of the rhetorical power of poetry lies in its music. One thing that can diffuse the fear is to realize that the original music cannot be reproduced in a translation, that "the complete rendering" of the "full effect of words, metre, sound and sense" Oldaker (1938) wanted is still too hard to get, although it remains worth our while. The sample translation of the two lines of Arabic poetry above communicates at least the ideas and the metaphors of the original. It has its own music which is not the same as the music of the original, because, among many other reasons, there is very little kinship between Arabic and English, compared, for example, to English and German.

### **5. Fight, flight or freeze?**

"Fostered alike by beauty and by fear,  
Much favoured in my birthplace, and no less  
In that beloved vale to which erelong  
I was transplanted."  
(Wordsworth, Prelude, 1850, 1: 305--309).

The unavoidable question is what should be done to conquer, or at least alleviate those fears – which are not the most serious of all fears of translation and interpreting. The options are:

- 1) surrender to the fears and leave troublesome texts untranslated,
- 2) fight the fears, unarmed, and ignore the troubles,
- 3) freeze and wait for fears to vanish of their own or be demolished by an external force, which could take forever, and
- 4) handle the fears appropriately, armed with knowledge, skills and attitude.

The price of surrendering to the fears and leaving troublesome texts untranslated is that so many pearls will remain unfathomed and so much gold will remain unearthed. Some of the most important works will remain untranslated. It is true that a great deal can be lost in translation; it is also true that so much can be lost because of untranslation. The price of fighting the fears and ignoring the troubles can be dear – from funny literalisms to deadly mistranslations. The price of freezing and waiting for fears to vanish of their own, or be demolished by an external force, is waste. Because fears are not equally serious, a translator will have to gauge the loss in each of these options against the amount of fear involved in each translational situation. The price of handling the fears appropriately is more wisdom and more beautiful and enlightened translations.

It may be wise to diffuse many fears of translation and interpreting by drawing translation learners' and translators' attention to the "lures" of translation (Sewell, 2002). Compared to a communicative language teaching classroom, the translation classroom satisfies a number of essential needs: "the need for confidence and self-esteem", "the need not to lose face", "the need to be rewarded", "the need for certainty, for closure, for autonomy", and "the needs arising from any introversion in our personalities" (153; see

pp. 154-158 for an explanation of each of these lures). It will also help overcome the fears addressed above to recognize that they are manageable. They can be overcome with more knowledge, more mastery of the two languages involved, and more training and practice.

This is not the end of the story of fear in and of translation. In fact, many of the fears discussed above may sound "trivial" compared to others left out for a more elaborate treatment. More profound fears of translation and interpreting that merit serious research attention include, but are not limited to, the fear of obscenity and foul language, especially in traditional societies; the fear of political authority and concern with political-translational correctness, e.g., in translating jihad into "terrorism" vs. "fighting for the cause of Allah"; the fear of cultural invasion and the fear for hegemony and control, especially in the case of totalitarian regimes; the fear for life itself in the case of interpreting at hot zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan (e.g., Ali, 2005); the fear of breaking bad news in medical interpreting, especially when the news is too bad and the interpreter is involved; the fear of making serious mistranslations in legal interpreting where a person's life is at stake; the fear of and for religion.

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### **Transcription symbols**

The following symbols are used in transcribing Arabic words in the article: ح - ه - ء - ؟ - kh - th - ذ - ث - sh - ص - S - D - ض - Z - ظ - T - ط - ع - gh - غ - q - ق - y - ى. Long vowels and geminate consonants are indicated by doubling the relevant symbols. Transliterations are given in italics.

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