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*Original article*

**Language, Culture, Literature, Politics, Translation and Cognition –**

**A (very) long story cut (very) short**

**by**

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### **Abstract**

A cognitive cultural politic(olinguistic)s of translation involves an investigation of what language, (and literature), translation, culture, cognition and politics are, and how they relate to each other. Any of these constructs, that can hardly be separated, is too much for any single study. The translator's self (perception of a text or discourse, personality, creativity, attitudes and biases), prior text and discourse (formal and informal education), cultural and language patterns all play an important role in translating an ancient text in the same language (intralingual translation) or translating across languages (interlingual translation as well as interpreting). The article attempts a synthesis of those grand constructs – language, literature, translation, politics, cognition and culture - underscoring their interrelatedness. They are inseparable and what happens to, by, or through one of them inevitably affects what happens to, by, or through the others. This article explores some aspects of and connections between those constructs and investigates their impact on each other in instances of translation between Arabic and English.

*Keywords:* language – cognition - culture – literature - translation – politics.

### Introduction

The famous quotation from Mahatma Gandhi describes a utopian idealistic situation, a situation where the vernacular lives in peace with the foreign, where diversity is appreciated and identity is upheld – "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." This is easier said than done, however.

"Cultures of all lands" are blown about a person's house when s/he comes in contact with another community through trade and travel, colonization and immigration, through media, language, literature and translation, all of which are screened by cognition. The contact is not always healthy, not the outcomes always positive. Yet, it happens and will continue to happen; it is there, everywhere.

The article does not seek to make any final statements on any of the constructs addressed therein. It rather explores some of the interactions between them, based on the nature of each, with a focus on how these interactions play themselves out in translation between Arabic and English.

### Culture

"Thou art growing less doltish and more shrewd every day, Sancho," said Don Quixote. "Ay," said Sancho; "it must be that some of your worship's shrewdness sticks to me; land that, of itself, is barren and dry, will come to yield good fruit if you dung it and till it; what I mean is that your worship's conversation has been the dung that has fallen on the barren soil of my dry wit, and the time I have been in your service and society has been the tillage; and with the help of this I hope to yield fruit in abundance that will not fall away or slide from those paths of good breeding that your worship has made in my parched understanding" (Miguel de Cervantes: *Don Quixote*, English Ormsby Translation, p. 458)

Which came first and which shapes the other – language or culture – is a chicken-egg-question (where it is impossible to tell which of two things existed or happened first and which caused or shaped the other). Language and culture have always lived together, interdependently, entwined and inseparable. Language can always be examined from the viewpoint of culture as an important aspect of one person's culture, and culture can always be examined from the viewpoint of language, transferred, expressed, subverted, or challenged. No matter which definition of the word *culture* or its translation into Arabic, there is no way culture can exist without language, understood in its broadest sense to mean verbal as well as non-verbal, natural as well as artificial, spoken as well as written.

Because no human community can be conceived without thinking of its culture, and because *culture* is a basic word, its meanings in different languages seem to coincide. In fact, the word in most European languages is an orthographic variation on the Latin original *cultura*. In the quote from Pope, the word means breeding and upbringing, both in the world of plants and of humans:

Where grows?-- where grows it not? If vain our toil,  
We ought to blame the culture, not the soil.

(Alexander Pope: *An Essay on Man, Epistle IV*)

Other, quite related meanings of the term listed in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* online are:

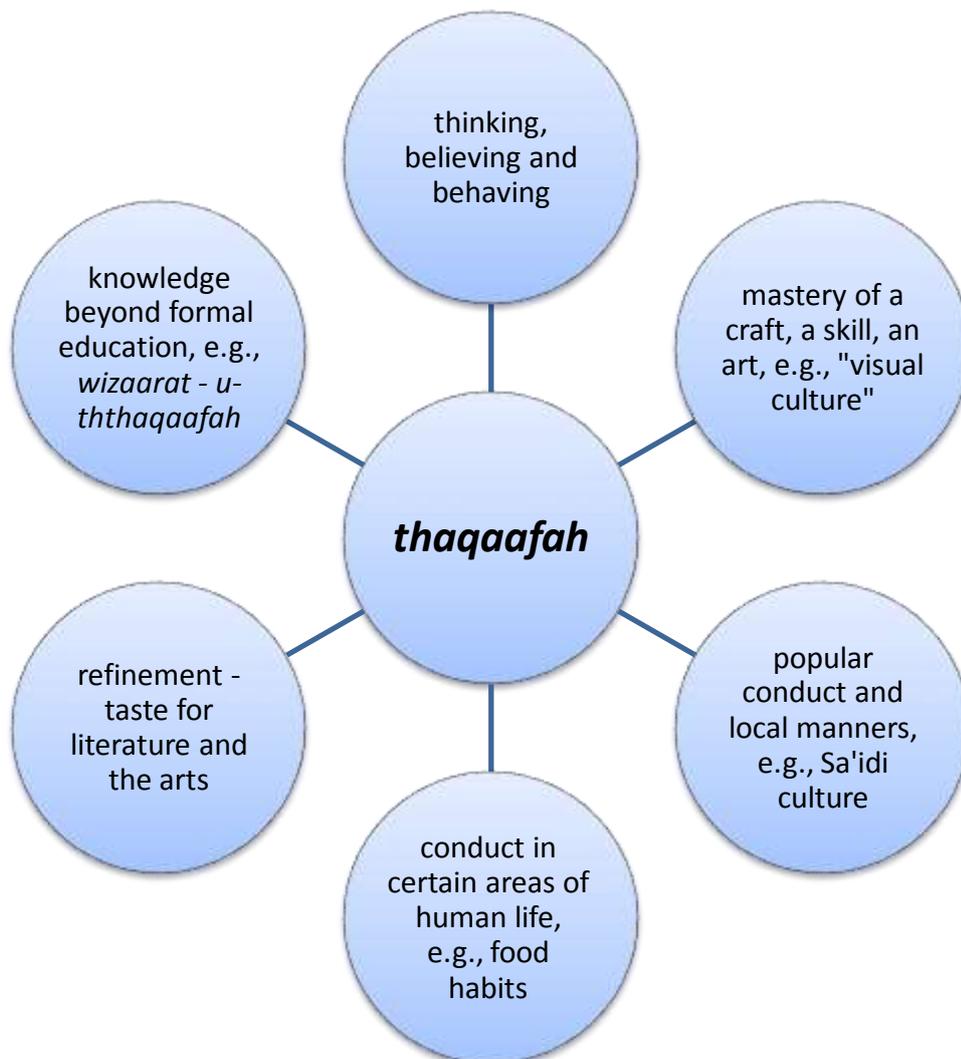
- 1) "the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties especially by education" - which is impossible without language;
- 2) "expert care and training – e.g., "beauty *culture*" – which inevitably involves communication;
- 3) "enlightenment and excellence of taste";
- 4) "acquaintance with and taste in fine arts, humanities, and broad aspects of science as distinguished from vocational and technical skills - "a person of *culture*";

- 5) "the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations" – a transmission that is achieved through language in various forms and modes;
- 6) "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" – where language is both an index and a tool, a tool for perpetuating those beliefs and traits, or challenging them, and an index for an outsider to perceive them;
- 7) "the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time - "popular *culture*" and "Southern *culture*";
- 8) "the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices of an institution or organization - "a corporate *culture*" – alternatively referred to as "a community of practice";
- 9) "the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic" – "print *culture*", "football *culture*" – here again communication is instrumental as an index as well as a tool.

Those meanings of the word *culture* are more or less the same in Arabic, where the word is *thaqaafah* from the trilateral *thaqafa* which means, among other things, "polished", "refined", "grasped" and "surrounded" (Fig. 1). Semantic change has taken the adjective *thaqaafi* to the additional underground meaning of "pornographic", e.g., the movie title *film thaqaafi*. Moreover, contact with Western languages has broadened the meaning of the word *thaqaafah* beyond the Arabic trilateral root.

Culture may be understood, in a nutshell, as "the intellectual side of civilization", as suggested by an Oxford dictionary editor (Levin, 1965), which highlights the place of cognition in culture as elaborated below. In other words, it refers to the ways we **think, believe** and **behave** (Goddard, 2005). For thoughts to be expressed, beliefs to be communicated or observed, and behavior to be reinforced or taught, language remains humans' most powerful tool. Whether in referring to various components of a building (civilization) or in describing

how people behave in the building and how they perceive it (culture), recourse to language is inevitable. Thinking and believing are cognitive processes - which sounds like stating the too obvious. Behavior, on the other hand, is part of the visible surface of an **iceberg** the hidden part of which includes identities, values, beliefs and convictions. Acting rudely in a certain situation must be part of certain attitudes, based on certain beliefs and values, about behavior and about living in a community. Eve-teasing, for example, characterizes many communities (subcultures, after all) in the Arab world today. It is (at least partly) a linguistic behavior. It can be traced to ideas about being a grown up boy and attitudes toward what is right and what is wrong.



**Fig. 1: Meanings of Culture - *thaqaafah***

### Language

[A]nything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position: language is not a clear window but a refracting, structuring medium (Fowler, 1991: 10).

Language is "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols" (Sapir, 1921: 8), "a cultural, not a biologically inherited, function" (vii). Language has come to mean so many other things since Sapir proposed his definition, especially with the development of structuralism and semiotics, but the skeletal definition remains fairly valid and acceptable. A less elaborate version can be found in the definition provided by the classical Arab linguist Ibn Jinni (AD 932-1002) – "sounds whereby members of a community articulate their purposes". In both cases, there are **humans** living in **communities**, feeling, thinking, acting, interacting and **communicating**. Language is "a dress of thought", but it is more apt to speak of languaging vs. language (a reminder - just a reminder - of Saussure's langue vs. parole and Chomsky's competence vs. performance). "Languaging both shapes and is shaped by context" (Becker, 2000: 9). The term languaging refers to the simultaneous process of continuous becoming of ourselves and of our language practices, as we interact and make meaning in the world. Becker further argues that language is not simply a code or a system of rules or structures; rather what he calls languaging shapes our experiences, stores them, retrieves them and communicates them in an open-ended process. To learn a new way of languaging – for example, to learn a foreign language, or to translate - is not just to learn a new code; it is "to enter another history of interactions and cultural practices" and to learn "a new way of being in the world" (Becker, 1995: 227). "To look at language as a practice," Pennycook (2010) adds, "is to view language as an activity rather than a structure, as something we do rather than a system we draw on, as a material part of social and cultural life rather than an abstract entity" (2).

A deterministic view of language and culture would argue with Sapir (1921) that we are "at the mercy of the particular language"; the way we think is determined by our language, and would cite Arabian "swords", "horses" and "camels" and Eskimo synonyms of *ice* and *snow*. It may cite other instances of how "words create worlds" and it may go so far as to examine how speech acts and propaganda shape our lives. Being the bricks with which a (literary) text is built, language also shapes literature: "The literature fashioned out of the form and substance of a language has the color and the texture of its matrix" (Sapir, 1921: 227).

The dangers of a deterministic view of language and culture are many. One danger thereof is the argument for a verbal deficit or a restricted code of low class children resulting in lower scholastic achievement when compared with middle and high class children (Bernstein, 1971). The other extreme – that culture shapes language - is no less dangerous. Human language is acquired, not inherited. There may be a LAD (language acquisition device), but there is no language gene, though some aspects of voice, temperament and body language can be inherited by one generation from another. Our ways of thinking are shaped by culture, not heredity and those ways of thinking inform our writing styles, hence the term **cultural thought patterns** (Kaplan, 1966). Thought patterns show up in writing styles and other uses of language and can impede or hamper intercultural communication encounters. The danger of subscribing to a culture-shapes-language position is to embrace **stereotypes**. "All violence is the illustration of a pathetic stereotype" (Kruger, 1991). Cultural violence is any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form: "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence - exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) - that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. Stars, crosses and crescents; flags, anthems and military parades; the ubiquitous portrait of the Leader; inflammatory speeches and posters - all these come to mind" (Galtung, 1990: 291). Stereotypes can be nationalist, racist, ageist, sexist,

classist, or regionalist, to give a partial list. Stereotypes are ideas – an understanding, thought, or picture in one's mind; a belief or opinion; reason or purpose of doing something (*Cambridge Dictionary*) – which takes us to the **cognitive** part of language and culture.

### Cognition

Quite simply, cognition refers to thinking. There are the obvious applications of conscious reasoning—doing taxes, playing chess, deconstructing *Macbeth*—but thought takes many subtler forms, such as interpreting sensory input, guiding physical actions, and empathizing with others. The old metaphor for human cognition was the computer—a logical information-processing machine. (You can't spell cognition without “cog.”) But while some of our thoughts may be binary, there's a lot more to our 'wetware' than 0's and 1's. (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/cognition>)

It is quite unthinkable to think of language (and consequently of literature and translation) without thinking of thinking. Cognition, i.e., such mental functions as thinking, perceiving and representing, mediates between discourse and society (van Dijk, 2002), between language and culture.

According to van Dijk (2002: 66-67), the following structures and constructs, to which some elaborations and examples are added, are relevant to the study of discourse (thus of literature and translation).

- **Mind** - a central function of the human brain, where language originates and where it is perceived. The mind is both an outcome and a cause of language as well as culture - whether perceived as a muscle or a creative organ that thinks, reasons, feels, and remembers, and whether it picks up language by imitation or produces it through a built-in Language-Acquisition Device.
- **Memory: Short Term (Working) Memory (STM) and Long Term Memory (LTM).** "If we want to gain understanding of phenomena that are both structured and variable, it is necessary

to look beyond the mutable surface forms to the forces that produce the patterns observed.

Language is also a phenomenon that exhibits apparent structure and regularity of patterning while at the same time showing considerable variation at all levels..." (Bybee, 2010: 1).

- **Episodic** (personal, autobiographic) **Memory** (EM) and **Semantic** (socio-cultural, shared) **Memory** — as part of LTM. "Instances of use impact the cognitive representation of language." Language does not come from scratch, but it is not a reproduction, altogether: "exemplar representations keep track of usage, allow for the representation of gradience in structures, and allow for gradual change" (Bybee, 2010: 14).
- **Semantic Mental Models** (represented in EM) as "the subjective representations of the events and situations observed, participated in or referred to by discourse." Strings of symbols (signs, words, etc.) are mapped into models to be retrieved and exploited. The reference of a symbol can change and appear in different senses in various models (*Cf.* Johnson-Laird, 1983: 167-168).
- **Goals** - "mental models of the situations to be realized by action." A communicative action involves two worlds: "the world of social actors with the purposes, concerns, and 'goals' that motivate their actions, and the world of discourse in which everyday actors' goals are expressed and inferred" (Tracy and Coupland, 1990: 1, original emphasis) Goal and discourse are intertwined" If talk is essentially a mode of action, then these actions will be often taken in pursuance of 'objectives', however imprecisely they are formulated or formulatable" (p. 2, original emphasis).
- **Pragmatic Context Models**: "specific mental models of subjective representations (definitions) of the relevant properties of communicative situations, controlling discourse processing and adapting discourse to the social environment so that it is situationally appropriate." Pragmatic context models are multimodal, comprising linguistic as well as nonlinguistic variables, featuring the very experience of language in use and also featuring

"evaluative opinions and emotions (happiness, fear, etc.) associated with the communicative situation" (van Dijk, 2014: 126). It is very important to remember that pragmatic context is not the reality that surrounds a communicative event, but how participants in the event perceive this reality.

- **Knowledge** and its organization – "shared, socio-cultural beliefs that are certified by the (knowledge) criteria or standards of a (knowledge) community."
- **Ideology** "shared, fundamental and axiomatic beliefs of specific social groups (socialism, neo-liberalism, feminism, (anti)racism, pacifism, etc.)."
- **Attitudes** – "socially shared, ideologically based opinions (normative beliefs) about specific social issues having given rise to debate or struggle (abortion, divorce, euthanasia, immigration, etc.)."
- **Cognitive processes** such as "the production and comprehension of discourse/ interaction on the basis of specific mental models, controlled by context models, and based on knowledge and ideologies."

### **Literature**

Nevertheless, literature gets itself translated, sometimes with astonishing adequacy (Sapir, 1921: 222)

Languages, Sapir (1921) elaborates, are "more to us than systems of thought transference. They are invisible elements that shape themselves about our spirit and give a predetermined form to all its symbolic expression. When the expression is of unusual significance, we call it literature." Sapir is modest enough not to define "what kind of expression is significant enough to be called or literature" and he finds a way out by admitting that we "have to take literature for granted" (p. 221) Literature is an instance of language in use: "Language is the medium of literature as marble or bronze or clay are the materials of the sculptor. Since every language has its distinctive peculiarities, the innate formal limitations – and possibilities – of one

literature are never quite the same as those of another" (p. 222) - which brings up the issue of (un)translatability of literary works.

Since antiquity, critics have debated what makes a piece of expression "literary". There are no strict rules for distinguishing literary from non-literary, though some requirements and conditions have been put here and there, e.g., meter and rhyme, semantic and structural deviation and ambiguity for poetry, dialogue, conflict and resolution for drama, plot and characterization for fiction, further delimited by condensation for short story. In addition to these sub-generic conditions, literary texts are planned, patterned and deliberate, their language often departs from the rules of common usage. A literary work may endeavor to give an impression of spontaneity, but it remains deliberate and planned, having passed through an author's imagination and intellect.

Those and other conditions of literariness keep shifting and changing from one culture to another and from one age to another. Once a breaking of the rules, now free verse is taken for granted. The same is true for poetry in the vernacular. The traditional structure of a novel is no longer a dogma; in fact, novels that uphold the classic patterning of actions and events rarely appear today, except in the form of parody or satire.

No matter what conditions obtain for a text to count as literature in a given context, the text remains **linguistic** (which is stating the too obvious, because any text is made of a language), **cultural** (rooted in a culture, no matter how distanced or defamiliarized character, action, setting and other elements might be) and **political**, in the broad, occasionally narrow, sense of the word (articulating an ideology or ideologies and power/ control relationships, and has a purpose, or purposes). When a literary text is translated from one language to another, the translation – the product as well as the process – becomes the battlefield (metaphor intended) of two languages and cultures. The changes are not limited in the way described by Geoffrey Chaucer no other changes than "oure tonges difference" requires (*Troilus and Criseyde*, I.395).

"Where literature exists, translation exists. Joined at the hip, they are absolutely inseparable, and, in the long run, what happens to one happens to the other. Despite all the difficulties the two have faced, sometimes separately, usually together, they need and nurture each other, and their long-term relationship, often problematic but always illuminating, will surely continue for as long as they both shall live." (Howard, 2010, citing Grossman, 2010).

Well before, and right after, a literary text gets translated, it passes through many **translation channels** (Popa, 2006):

- **Before:** Why/ What/ Whether/ Who takes the decision to translate,
- **During:** How to translate (e.g., **foreignize** or **domesticate**), and
- **After:** What to do with the translation.

Literary translation, in fact, all translation, is [P/p]olitical, whether the **p** of political is capital or small - whether politics is understood in terms of partisan politics, electoral politics, political leadership and related matters, where conflict is inevitable and obvious, or in terms of influencing, achieving/ exercising control over a community, or the practice and distribution of power and resources, where conflict may be covert. For more on this, see below.

### **Politics**

The words *policy*, *metropolitan*, *metropolis* and *cosmopolitan* are reminders that *politics* has to do with cities, more precisely with running the affairs of cities. This is perhaps why the word has often been notorious and the social-dynamic aspect thereof has often been overshadowed by its implications of conflict and confrontation.

Interactions between politics, on the one hand, and language, culture, literature and translation, on the other, are too complex to be captured here, but some definitions may be given and some generalizations may be made.

- **Political Culture** (What is cultural about politics?) – how politicians behave, think and believe; how politics is done; forms of governance; political ideals (capitalism, socialism, etc.) and operating norms (laws, statutes, bureaucracy, etc.) of a polity. The place of language and communication in this culture can hardly be overlooked.
- **Cultural Politics** (What is political about culture?) where meanings are constructed / negotiated, where relations of control, power, dominance and subordination are defined and challenged, and cultural norms, structures, hierarchies, and values are perpetuated, subverted, or resisted;
- **High- vs. Low-Context Cultures.** According to the pioneering characterization of Hall (1976), high-context cultures are those where the rules of communication are transmitted mainly through the use of contextual elements (i.e., body language, a person's status, and tone of voice – that is, non-verbal communication) and are not explicitly stated. This is in contrast to **low-context cultures**, in which information is communicated mainly through language (verbal signals) and rules are explicitly articulated, e.g., "I am the boss here and you have to conform".
- **Politics in the Middle.** Culture is a result of (literary) translation; (literary) translation a result of culture, and there is always politics in the middle. Translating literary texts from other languages and cultures brings about substantial changes in the target culture – new vocabulary, new ideas and new life-styles – some of which are quite subversive and "undesirable". This is the thrust of a fable in *Kalila and Dimna* by Ibn Al-Muqaffa', where a crow wishes to learn the stroll of a beautiful partridge, and a guest wishes to learn the language of his host, the hermit. The impact of foreign literature and the culture it carries is more profound and more far-reaching when the source culture is more dominant and the target culture is vulnerable. On the other hand, translational decisions, before, during and after translating, as outlined above, are an outcome of the culture of the translator and the community s/he belongs to.

- Translation is a place where languages and culture meet, an intercultural field. The question in intercultural communication is not who we are, but "what we stand for" and "how we should act". "To **act politically**, in the **intercultural** field, could thus mean **siding** with one culture or the other, or with one aspect of a culture against another, to some degree or another, for one reason or another" (Pym, 2003).

### Translation

Reflections on translation in the context of Barthes's and Kruger's statements undoubtedly cheapens violent action, trivializes its serious physical and psychological costs, its brutal materiality. But such reflection will also illuminate the discursive conditions of violence by attending to the material effects of another metalanguage, the power of translation to (re)constitute and cheapen foreign texts, to trivialize and exclude foreign cultures, and thus potentially to figure in racial discrimination and ethnic violence, international political confrontation, terrorism, war. (Venuti, 1993: 208)

The transfer of meaning from one language to another does not flow as easily as this sentence does – the dressing of a body in a different garment, which may involve re-sizing or re-tailoring; the transplant into a new body or a new soil of a foreign plant or body part, the rape; the deflowering of an original; the terrorism of forcing a liquid into a different container; the dangerous bridge whereupon ideas travel from one shore to another; the "trials of the foreign", and the twelve "deforming tendencies" inherent in the act (Berman, 2000),; the taming of a shrew, or domestication of a foreign text; the carryover of a jewel to a different casket; the conquest of a terra incognita, resulting in surrender or annihilation, taking on the culture of the new territory or forcing the invading culture thereon; the enfranchise or the tolerance of the foreign; infusing, transfusing, refining, mirroring, copying; opening a window; preserving fire; suffering from disease; bringing the dead to life, *traduttore traditore, les belles infidels*, or

creative betrayal, to give a partial list of the **images of translation**, so to speak. Such is "the misery and splendor" (Ortega, 1992), the pain and pleasure of (literary) translation.

There is politics in translation and there is translation in politics, which sounds like common sense, or it should. What is trans(re)lational about politics? Linguistic behavior largely shapes political behavior. In fact, the argument about the interrelatedness and mutual effect of language and culture can be extended with good reason to the relation between linguistic and cultural behavior. So, it would be more apt to add that political behavior shapes linguistic behavior. Mistranslations can result in conflict and conflict can result in deliberate deformation of an original text. The impact of politics on translation is less questionable and more widely accepted than the impact of translation on politics.

The most immediate impact of translation on politics, in addition to the possible outcomes of mistranslation, including such dangerous outcomes as WWII, involves changes in the political discourse, its vocabulary and concepts, at the receiving end. Terms such as democracy, capitalism and socialism, liberalism, secularism, globalization, war on terror, and many others, have found their way into Arab political discourse through translation and contact with Western societies. The next step, which depends on the political and ideological make-up of the receiving society, is the adoption, appropriation, or rejection of the ideals and practices that those terms stand for.

What is political about translation? Everything - from the decision, or obligation, to translate a text, to the decision to choose one word rather another, to the choice of a strategy such as adaptation or deletion, to the choice of an overall approach – to foreignize or to domesticate in Venuti's parlance, to move the reader toward the writer or move the writer toward the reader, in Schleiermacher's. Little politics is involved in translating the following short poem by Basma Sheikho (2017):

السفينة التي غرقتُ تبتسم،

تحسب نفسها سمكة.

القارب الورقي ينتظر،

لم يخبروه أنه لن يحمل ركاباً.

من غصنٍ لغصنٍ أقفز،

ظلّ الشجرة أمتن منها.

The poetic tension between illusion and reality is as old as poetry itself. This short poem is an instance of this tension. The original metaphors and personifications can be rendered directly with no loss of meaning or impact. A ship that "thinks" it is as capable of living in water as a fish and a paper boat that "keeps waiting" for real passengers for it has never been "told" it is just a paper boat are both mistaken, each entertaining an illusion. A pronominal shift occurs in the third couplet where the speaker, rather than the ship or the paper boat, becomes the theme/ subject – "I keep jumping from one branch to another". The speaker may very well be another non-human being personified, possibly a bird, and there are affinities between a bird and a poet. The bird/ poet keeps jumping from one branch to another because the shade of the tree is stronger than the tree itself, which seems to suggest that illusion is stronger, more enduring and more effective than reality.

But culture and politics will loom large in translating the following popular couplet into Arabic:

Whiskey after beer, no fear

Beer after whiskey, so risky

A translator cannot afford to delete whiskey and beer. Depending on his/ her own ideology, who is paying for the translation and who will read it, amongst many other factors, the translator

is left with the options of a literal translation, a literal translation with a caveat in a footnote, or a cultural equivalent which replaces whiskey and beer with a hot and a cold drinks, respectively.

The literature on how a text is "doctored" in translation is very vast and it keeps growing. One case in point is the rendering of D. H. Lawrence into Arabic. Samaan (1990) notices a tendency "to summarize on the one and moralize on the other." In the translation, the "need for love" is treated as "misbehavior", which is "out of keeping" with the original (p. 20). In the theory of translation **norms** as developed by Toury (1980, 1995), **acceptability** is the result of the translator's decision to surrender to the norms prevailing in the target culture. A translation is thus "acceptable" in the sense that it subscribes to the "the linguistic and literary norms active in the TL and in the target literary polysystem or a certain section of it" (Toury, 1980: 54). Subscription to the norms prevailing in the SL would, on the other hand, lead to an 'adequate' translation (Toury, 1995: 56-58).

Whether to subscribe or not to subscribe to a certain approach to translation is a decision a translator takes, often unconsciously, based on a myriad of factors and constraints some of which are linguistic (constraints imposed by the morphology, syntax and semantics of the two languages), some are cultural, some, political, and in the case of literature some relate to literature itself (e.g., generic constraints and literary conventions). A translation is shaped by language, culture and politics the same an original text is.

A text has meaning Becker (2000: 187) puts it thus, "because it is structuring and remembering and sounding and interacting and referring and not doing something else... all at once." The task of the translator is to evoke all original contextual relationships simultaneously. "The life of a text is in its weighting and balancing and counterbalancing of the terms and figures and in the conceptual drama they evoke" (p. 187). To do this the translated text needs to be deconstructed and attuned across all contextual relationships. To the degree that the

translator succeeds in doing so, he or she has produced aesthetic value and has remained faithful to the original (pp. 309-312).

### **Texts**

#### **(1)**

#### **The Ruined Maid**

"O 'Melia, my dear, this does everything crown!

Who could have supposed I should meet you in Town?

And whence such fair garments, such prosperi-ty?" —

"O didn't you know I'd been ruined?" said she.

— "You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,

Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;

And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers three!" —

"Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined," said she.

— "At home in the barton you said thee' and thou,'

And thik oon,' and theäs oon,' and t'other'; but now

Your talking quite fits 'ee for high compa-ny!" —

"Some polish is gained with one's ruin," said she.

— "Your hands were like paws then, your face blue and bleak

But now I'm bewitched by your delicate cheek,

And your little gloves fit as on any la-dy!" —

"We never do work when we're ruined," said she.

— "You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,  
And you'd sigh, and you'd sock; but at present you seem  
To know not of megrims or melancho-ly!" —  
"True. One's pretty lively when ruined," said she.

— "I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,  
And a delicate face, and could strut about Town!" —  
"My dear — a raw country girl, such as you be,  
Cannot quite expect that. You ain't ruined," said she.

Thomas Hardy's poem, written 1866, but published 1901, is about a woman who loses her purity or virginity during the Victorian Age, which is looked down upon. The poem shows how the ruined maid sees herself, and how society sees her. The poem is in the form of a conversation between two women. The ruined maid, her name is Melia, uses proper English, and the other woman uses a broken dialect.

The text is a site where language, the very bricks of which it is built, culture and politics meet. First and foremost, it is a literary text, a poem. A reader familiar with English poetry will recognize it as poetry through its layout, its stanzaic division, its rhyme scheme (aa bb cc ...), and maybe through its rhythm. There is patterning, not only in those formal features, but also in the sequencing of the dialogue and the turn-taking behavior throughout.

An important aspect of the poem is its vocabulary, especially the semantic change that some words have undergone from the Victorian Age to the present, e.g., "gay" which used to mean light-hearted, happy and carefree but has come to mean "homosexual". The word "maid", which used to mean "an unmarried girl" or "young woman", has also undergone serious semantic change and has come to mean a female domestic servant. Another aspect of the

vocabulary in the poem is the difference between the everyday informal words of the speaker and the more formal and refined words of Melia, the ruined maid – "Some polish is gained with one's ruin."

The poem is an encounter between two identities, two varieties of language and two moral statuses. Tension is quite predictable. The speaker sounds patronizing and a bit contemptuous, whereas Melia is more relaxed and confident. Since there is no way she could regain her "purity", she seems to be able to live with the fact that she is ruined. In fact, she is capable of finally shooting the speaker with "My dear — a raw country girl, such as you be/ Cannot quite expect that. You ain't ruined, said she."

The poem questions the treatment of women, ruined vs. un-ruined, in Victorian England. A ruined woman would go up the social ladder and become rich and refined and live a happier life. An un-ruined woman, lacking in skill and talent, would remain the same leading a life of strife and suffering. It is tempting to reread the story with the world of today in mind (and perchance to compare the glamor of a porn star's life with the misery of a low-class working woman's life).

This is a modern Cinderella story, with a villain, not a prince, taking a maid up the social ladder by damaging her reputation, by ruining her. Questions to ask on the poem as a whole include: how the persons are using language (probing, hinting and satirizing by the speaker and responding by Melia), as well as ways of acting (ruined vs. un-ruined; old friends vs. strangers), interacting (the conversation in the poem), believing and valuing (what a ruined maid should look, speak and act like vs. what an ideal maid should look, speak and act like; how a community regards a ruined maid; how dialect, appearance, dress are valued in a community, and by different members therein, e.g., women, girls, men – "I'm bewitched by your delicate cheek"), dressing, and using various objects, tools ("tatters, without shoes or socks" vs. "gay

bracelets and bright feathers" and "little gloves fit as on any la-dy!") and other ways of self-representation in a given situation and socio-linguistic activity.

Because many of the poem's ideas and words are situated in a socio-cultural context, there will be some issues in translating it into Arabic. The key word "ruined" is not unproblematic. It could mean fallen once, or making a living by being fallen. There will be variation in translating it into Arabic depending on, among other things, how a translator regards "a fallen woman" – امرأة ساقطة، امرأة منحرفة، عاهرة، ست منحلّة، إلخ –

A serious challenge in translating the poem into Arabic is to maintain the linguistic variation between the speaker and Melia, the ruined woman, a variation that signals the move from the country to the town as well as the social identity change that results from being "ruined". The variation is quite remarkable in the following stanza:

— "At home in the barton you said thee' and thou,'  
And thik oon,' and theäs oon,' and t'other'; but now  
Your talking quite fits 'ee for high compa-ny!" —  
"Some polish is gained with one's ruin," said she.

- أمّا كَتّي حدانا في الغيطان  
كتي ياما تقولي اّته آه واتي  
ده ودوله والحاجات الثانية، لكن  
انهارده ياختي شوفي  
جه كلامك حاجة تانية  
حاجة عليوي بصراحه.

- بصّي بئى يا أختي (أختشي)  
الواحد لما بتتحرف

لسانها بيئى حلو خالس

زي ما أنتي يا روعي شايفه.

The standard-dialect variation in Egyptian Arabic does not signal a difference in social status. (Rendering Melia's utterances in Standard Arabic would sound funny and unnatural.) This variation is often signaled by shifting between Cairene and non-Cairene (specifically Upper Egyptian or Saidi) Arabic. The translation of the stanza is all non-standard Arabic and the only way to indicate the distinction between the raw country woman and the ruined woman – Melia - is to switch from non-Cairene to Cairene when the turn is taken by the latter. The distance between the two varieties can be seen in the pronunciation of, for example, ج (/g/ in Cairene and /dj/ or /d/ in Upper Egyptian), ق (/ʔ/ or /k/ in Cairene and /q/ in Upper Egyptian), and ص (/s/ in Cairene and /S/ in Upper Egyptian).

(2)

واللي زارع في صوته

فدان ورد وأغاني

تتر مسلسل ذئاب الجبل، كلمات عبد الرحمن الأبنودي

- **What is linguistic about the two lines?** They are made of language. Semantic **fields**: زارع، فدان، ورد. **Agreement**: صوته، صوته، أغاني – فدان، ورد. **Cohesion**: واللي linking the lines to the previous parts of the poem. Literature makes an impact through **sound, sight** (the image depicted of a vast area of land where roses and songs are grown) and **intellect** (The idea in the lines as well as in the whole text).
- **What is literary?** The **patterning** – micro and macro. The **rhyme** (-*aani* which runs through the whole poem) and the **rhythm**. The **hyperbole and the metaphors**: فدان ... - زارع في صوته أغاني
- **What is cultural?** A **feddan** (Arabic: فدان) is a unit of area, used in Egypt, Sudan, Syria and the Sultanate of Oman. In Classical Arabic, the word means 'a yoke of oxen': implying the area

of ground that could be tilled by them in a certain time. In Egypt the feddan is the only non-metric unit which remained in use following the switch to the metric system. A feddan is divided into 24 **kirat** (Arabic: قيراط, qīrāt) which equals 175 square meters (Wikipedia)

- **What is political?** The suffering of a young educated man having to strike a balance between his and his conservative community's ideals and attitudes. A rural community in transition.
- **What is translational?** Not only having to decide to find an equivalent for the word feddan, or to keep it and add a footnote, but also to handle the whole image and render it naturally, communicatively and accurately, based on an understanding of the whole poem as well as the drama. My ad hoc suggestion is: "his voice is as fragrant and as melodious as a vast area of land where roses and singing birds live"

(3)

I love my mom's slipper;

it used to hit the back

of my clothes

without touching

my back itself ever;

it got so often thwarted,

hitting the air instead,

pretending

it was just a mishit;

it often cried -

as it flew so high -

threatening me.

أَحِبُّ شَيْشِبَ أُمِّي

كثيرا ما يخبطُ ظَهْرَ جِلْبَابِي وَلَا يَلْمِسُ ظَهْرِي.

كثيرا ما يَنحَرِفُ عَنِّي وَيَكْدُمُ الْهَوَاءَ

مُتَظَاهِرًا بِأَنَّهُ أَخْطَأَ الْهَدَفَ.

كثيرا ما بَكَى وَهُوَ يَرْتَفِعُ عَالِيَا وَيَتَوَعَّدُنِي

فتحي عبد السميع

What is particularly cultural about the lines by a contemporary Egyptian poet is the central motif – the slipper. A mother in a traditional Egyptian community uses a slipper, among other things, as an instrument for punishing a disobedient kid, especially when s/he is not within the angry mother's reach. A mother's punishment, symbolized by the slipper, is a mixture of care and coercion.

## (4)

ويأمرها السيد بأن تكنس الغرفة مرة أخرى فتحتج صامتة لأنّ الغرفة نظيفة ولأنّ هذا مجرد عذر لكي يتطلع إلى جسمها الجميل. تفتح النافذة، بعد أن يخرج السيد، تصافح الهواء الذي يستقبلها بضحكة عذبة. "تطيرين؟" "أطير". يأخذها إلى مكان تزهو فيه الألوان وتومض تحدث انعكاسات في الجدول حيث الماء نقي وشفاف. النساء تستحم والرجال يقطفون ثمار الأشجار والأطفال يمرحون على العشب. تسأل طفلاً: "تلهو منذ وقت طويل ألا تشعر بجوع؟" يضحك الطفل: "عم تتحدثين؟" فتقول له: "سوف تمرض إذا لم تأكل". يهز الطفل رأسه: "لست جائعاً ولم أمرض قط". تقول: "ولكن الموت". يضحك عالياً. تسأله: "لماذا تفتح فكيك هكذا وتطلق هذا الصوت الغريب؟" يجيبها بدهشة: "أنا أضحك". ثم يجري بعيداً عنها. تحاول أن تفعل مثله. تفتح فكيتها وتدفع صوتاً ممزقاً من صدرها. "ماذا تفعلين؟" تغلق النافذة بسرعة. كان السيد يتأمل ظهرها. "تنبحين كالكلية" (أمين صالح: النافذة، 1975).

- A male master, twice powerful, and a female servant, twice powerless.
- **IFID:** *yaʔmuruha*; **Reference:** as0sayyid; **Processes:** *taknis* ("cleans"), *tahtajj* ("resents"), *tanbaḥiin*; **Realis and Irrealis:** *SaamiTah* (silently); **Figurative:** *ka l kalbah* ("like a bitch")
- Female as an **object of desire** and voyeurism – *yataTalaʕ ʔila jismiha l jamiil* ("stares at her beautiful body"), *yataʔammal Zahraha* ("gazes at her back")
- Nature as a **rescue**, albeit temporary and imaginary. Pure water and vivid colors. Natural, **instinctive** men and women; playful, happy kids, no hunger, no diseases. **Enjoying** life rather than **fearing** death.
- Learning how to laugh, interrupted by the sadist master.

### **Results**

This article attempts to investigate the relation of language, literature, translation, politics, cognition and culture; whether they, or any of them, can be conducted separately or they should be investigated inseparably. It is found that all these go hand in hand and can hardly be separated. In dealing with any of these, one cannot break their interrelatedness nor their inseparability. This study shows that all of these grand constructs are inseparable and what happens to, by, or through one of them inevitably affects what happens to, by, or through the others. This result entails that no one research can handle any of these without investigating the others. Investigating any of them separately leads to inevitable incorrect results. Therefore, researchers need to study and relate all of these factors inseparably and they need to account for the impact of all other constructs interrelatedly.

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