Sense-for-Sense Translation and the Dilemma of Comprehensibility in Translating Jordanian-Laden Proverbs: A Literary Perspective

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Abstract

Arising from the fact that there is always a top priority in choosing the appropriate equivalence with texts that are not straightforwardly understood, we argued that cultural approximation strategies such as functional equivalence or what Fredrich Schleiermacher termed "domesticized translation" can be the best choice in translating culture-specific items i.e., proverbs and proverbial expressions. In this paper, we investigated the translatability of a number of culturally-laden expressions, mainly prevailing in Jordan. We also suggested translations that, we believe, captured the intended messages of the origin. Refuting arguments that advocated the employment of word-for-word translation, we argued that sense-for-sense and/or domesticized translation can function more faithfully and naturally within texts loaded with cultural components provided that translators should prove fluent and competent in the TL culture. Our argument is highly based upon our strong sensation that the audience in the TL does not want to experience hard times in decoding much foreignized terms but he or she wants to feel at ease by living and dealing with domestic experiences that reflect upon his/her culture.

Key words: Equivalence; Word-for-word translation; Sense-for-sense translation; Text-typology; Domesticing translation; Foreignized translation

1. THE PROBLEM

Proverbs are always considered an important part of the discourse of the elite and the educated. Broadly used in the Jordanian daily discourse, it is significant to think of the appropriate ways to render them in English, being the second language circulated in Jordan. Yet, it is axiomatic to infer that the translatability of proverbs, proverbial idioms, idiomatic expressions, is quite problematic and challenging due to the strangeness and complexities of some of these proverbs; most of these proverbs read difficult and sound unintelligible even for people of the same culture. That translation is not only an interlingual transfer and cross- cultural communication, professional and competent translators, in effect, exert double efforts in hopes of comprehending and/or encapsulating the exact message existent, or hidden, in the source language text (Jian-hua and Zhi-yun, 2010). Although theoreticians and professional experts in translation stress the necessity of translating formally (word-by-word) and ideationally as they attempt to translate culture-laden texts, we argue that translating texts loaded with cultural ambiguity, or to be more specific, with cultural-dependant expressions requires competent translators to resort to functional equivalence or what Farghal and Shunnaq termed "cultural approximation" (cf. Farghal and Shunnaq, 2011).

However, it is a possibility that a number of cultural expressions might score high degrees of understandability and comprehensibility once literal translation (formal equivalence, sometimes) and ideational equivalence have been employed. This is attributed to the fact that, although the items under question address culture-specific notions, the spirit of the corpus may be comprehensible in the target language because of the semantic units in the corpus that normally address knowledge to both SL and TL cultures. Also, as Murphy (1998) puts it, resorting to techniques other than literal translation would create a sense of complexity in the original text, "the different [foreign] features would become a challenge to the reader [and] a more literal rendering does justice to the ambiguity that might be eliminated if the saying were translated in too bland a fashion" (p.622).

2. RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

In this paper, we shall examine the proper employment of domesticized translation in rendering the sensual and

spiritual aspects of the cultural expressions. We shall also work on exploring the role of domesticized translation or what other critics termed functional equivalence, and what we refer to as sense-for-sense translation in this study, especially in maintaining the domesticized aspects of the original text rather than the foreignized and/or the foreignizing ones. To do so, we examined the translatability of a number of culture-laden expressions that, although look very familiar and common, are hard to tackle especially for translators whose knowledge of the source language text (SLT) is humble and insufficient. These proverbs are randomly chosen from our daily discourse but they have a peculiar feature as they are always uttered by the elderly people and constitute a major trait of their discourse.

3. THEORITICAL APPROACHE(S): EQUIVALENCE PRIORITY

In this paper, we decided to deal with only two major categories of "translation equivalence", although the scholars and critics we consulted sought to use different names for some of these translation equivalences. These include: formal equivalence and functional equivalence. As for the former, it normally focuses on the form of the translated text regardless of the sense (exact meaning), so it resembles, though not to a great extent, what others term word-for-word translation. The latter captures the function or what we term the soul of the text apart from the form of the original text. In this study, we also opted for a foreignzing translation as an alternative to formal equivalence and a domesticated translation that refers to functional equivalence.

When it comes to the translation of cultural items that represent different traditions and norms, translators are expected to face many problems as how to deal with the complexity and difficulty of such cultural expressions, most of which are, if not based on social stories, are hard to interpret and understand. At this point, translators may think of a trichotomy of equivalence by concentrating on form, function, or idea. These are formal, functional and ideational equivalences. For example, if the translator is concerned with the form rather than the function, s/he will surely resort to formal equivalence (Catford, 1965). However, the translator is not the only variable in the choice of equivalence as text-type and audience may play a great role in adopting the most appropriate equivalence.

That said, it is important that the chosen equivalence should maintain elements of naturalness of the SLT. In the context of culture specific expressions i.e., proverbs and proverbial expressions, a discussion of functional

equivalence[1] will be furnished. Newmark (1988) states that "functional equivalence, when applied to cultural words, requires the use of a culture-free word, sometimes with a new specific form; it therefore neutralizes or generalizes the SL word" (p.83). To him, this procedure, which is a cultural analysis, is the most accurate way of translating i.e., deculturalizing a cultural word. Below, we will review some of the international scholarship in which poets, translators, and critics spoke of the priorities employed in their translations, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Jerome, John Dryden, Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace) and Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt. In this theoretical review, we shall elaborate on the key translation equivalences (strategies) examined and the equivalence these critics celebrated equipped with some reasons for their choice.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (2000) points to an indispensable difficulty related to the matter of receptiveness, which explains the relationship between the source language translation and the accessibility of the translated works in the target language. In other words, Schleiermacher clearly criticizes translations that blindly employ foreignizing techniques when translators deal with cultural-dominated texts i.e., proverbs in this paper. He clarifies that

> Excepting…extraordinary masters who have equal command of several languages, or even find that one they have learned comes more naturally to them than their mother tongue, men for whom, as has been said, it is not possible to translate –excepting them, all other people, as fluently as they might read a foreign tongue, will yet retain while doing so a feeling of the foreign. (p.53)

Then he emphasizes a similar notion by pointing to the urgent necessity of encountering the foreign sense of the translated text. He adds:

> Now how shall the translator contrive to disseminate among his readers this sense of encountering foreign when he presents them [readers] with a translation in their own tongue?...one must admit that an indispensable requirement for this method of translating is a disposition of the language that not only departs from the quotidian but lets one perceive that it was not left to develop freely but rather was bent to a foreign likeness; and it must be confessed that achieving this with art and measure, with detriment neither to oneself nor to the language, is perhaps the greatest difficulty our translator must confront. (Schleiermacher, p.53)

Contemporary theoreticians, scholars, and literary critics have switched from the dichotomy of Nida's and Deighbogrand's literal and dynamic equivalences into a dichotomy that values foreignizing and domesticing techniques. In his book *Rethinking Translation*, Venuti (1992) commented on a dichotomy of translations: foreignizing translation, functioning as a substitute to

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[1] This term, as intended in our study, is synonymous to domesticized translation and sense-for-sense translation, but for the sake of consistency we will be using sense-for-sense translation and domesticed because of their modern arrival into translation studies.

literal and/or formal equivalence, and domesticating translation which refers to free translation. These translation techniques function, as Marilyn Gadd explains, in a "diametrically opposite ways." Rose, in effect, highly praised Venuti's classification of foreignizing and domesticating as being visible and invisible, respectively (p.22).

Drawing upon the same them, Friedrich Schleiermacher (2000) elaborates on two approaches, especially when referring them to text-typology and the cultural information that usually occur between them. These two methods are foreignizing text and domesticating text. Schleiermacher eloquently clarifies the relation between them. He says "[e]ither the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer towards him" (p.49). In the first case, the reader-author relationship brings reader into the author and leaves the cultural information intact just demonstrate a sense of foreignness and portray an extreme reliability to the foreignness of the source text. Here, the translator has to use special tactics to compensate for the reader's inability to understand the original language. In the second case, the author-reader relationship leaves the reader and moves the author towards him in an attempt to provide a domesticating text.

It should be emphasized that once theoreticians, poets, translators and great philosophers support the employment of equivalence at the expense of another, they fully deject using any other equivalence although it might function properly in the TL, i.e., word-for-word equivalence. This fact is stressed by John Dryden (2000) who in "From the Preface to Ovid's Epistles" supports translations that give much more "liberty" to the original and also point to the fact that translators should avoid using two major extremes in translating poetry and other text-typologies. These extremes include imitation, an equivalent of literal translation, and verbal renditions (p.40-42). Apparently, Dryden values the resort to a domesticized translation so as not to "vitiate the sense." He further emphasizes:

> But since every language is so full of its own properties, that what is Beautiful in one, is often Barbarous, nay sometimes Nonsense in another, it would be reasonable to limit a Translator to the narrow compass of his authors words: 'tis enough if he [the translator] choose out some Expression which does not vitiate the sense…*By this means the spirit of an author may be transfus'd, and yet not lost.* (Emphasis added, p.41)

Similarly, the roman poet Horace (2000) stresses the necessity of not translating by employing some translation procedures such as word-for-word translation in an attempt to come up with a "distinctive" quality of text. Following his steps, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (2000) does not value translations that embrace an amalgamation of form and content, but he prefers translations that "preserve the cultural and linguistic differences." He emphasizes that

> A translation that attempts to identify itself with the original ultimately comes close to an interlinear version and greatly facilitates our understanding of the original. We are led, yes, compelled as it were, back to the source text: the circle, within which the approximation of the foreign and the familiar, the known and the unknown constantly move, is finally complete. (p.65-66)

In contrast, the German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (2000) advocates the employment of "word-for-word literalism" as a substitution of functional and or dynamic equivalence. Here, while Horace and Goethe focus on the distinctiveness and the originality of the source language text correspondingly, Schleiermacher's approach aims to create a sense of "foreignness" in the translation. (qtd. in Venuti, *The Translation Studies* 5)

Jerome (2000), further, calls for the employment of what he calls sense-for-sense translation as a means to assume a cultural sense, especially in dealing with religious and cultural texts. He argues that "one must consider not the words, but the sense" (qtd. in Venuti, p.15). Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt (2000), likewise, values the translatability of culture "over adequacy to the foreign text" (p.31-32). D'Ablancourt's preference to resorting to sense-for-sense translation is legitimate as it, according to him, helps the reader to avoid "offending the delicacy of…language" and "causing moral offense." However, d'Ablancourt did not explicitly imply that his domesticating choices are obligatory to use but they are "based on an interpretation that displays an acute sense of historical difference" (p.32-3). Venuti (2000), among others, emphasizes the fact that avoidance of word-for-word translation is considered a "proselytizing move designed to increase access to the …text". In the excerpt below, Venuti explicitly expresses his opinion in which he highly values and embraces any domesticating translation over any word-for-word translation. He argues that

> The functionalism that accompanies sense-for-sense translation since antiquity is now redefined to fit different cultural and social realities. Translators are forthright in stating that their freedoms are intended not merely to imitate features of the foreign texts, but to allow the translation to work as a literary text in its own right, exerting its force within native traditions. As a result, translation is strongly domesticating, assimilating foreign literatures to the linguistic and cultural values of the receiving situation. (Venuti, p.16)

As we came to state the problem of this paper, we stressed the notion that competent translators should not forget the fact that the receptors are not "passive targets" (De Waard & Nida, 1986); translators should take into consideration readers' responses, among other things, which reflect their abilities or readiness to translate. That said, the question that arises when we think of backtranslating or reflecting upon the understandability of a number of functionally translated proverbs is: do non-native speakers of Arabic language receive Arabic translated proverbs as culturally intended in the original

text?

4. PRACTICAL EVIDENCE

Due to the expected difficulty of appropriately capturing what we term the exactness of the original of the SLT, we argue that competent translators should opt for techniques that have domesticating sense. So doing, the competent and/or the proper translator, in Schleiermacher's view, ensures the reader's and writer's satisfaction by bringing them together. By the virtue of the domesticating sense, the competent translator enables the reader to willingly remain within the boundaries of his or her mother tongue. This could be clearly inferred in Schleiermacher's oft-cited statement, "[e]ither the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him" (Schleiermacher, 2000, p.49). By way of illustrations, the following examples below show how blindly resorting to foreignized translations might lead to creating a conflict between the translator and the writer/the reader because both parts will be forced to leave the boundaries of their mother tongue. The first example is

Ma feeh A3war gheir a3war Dogara?

Literally: *Is there no one-eyed person except that in Dogarah?*

This proverb is very culture-specific. It reads very strange to all other Arab countries apart from Jordan, the country where this proverb is originated and normally circulated. Surprisingly, very few people might know the cultural indications attached to this proverb, especially those who live in the urbanized places and those who are not well-versed in the pure Jordanian culture and traditions. Once we attempt to translate this proverb based upon our own cultural traditions, we might complicate its comprehensibility. Ignoring the receptiveness of such translation in the TL will produce a number of cultural items loaded with pragmalingusitic misunderstandings and confusing thoughts and ideas. Also, according to Murphy, the lack of response regarding the pragmalingusitic comprehension would result in a confusing the reader by disenabling him or her to "enter more fully into the pungency and often the mystery of a proverb" (p.623).

This proverb, as a matter of fact, is normally uttered in situations where the speaker delivers the message that there is no uniqueness in our world which knows no limits and boundaries. Places, phenomena, and people definitely have great commonalities and similarities among them, so no one can claim himself or herself as being unique. Additionally, this proverb is also uttered in response to people who may mistakenly misrecognize certain people or places. In other words, one cannot take for granted what they think of as always being true as things and people's appearances sometimes look similar yet deceptive and misleading. Although this proverb is very culture-specific, it reads funny yet challenging to comprehend and translate because of its slanginess.

Once we attempt to translate this proverb literally, we will definitely sacrifice the beauty, and the "delicacy" of the original text (Farghal and Shunnaq, 2011, p.16). Any suggested literal translation, such as *is not there one-eyed person except that in Dogarah,[2]* will definitely be highly understandable for people who are familiar with the place and the linguistic style of the Arabic proverb. However, it will sound odd and perplexing for those who are unfamiliar or who are not well-versed with the Jordanian traditions. This is simply because the reader in this regard would feel alienated i.e., the translator tried not to compensate the reader for lacking the cultural image of the original by not providing him or her with a similar image or impression (Schleiermacher, p.49). Here, word-for-word translation or formal equivalence, we argue, will not only affect the beauty of the original message but it will negatively impact its naturalness and faithfulness. We, at this point, adopt Jerome's point of view when he rejects the remedy of word-for-word translation, "if I translate word by word, it sounds absurd; if out of necessity I alter something in the order or diction, I will seem to have abandoned the task of a translation" (2000). Also, translators might fall victims to misunderstanding the interrogative style of the proverb i.e., because the proverb reads like a question but in fact it is a negation. The region-specific features expressed in the proverb will be lost, if not distorted, thus giving more room for misinterpretation and foreignized thoughts in the target language.

At this point, a competent translator must think of translations that should capture the functionalism of the proverb. In other words, she or he should think of some translations that do not confuse the reader by equipping the text with alien features. He or she should also think of a translation that renders the communicative value of the proverb otherwise a great loss in meaning is bound to occur. A suggestion such as *our world is a little home*, although it reads very generic, captures the message of the original proverb. By virtue of this translation, the reader might well get a high degree of understandability of the contextual debate that encompasses the proverb. It definitely corresponds to the pragmacultural values of the origin because it clarifies the function of the proverb i.e., it denotes to the audience an idea like that of the origin

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[2] A small village that is located in the north of Jordan, in Irbid, whose people are always characterized as being simple and heart-hearted. These people make living by raising animals and farming. So, most of their sayings and proverbs are derive from their environment and culture that might be very unique, even compared to some other villages in the same region.

but in different lexicon by substituting the literal image of the local place with a more generic one, thus paving clear way for understandability and comprehension.

The second example is:

Hada Al-Maidan ya Humeidan

Literally:This is the field Oh Humeidan

This proverbial expression is specifically uttered in colloquial discourse. Culturally speaking, once it is uttered, it reveals that the speaker is offering an invitation to challenge i.e., a situation that entails challenging someone who claims being powerful and confident, especially in terms of wrestling. It is also common to use this proverb in our daily discourse to motivate lazy people to further proceed in their jobs. That said, to capture the message originated in this proverb, it is axiomatic to infer that formal correspondence may not well be a good resort. Blindly translating this proverb using formal equivalence and/or by using word-for-word will come up with translations such as

This is the field, oh! Humeidan!

Here, we do not need a scientific evidence to conclude that that this translation fails both semantically and pragmatically to render the exactness of the original text. However, it might sound beautiful. But it is, as d'Ablancourt rationalizes, that competent translators should not seek to translate the beauty of the translation at the wealth of its faithfulness (cf. Venuti *The Translation Studies*, 2000). In other words, this translation only rendered the language of the proverb but not the culture to which it belongs to. With such interconnectedness between language and culture, a great distortion is bound to occur in the intended message of the origin. According to Jian-hua and Zhi-yun, translations of items such as proverbs, translators should not limit their understanding to the literal meaning of these items, but they have to "know the deeper meaning and try to understand them from the cultural angle" (p.118).

To further elaborate on this proverb, the reader will infer that the addressee, Humeidan, is very culture-specific uncommon name, thus adding to the complexity of understanding this translation. Humeidan, by definition, is an old, yet funny-sounding name, which always stands for weak people who are physically and socially weak and powerless. Additionally, if, at worst, we opt for translating this proverb formally, we will definitely sacrifice the foreignizing sense of the proverb. In other words, the contextual debate in which the proverb is translated will sound foreignized rather than domesticized, thus dragging the reader into more confusion and perplexity, let alone misunderstanding.

However, this same proverb can be best translated based on eliciting a better equivalence that guarantees translating the function of the proverb. By function, we mean to capture the pragmalingusitic feature embedded in the phraseology of the proverb. At this point, we speak of a domesticized, not a literal meaning. Literal meaning would definitely create much more confusion and open interpretations, which will be definitely a great venture, thus distorting the meaningful unit of the proverb. The focal point, as we see it, entails the use of functional, sense-for-sense and/or domesticating translation that will not only help target readers comprehend the cultural message of the proverb, but it will also enable them feel the sense of unity and cohesiveness of the translated proverb, especially within the translated text. By virtue of resorting to the function or to the dynamiticity of the cultural item we emphasize faithfulness to the original text, at least in terms of content. This further will evade readers fall victims to falsified conceptions and thoughts, fully equipped with semantic and pragmatic miscues.

Below, we offer three suggested translations that might better encapsulate the missing information once translated based upon translators' focus on the form or and the content away from the aesthetics of the cultural element . Notably, readers will notice that our suggested translations belong to different translation equivalences. But we mean the first suggested translation to be domesticating in agreement with d'Ablancourt's patterns of thought who argues that sense-for sense-translation, in a context such as where this proverb is articulated, assimilates some foreign features (literatures) "to the linguistic and cultural values of the receiving situation." (qtd. in Venuti 16) These suggested translations are:

This is the time, this is the place.

There you are! Show us what you can do!

The proof of the pudding is in the eating

Knowing that time and place are essentially needed for competitions and challenges, it is clear that, in terms of content, the first suggested translation does not sacrifice the gist of the original message. People need to specify both place and time to start any competitions or to invite their opponents for a challenging situation once they suspect their abilities to do a certain skill or hard task. Starting the suggested translation with the demonstrative *this* in both clauses further gives the proverb an influential and forceful sense, thus substituting the message of challenge that exists in the original proverb. Most importantly, this translation reads much more universal than the formal one that speaks to the readers as if they were experts and skilled in the source language text.

However, our second suggested translation might function properly although we do not intend it to be functional. As a matter of fact, this translation looks too foreignized to function properly in any culture-laden text. That is, although this translation explicitly renders the challenge of the SL, it does not decipher the cultural and esthetic value of the proverb as, apparently, the cultural senses that overload the proverb seem to be missing in the translation. It is apparent that the cultural elements are utterly decoded. On this account, we argue that this translation is pragmalingusitically appropriate but culturally inappropriate. Still, some translators might

prefer translations that are of a common knowledge and that are internationally recognized as shared data and wisdom such as our third suggested translation, a translation that, although does not keep the literal wording of the original, maintains some aspects of clarity.

The last proverb that supports our previous discussion is

Enga3ha Wa Ishrab Mayet-ha
Literally: Soak it and drink its broth

This proverb discusses a very common sociocultural image that prevails in the Arab culture. It denotes a message of indifference and carelessness about people's discourse. Normally people would brag that they have papers (legal documents) that can be used to testify against their opponents in their disputes. In effect, when the addressee shows some signs of indifference about the whole situation they would respond in a very calm yet rude manner by uttering this proverb. Yet, it sometimes might be uttered sarcastically. Here, it should be emphasized that this proverb might carry some sexual connotations especially when the speakers are either males or females, but it is unlikely to be uttered between a male and a female because it might be considered a sexual harassment. That said, any suggested translation for this proverb must deal with the proverb in a cautious way i.e., it should render the domesticized sense included in the message of slackness and negligence. Our suggested translation ventures the form but captures the content of the proverb. The suggested translation is *Shove it!*

Although this translation might read odd, it does correspond positively in the target language because this phrase, in the Western culture, is uttered when the speaker tries to insult the addressee by showing some signs of recklessness and rashness. At this point, our translation, once backtranslated, will remain natural in terms of its content i.e., it will render an approximate message of the original. Resorting to a foreignized sense will mislead the target audience because they are not familiar with the cultural context in which the proverb is uttered. So, we dare say that by the virtue of the employing any cultural approximation techniques such as domesticized translation, the cultural value expressed in the original text remains intact and was not distorted. This supports our hypothesis about the positive impact that might pop up once competent and professional translators opt for cultural approximations in case they are faced with culture-specific items.

It is necessary to point out that some culture-specific expressions that require cultural approximation as the best means for translating are less flexible than those that require common knowledge, universal expertise and shared experiences. This is attributed to the fact that these expressions are restricted to a specific function that does not have ample cultural approximations in the target language, i.e., English. By way of illustration, a proverb like *Al-3in Baseera Wa Eid Gaseerah* [Literally: the eye can see but the hand is short] will definitely have very few renditions in the TL, whether dynamically, ideationally, or functionally, whereas proverbs such as *Klabon Mayyeton khaeron men Asaden Hay* [Literally: a living dog is better than a dead lion]will definitely have more than one translation strategy that will appropriate renditions once translated regardless of the translation strategy.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we, among others, agree that the translation of culture is one of the hardest tasks competent and professional translators may face especially when the language which they are dealing with have no "counterparts" in the TL. This, also, may be attributed to the fact that culture is like humans i.e., it has different tastes, so what might sound acceptable in a given culture might sound very awkward in another (Jian-hua and Zhi-yun, 2010, p.118).

It is also noteworthy that in the process of translating culture i.e., proverbs, top priorities should be adopted to ensure the rendition of the cultural elements. Text-typology is one such priority that plays a major role in deciding whether or not to translate formally, dynamically or ideationally. That the strategy of "cultural approximation" would help capture the cultural sense of the source language text, we feel that the best resort is to translate uncommon cultural norms based upon our own cultural understanding. The rationale behind our hypotheses is that once translators manage, i.e., substitute a number of cultural elements, during the process of translation, they avoid offending either culture. By so doing, they make sure that the cultural heritage, some of which might be very scared and of great significance, will not be distorted. This is purely because a number of cultural elements in some countries might be seen as terrible whereas other countries might view them as godly. In short, we should avoid formalism and literalism in attempting to translate culturally-laden expressions.

Once competent translators are stuck with expressions that need deep cultural and pragmalingusitic understanding, they better seek functional equivalence to ensure that the target audience get their message as originally intended, far away from being loaded with ambiguous renditions and interpretations. However, we are not essentializing the use of this equivalence as other equivalences might, whether permanently or not, register high levels of understandability and comprehensibility.

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