Issues Encountered during the Translation Process

Ahmed Mohamed Lemine El-Mokhtar

Faculty of Arts || NKC Modern University || Mauritania

Abstract : There are general translation problems that make translation a difficult activity. Some of these problems are related to source text, some related to target language and some to translation adopted methods and processes. This article enlists the most common issues and challenges translators encounter during the process of translation. It is divided into three sections. The first section is about the linguistic and cultural problems in translation. The second section illustrates certain constraints faced while translating idioms, metaphors and collocations. The third section highlights the duality of fidelity and freedom and the translator's position in the process of translation.

Keywords: Translation Issues, linguistic and cultural problems in translation, Translating Idioms, Fidelity and Freedom in Translation.

<div dir="rtl">

المعضلات المعيقة لعملية الترجمة

أحمد محمد الأمين المختار

كلية الآداب || جامعة نواكشوط العصرية || موريتانيا

الملخص: هناك معضلات عديدة تعرقل عمل المترجمين، وبعض هذه المعضلات مرتبطة بالنص المترجم، وبعضها مرتبطة بلغة الترجمة، وأخرى مرتبطة بطرق وأساليب الترجمة المعتمدة من هذا المترجم أو ذاك. يسلط هذا المقال الضوء على أبرز المشاكل والتحديات التي يواجهها المترجمون أثناء عملية الترجمة، وينقسم المقال إلى ثلاثة عناوين فرعية يُعنى أولها بالمشاكل اللغوية والثقافية في الترجمة، وثانيها بالعراقيل المرتبطة بترجمة الأمثال، والاستعارات، والمتلازمات، في حين يناقش العنوان الثالث ثنائية الحرية والأمانة في عملية الترجمة وعلاقة المترجم بالنص المترجَم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مشاكل الترجمة، المعضلات اللغوية والثقافية في الترجمة، ترجمة الأمثال، الأمانة والحرية في الترجمة.

</div>

Introduction:

Translation is not an easy task. The problems encountered during any translation process are associated with source text, target text and the nature of the methods adopted by the translators. Source text may include unread words, spelling or typographical errors, incomplete text, poor structure or false information about an axiom. There are some linguistic problems translators encounter during the process of translation, like dialectic terminology, new words, abbreviations, acronyms and mysterious language. Of the difficulties also, translators can face challenges with thymes, puns, poetic measures, very specific cultural references and hidden but important language characteristics such as articulation and tone. That being said, the major challenge of a translator is that they introduce texts for different readerships. While treating any text, the translator is required to edit, post-edit, revise non-native users' writings and perform proofreading (Ehrensberger-Dow, 2014).

This article enlists the most common issues and challenges translators encounter during the process of translation. It is divided into three sections. The first section is about the linguistic and cultural problems in translation. The second section illustrates certain constraints faced while translating idioms, metaphors and collocations. The third section highlights the duality of fidelity and freedom and the translator's position in the process of translation.

Linguistic and Cultural Problems in Translation:

A simple definition of translation is that it is about the transmission of meaning from a source language into a target language. However, the way the process of transmission is performed and the nature of its final result present serious challenges for translators and their audiences. Some translators assume that there is a firm link between words and phrases in different languages that make translations consistent, such as cryptography. In this context, many of them assume that the translator's task is just to translate a particular text by transferring the meaning of words between languages as illustrated in a bilingual dictionary. On the contrary, this constant relationship between words can only exist if we create a new language constantly synchronized alongside an existing language. The created language, in this sense, should be shaped in such a way that each word carries exactly the same meaning and shades of meaning as the word in the original language. It should also preserve its derivative roots, phonologically and morphologically. In addition, if the new language would have a life of its own regardless of such usage of strict encoding, each word would begin to take on new connotative shades of meaning and give up the previous denotations, making any such artificial synchronization impossible. As such, translation from that point on will require reconsideration of the new connotation of the words. Accordingly, while translators seek parity, this requires less rigorous and more analytical methods to arrive at a good translation.

Another challenge that translators encounter is the one concerning the discussion about whether translation is an art or a craft. Literary translators convincingly argue that translation is an art, although they acknowledge that it is instructable. Other translators, most of whom are professionals working in

technology, business, or legal documents, do their job as a craft that can only be taught, but it is subject to linguistic analysis and requires academic education. Most translators agree that the truth lies somewhere between the lines of a text and depends on it. Translation of simple documents, like brochures, does not require much time or efforts. On the contrary, translation of a newspaper editorial, text of political speech, or a book on almost any topic will require not only the craft of good language skills and research style but also the art of good writing, cultural sensitivity, and good communication skills.

There are two types of challenges that translators face during the process of translation. The first type is related to the level of the translator as far as mastering the source and target languages are concerned. The second type is about the translator's cultural background of the source text/culture and the target text/culture. In his article, "What Every Novice Translator Should Know", Antar Abdellah, mentions that "translation problems can be divided into linguistic problems and cultural problems: the linguistic problems include grammatical differences, lexical ambiguity and meaning ambiguity; the cultural problems refer to different situational features" (Antar, 2012). Any translator must be familiar with certain linguistic problems as to ensure they decode the real meaning meant in the source text so that they can transmit it into a target language in accordance with its accurate linguistic and cultural equivalence.

In his article "6 Translation Problems", Mathieu demonstrates six problems that translators usually encounter in any translation process excluding computer and stress related issues. The first problem is lexical-semantic problems. Translators can overcome lexical-semantic problems by consulting appropriate dictionaries or language experts for relevant usage of certain synonyms, antonyms, neologisms, contextual semantic gaps and terminological alternatives. The second is the grammatical problem where the systematic order of words, construction, prepositions, verbs, pronouns, common nouns, proper nouns and adjectives denoting unknown objects, italics, dashes and their structural correspondences should be respected depending on their sequence in target and source languages. The syntactical problem, the third point, is seen in passive voice forms, rhetorical figures of speech and syntactic parallels. The fourth problem is the rhetorical one that is linked to classification and reformation of figures of thought, like comparison, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, oxymoron, paradox, and diction. The fifth point is about the pragmatic problem that is related to the usage of formal and informal language depending on the context and nature of used expression, be it idiomatic, ironical, humor or sarcastic. The last point is the cultural issue1 that translators often face when dealing with a text that is loaded with cultural items related to the customs and traditions of a specific culture, like names, food and festivals. These six problems are of the most common challenges that translators encounter in any translation activity (Mathieu, 2015).

Mary Massoud tackles some problems that translators face, obstacles that they must overcome and the necessity of having basic qualifications for someone to be a translator. She argues that expert linguistic translators may fail to deliver a good comprehensive translation by conveying the wrong intended meaning

due to the lack of awareness of certain historical facts or due to other factors including insufficient knowledge of culture or of the connotative development of certain metaphors and idiomatic expressions. She highlights what she calls 'matching translation project with translator's skills' emphasizing that, for instance, literary translators must be familiar with the literary genre they translate. In other words, poetry should be translated only by a poet, fiction by a fiction writer, drama by a playwright and so on. Translating a literary work is different from translating a scientific work. In literature, the translator is required to use his imagination as to deliver the meaning in the same tone and emotive act.2 In science, the translator is constrained by the form and the meaning and cannot use his imagination to render scientifically proven facts (Massoud, 1988).

## Translating Idioms, Metaphors and Collocations

Translating idioms, metaphors and collocations is classified within the context of cultural translation. They cannot be translated literally. Idioms are expressions consisting of more than one word but cannot be understood by extracting the meaning of their individual words. An idiom is a combination of words that takes a specific form. It is known and understood by native speakers and language experts. Non-native speakers, who are not familiar with both the language and the culture of the source language from which idioms are constructed, cannot guess the real meaning of idiomatic expressions as they are culture-bound. In his book Difficulties in Arabic-English Translation, Omar Jabak provides a summary for previous studies in which Arab students translate Arab idioms into English. Omar states that English native speakers would struggle to understand those idioms as they were translated literally. Non-native speakers are not familiar with the Arabic language and culture. He adds that "idioms do not derive their overall meaning from the meaning of the words which make them." (Jabak, 2019).

Mary Massoud states that "a good translation is idiomatic," and "a good translator distinguishes between the metaphorical and the literal" (Massoud, 1988). A translator should be able to judge the meaning of the expression they translate by rendering the real meaning intended in the source language in its equivalent meaning in the target language. Though idiomatic expressions are metaphorical figures of speech that may give the translator more freedom during the process of translation, still they are credible and their usage is considered of high rhetorical importance within the field of translation.

In this respect, József Andor emphasizes the idea that "idioms and metaphors are overlapping categories with graded membership and fuzzy boundaries," and that "idioms involving figurative devices other than metaphor obviously cannot be called metaphors, while metaphors that bear the least resemblance to idioms are the innovative, lexically and syntactically highly variable types" (Andor, 2008). Here, the author highlights a point related to the relationship between idioms and metaphors. He argues that while they are similar in their metaphorical dimensions, there are cases where certain idioms cannot be

classified as metaphors. Yet, any metaphor that carries the least syntactical and lexical characteristic of metaphor becomes its most rhetorical form.

Metaphor, then, is a figure of speech in which an expression refers to something that it does not literally denote. Translating metaphors is a challenge to any translator as they go beyond the form of the words to what they indicate to native speakers as figurative expressions. In his work A Textbook of Translation, Peter Newmark states that all polysemous words are potentially metaphorical. Metaphors may be single words or a combination of words as a collocation, an idiom, a sentence, a proverb, an allegory or a complete imaginative text.
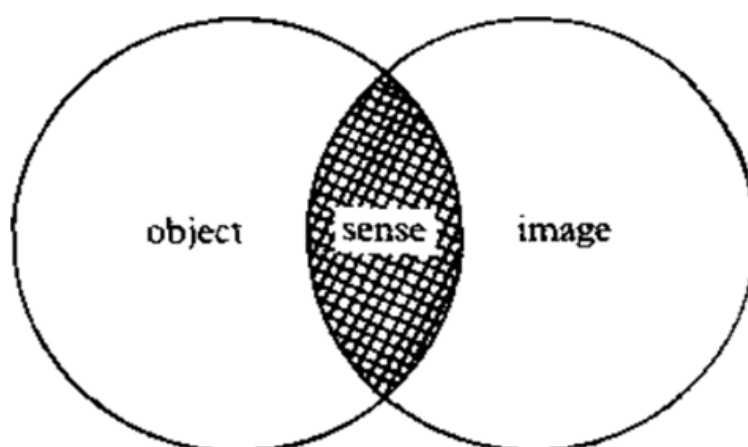
In the above figure, Newmark depicts a picture for the point where the sense that the translator seeks exists. For him, any translation of metaphors should be processed from a central point between the text and the translator's perception of it. It is only from the sense position that the translator can assure the accuracy of metaphor translation and determine its credibility in accordance with the corner from which they treat the text (Newmark, 1988).

In his book Metaphor, David Punter states that Aristotle is the founder of metaphor theory which appeared in his early works, namely Poetics. Metaphor is a sign of linguistic mastery and a kind of genius. That is to say, mastering metaphor requires special efforts since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilar. Punter sheds lights on the classical background of metaphor from its philosophical roots to its religious and political tradition in the West and the East. He links the pivotality of metaphor to the influence of culture and politics of literary works and theory. He scrutinizes metaphor in relation to literary theory, philosophy, psychoanalysis and postcolonial studies. He reinforces his argument with specific examples from Western and Eastern literature and poetry. The author provides several forms of metaphor including the following six types:

- Amalgamated metaphor: mixes different realms of discourse, sometimes accidentally, at other times for comic effect.

- Conceit: often regarded as typical of metaphysical poetry. This form of metaphor is distinguished first by the apparent initial dissonance between the two terms of comparison, and second by its sustenance over a considerable length, sometimes the length of an entire poem.

- Dead metaphor: used so often that it barely stands out as a metaphor at all and has descended to the level of cliché. Typical of much political language.

- Extended metaphor: a metaphor extended and developed throughout a text, or throughout significant portions of it.

- Mixed metaphor: mixes apparently incompatible topics. It is often the result of a rhetorical mistake.

- Simile: a form of metaphor, often regarded as the simplest of all, where the comparison between two objects is expressed through the link words 'like' or 'as'. Most advanced forms of metaphor seek to surprise and startle by omitting these link words (Punter, 2007).

Ali Darwish relates collocation to habits and considers them a combination of two or more words that have a special connotation as a unit different from each word on its own. Darwish states that "collocation is the habitual co-occurrence of individual words. For example, hold collocates with meeting (hold a meeting), make collocates with decision (make a decision) and good collocates with morning (good morning)" (Darwish, 2010). By illustrating these examples, the writer wants to clarify that, in translation, it should be noted that collocations might take different shapes and meanings in the target language, even if it shares its roots and morphology with the source language. Thus, a translator must be cautious to render the exact meaning of collocations by choosing their correct equivalents that are culture-bound and cannot be grasped by literal translation.

Sana Abdelhay focuses on the recognition of the meaning of collocations by native speakers unlike non-native speakers. They "sound natural to native speakers. These conventional sequences are instantly recognizable to native speakers of a language, but remain difficult for second language learners to acquire and use properly" (Abdelhay, 2017). Collocations present a challenge to any translator, especially when they translate from or to a language they are not of its native speakers. Despite it being rare, some translators can master two or more languages depending on the linguistic status of the environment they live in, especially during their childhood in bilingual or multilingual settings.

In their book Strategies in Translating Collocations in Religious Texts from Arabic into English, Bader Dweik and Mariam Abu Shakra discuss the problem of translating Arabic collocations into English. They say that translating collocations from Arabic into English is impeded by several hindrances related to the huge gap between the linguistic characteristics and cultural heritages of Arabic and English. Another reason that makes such translation a hard task to perform is the nature of the collocations themselves that are marked with their arbitrariness, which encodes the process of transmitting their meaning within and across the languages (Dweik & Shakra, 2010).

Rami Al-Hamdalla gives another idea concerning the translation of collocations and the margin of freedom a translator has in this context. He says that "in translating a compound noun, a collocation or a

noun phrase consisting of two or more nouns, there is often a choice between word-for-word translation and an expression having the meaning unambiguously" (Al-Hamdalla, 1998). Al-Hamdalla argues that collocations can be translated literally or literary. For him, both are acceptable approaches to demystify the ambiguity of the collocation. However, the question remains raised about the accuracy of translating a collocation like good morning literally into Arabic. We may translate the word good as جيد and the word morning as صباح and the expression will be صباح جيد, which does not sound a real equivalent collocation for good morning in Arabic that is delivered as صباح الخير. That way, we can say that Al-Hamdalla's argument is partially inapplicable in its part related to the possibility and credibility of translating collocations literally.

Fidelity and Freedom: Translator's Position in the Process of Translation

The duality of fidelity and freedom are commonly discussed as major issues within the context of translation studies. Fidelity, faithfulness and loyalty are opposite to freedom, betrayal and creativity. These terms and their synonyms are all meant to measure relationships between the translator, the translated text and the translation. There are two types of translation, faithful and free. Faithful translation is the one in which the translator delivers exact meaning and literal form of the translated text into the targeted one without any kind of intervention. In this case, the translator is just a mediator whose task is limited to transmitting a message from A to B and has no creative role to play in the process of delivery. Free translation is the one in which the translator freely renders the ideas in his own words, even if that requires paraphrasing, omitting or restructuring some words or sentences. Here the translator is involved in the process not only as a facilitator but also as an innovator whose task goes beyond transferring a message between a sender and a receiver. Both approaches are common in translation and each of them has its pros and cons (Baker, 1998).

As far as translation quality is concerned, fidelity and freedom are highly put on the list of pivotal issues discussed within the field of translation. Daniel Gile states that this duality "is a central part of reflection on 'translatability' in the literature; it is linked to the concept of equivalence and to theories about equivalence; it is virtually unavoidable in research measuring shifts between Source Texts and Target Texts, errors and omissions; it is relevant to reflection about the respective status of the author and the translator, about the literary status of translators, about creativity in translation" (Gile, 2009). Here we can deduce that fidelity, and thus freedom, are linked to many other literary and translational concepts and components. To decide about the translatability or untranslatability of a specific literary product, or tackle an issue related to the relationship between source and target languages, or about the positions of the author or translator or about the efficiency of the translation itself, fidelity would necessarily be involved.

Equivalence is a common denominator between all translations. Achieving this goal requires that a translator adopts fidelity or freedom or both at the same time depending on the context. This means that while fidelity might be preferable in certain contexts where the accuracy is highly recommended, like in a

scientific text, freedom is a better choice to give the translator more independence from the constraints of the source text so that they can render an innovative translation, especially in literary works. That being said, an ideal translation would be somewhere in between creativity or freedom and faithfulness or fidelity (Das, 2006).

However, experts in the field of translation, including Paul de Man, believe that concepts like fidelity and freedom are no longer applicable, because translation should not be looked at as just a reproduction of the meaning intended in the original text. Yet, it is evaluated on the readership it succeeds to reach. In other words, any new translation of a given text is an opportunity that reinforces its chances to reach universality. The more the text is translated, the more it is considered successful. Adopting a faithful or a free approach while processing a text is not an indicator that the product is good or otherwise. It is rather its wide distribution across linguistic, cultural and historical boundaries that can enhance the importance of its originality. For man, a translator cannot imitate the author, and cannot reproduce a text. Whatever attempts they make will remain a second translation of the original text, and will never be a replacement or a replica of it (De Man, 1986). In this respect, George Henry Lewes argues that "[i]n its happiest efforts, translation is but approximation; and its efforts are not often happy. A translation may be good as translation, but it cannot be an adequate reproduction of the original. [...] It may be better than the original; but it cannot be an adequate reproduction; it cannot be the same thing in another language (Lewes, 2016). Kumar Mohit Ray illustrates a similar idea by summing up the relationship between translator and writer saying that they are "equals differentiated only by the social and temporal contexts" (Ray, 2008).

In his article "The translator's Task," Benjamin Walter states that the major task of the translator is to be capable of translating the core of the original text into the target language by means of ensuring that the translation sounds original. Walter finds, in this point, a differentiative characteristic between translation and literary works. For him, literary works are linked to structuring languages; whereas translation is free of those linguistic constraints. He sums up his idea by the following example: "the poet's intention is spontaneous, primary, concrete, whereas the translator's is derivative, final, ideal" (Walter, 1997).

A translator, expert or novice, needs to read, comprehend the text, analyze its structure and seek the best way to transfer it to the intended audience. The translator's task is to be selective in choosing the appropriate method that better serves the process of translation depending on the nature of the translated text and what it requires. The translator formulates ideas and addresses them in their own words to a new audience. The difference between the writer and the translator is that the initial ideas belong to the writer. Yet, the way the translator treats the writer's ideas makes his task harder than that of the writer as he or she deals with the production of someone else and presents it to an audience on his behalf bearing the responsibility of rendering the whole content into another language and domesticating it into another culture. The translator may be more knowledgeable than the writer may; thus, they could be more capable of rendering intended meaning in the translation. In that sense, we might find a translation that is more accurate and credible than the translated text. This situation would raise the question of 'equivalence' as the

translation may include information that is not included in the original text, or may clarify mysterious ones. There can be several translations of the same text that differ from one another and from the origin depending on the capability and experience of the translators and the approaches that they adopt (Antar, 2002).

The translator rewrites the original text and holds the responsibility to construct and reconstruct its cultural, ideological and historical aspects as to be easily accepted and celebrated by the addressed readership (Tomoko, 2009). In this sense, the translator is a rewriter. Hence, being a rewriter of a text that belongs to someone else means that the translator is crossing the boundaries of facilitation into the replacement of the original writer. That being said, the translation may no longer be considered as accurate as it could have been if the translators refrain from giving themselves the right to rewrite a product of other people. In this respect, translators are called 'traitors'. They are traitors because they violate the original and present a fake work to their audience. Translators have power to influence society and literature and can use this power positively to introduce cultural practices and aspects of a given society to another or can use it negatively to destroy or misrepresent a specific culture for a reason or another.

Bibliography

- Abdelhay, S. (2017). The Problem of Translating English Collocations into Arabic Language. IJELLH International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities, 199—209.

- Al-Hamdalla, R. (1988). Problems and Approaches to Translation with Special Reference to Arabic. Journal King Saud University, 10, 23—38.

- Andor, J. (2008). When Grammar Minds Language and Literature: Festschrift for Prof. Béla Korponay on the Occasion of His 80th Birthday. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Angol és Amerikai Tudományok Intézete.

- Antar, S. A. (2012). What Every Novice Translator Should Know. Translation Journal, 6(3).

- Baker, M. (1998). Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies. London: Routledge.

- Benjamin, W. (1997). The translator's task. The Translation Studies Reader, 89—97.

- Darwish, A. (2010). Elements of Translation. Victoria: Writescope.

- Das, S. (2006). Fidelity and Freedom: The Politics of Translation. Journal of the Department of English, Gauhati University, 8, 18—32.

- De Man, P. (1986). "Conclusions" on Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator". Cornell University, March 4, 1983. Yale French Studies, 97, 10—35.

- Dweik, B. S., & Shakra, M. M. A. (2010). Strategies in Translating Collocations in Religious Texts from Arabic Into English. Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse.

- Ehrensberger-Dow, M. (2014). Challenges of translation process research at the workplace. MonTI. Monografías De Traducción E Interpretación, 355—383.

- Gile, D. (2009). Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training (Benjamins Translation Library) (Revised). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Jabak, O. (2019). Difficulties in Arabic-English Translation. Morrisville: Lulu Publishing

- Lewes, G. H. (2016). The life of Goethe. Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

- Massoud, M. (1988). Translate to Communicate: A Guide for Translations. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data.

- Mathieu. (2015, August 6). 6 Translation Problems. Cultures Connection. Retrieved July 10, 2022, from https://culturesconnection.com/6-translation-problems/#:~:text=At%20work%20translators%20typically%20have,practical%20problems%3B%20and%20cultural%20issues.

- Newmark, P. (1988). A Textbook of Translation. London: Pearson Education.

- Punter, D. (2007). Metaphor. (1st ed.). New York: Routledge.

- Ray, M. K. (2008). Studies in Translation. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors.