

Fidelity and Creativity in Literary Translation between Arabic and English

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Abstract: This paper aims to find a solution for the problem of translating literary works. In the introduction, it will show the difference between literary texts and factual texts. The problem part will present the issue that is faced by the majority of the literary texts translators whether they have to translate word for word or to translate the ideas themselves by abandoning word for word translation. Then it will discuss the two axes of fidelity which are literal translation and liberal translation. In addition, it will show the results of applying each one and the opinions of some scholars in them. After that, it will illustrate the problem of literal translation by defining the concept of equivalence and its two types which are word for word equivalence and sense for sense equivalence. Also, it is going to draw attention to the hardness that comes to the surface in most cases when applying word for word equivalence. Because of having problems most of the time when applying word for word translation, this paper will discuss creativity in translating the literary texts. To elaborate more on this, it lists the mistakes that may occur in literary translation in addition to the rules of the aesthetic communication theory. In the conclusion, the paper will show that creativity is always preferable to the reader on the condition to be used on a balanced level with the fidelity of the writer's ideas and intentions.

Keywords: literally translation, word for word translation, fidelity, liberal translation, word for word equivalence, sense for sense equivalence, creativity, aesthetic communication theory

Introduction

There are different text types like literary texts and factual texts. Literary texts include novels, short stories, science fictions, myths and poems. Factual texts include documentaries, newspaper articles, historical events, instructions and scientific writings. The Department of Education and Communities in the State of NSW has published that the aim of the literary texts is to entertain and amuse the reader while the factual texts are concerned with the delivery of facts, instructions, descriptions, explanations, and points of view.

Literary texts are always accompanied by aesthetic and artistic features which are essential in any literary work. Thus, as A.B. As-Safi believes in that the translator faces a serious problem when translating the literary texts because of the existence of these features. However, the translator does not face such problems when translating factual texts because they are straightforward; they do not have complex features. Also, since they include only facts, they cannot be manipulated.

On the other hand, the literary text's translator as Elaheh Jamshidian, a lecturer at University of Isfahan, has contended is stuck between two options; shall he/she translate literally (word for word) which will lead to the waste of the aesthetic and artistic features and deform the meaning of the original? Or shall he/she translate without restrictions to end up with a new text that does not relate to the original text at all? It is always a controversial issue to maintain a balance between form and meaning.

The Problem:

This paper aims to suggest a solution for the translators who are specialized in translating literary texts. It studies the concepts of fidelity and creativity throw showing whether the readers prefer to read odd texts or new texts when applying fidelity and creativity respectively. On the other hand, it will show how some translators may solve this problem which is by creating an equilibrium or balance between the aforementioned concepts.

Methods

Materials:

The needed data for writing this paper was collected from different reliable, educational websites in addition to the writings of some scholars who are specialized in translating literary texts.

Procedures:

First, a group of translated texts of different types was read. But the translated literary texts were the most exciting ones because it was noticed that the same literary text could be translated in different ways by different translators. This led to detecting some problems. To start solving these problems, the meaning of fidelity was looked up and studied carefully. As fidelity is related in away to the term of equivalence, also it had been looked up and it had been searched if it might be applied all the time or not. Then a new term which is creativity was studied because it was noticed that it is applied in some translated texts. At the end, after studying all those terms, a solution was suggested for the problem of translating the literary texts.

Fidelity in Translation:

Oxford Learner's Advanced Dictionary has defined the concept of fidelity as "the quality of being accurate". The meaning of fidelity in translating literary texts is controversial. Clyde Moneyhun, an Associate Professor at Boise State University, has said "the choices of translation are often plotted along two axes of fidelity: to language (literal translation) and to meaning (liberal translation)". For sure there are proponents for the first axis as there are proponents for the second one as it will be seen through this paper.

In literal translation, the reader of the translation can tell that the text he/she is reading is translated because it is odd, peculiar and abnormal. The translator even in some cases has to clarify some points to the readers by adding footnotes, endnotes or interpolation because he/she translates straightforward without adding or omitting anything. It is even not correct all the time. For example, the Arabic metaphor 'ليلة بيضاء' - layla bayda' is problematic. If it is translated into a 'white night', it will not be acceptable for its weirdness because simply the night cannot be white. The correct translation goes beyond the literal meaning which is a 'sleepless night' (As-Safi, 2011: 56).

In liberal translation, the translator transfers the author's intentions, ideas, senses without complying with the words of the text. The result of this is reading a familiar, clear and comprehensive text without needing any mean to bridge any gap. This is similar to what Moneyhun has stated in his paper:

I am not a literal translator, or rather, where I am most literal, I think I am at my least successful. Where I have confidence in my understanding of the poet's intended meaning and emotion, I am perhaps less literal in one sense, but in another more faithful to the poet's purpose for writing in the first place.

Moneyhun argues that he does not translate literally. But if he does, he translates in an accepted way to the reader. When he translates the poet's intention, he is then faithful to the meaning but not to the words of the original text.

Susan Bassnett has mentioned in her book *Translation Studies* specifically in the chapter "History of Translation Theory" the same controversial point of being faithful to the literary text:

In poetry, the adjustments made to the SL text by such major translators as Wyatt (1503–42) and Surrey (c. 1517–47) have led critics to describe their translations at times as 'adaptations', but such a distinction is misleading. An investigation of Wyatt's translations of Petrarch, for example, shows a faithfulness not to individual words or sentence structures but to a notion of the meaning of the poem in its relationship to its readers.

(Bassnett, 1991: 63)

Bassnett debates that transmitting the poet's intention instead of transmitting the meaning of each word also falls within the meaning of fidelity. This emphasizes what As-Safi has mentioned in the interpretative theory (theory of sense). It stipulates "that the focus should be on the... sense rather than the words of the ST" (As-Safi, 2011:43).

Samuel Kolawole and Adewuni Salawu, lecturers at the Nigerian Ado-Ekiti University, have mentioned that "Fidelity in translation is passing of the message from one language into another by producing the same effect in the other language, (in sense and in form), in a way that the reader of the translation would react exactly as the reader of the original text" (2008).

All the above mentioned opinions are proponents of the point of view saying that fidelity to the text means being a liberal translator. However, Amparo Albir defines fidelity as:

Fidelity is three-fold relationship to the author's intentions, to the target language and to the reader of the translation is indissociable. If one remains faithful to only one of these parameters and betrays the remaining ones, he cannot be faithful to the sense.(Albir, 1990:118)

Albir believes that no translator can be faithful to the source text if he/she neglects the fidelity toward one of the following; the intention of the author, the target language and the reader of the translated text. He wants the translators to be literal and liberal translators at the same time. Nonetheless, we can conclude that defining fidelity as being a liberal translation is more practical than being a literal translation.

Equivalence in Translation

Equivalence for As-Safi is “abilingual synonymy or sameness based on lexical universals and cultural overlaps” (2011:73). Many theorists believe in equivalence when it comes to translation. Equivalence is not only for lexis, syntax, and concepts, but it is also for features like style, genre, figurative language, connotations, denotations, cultural items and culture-specific concepts. Thus, equivalence is two types; word for word equivalence and sense for sense equivalence. The first type falls within the literal translation while the second one falls within the liberal translation.

Catford, Meetham, and Hudson are some proponents to word for word equivalence. As-Safi has mentioned in *Translation Theories, Strategies and Basic Theoretical Issues* Catford's definition of translation which is “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)” (2011: 6). That means any word in the source text must be replaced by an equivalent word in the target language. But, the million dollar question is can this be done all the time?

Equivalence is a controversial issue. It may be applied in some cases and it may be not in other cases. For example, the following English sentence ‘the book is on the table’ has a French equivalent which is ‘le livre est sur la table’. There are six words in each sentence. So, word for word equivalence is applied here because both English and French belong to the same family.

However, word for word equivalence cannot be applied when the above English sentence is translated into Arabic ‘الكتاب على الطاولة –alkitab ala altawila’. There are six words in English while they are only three in Arabic. However, sense for sense equivalence is applicable here; no matter of how many words there but what really matters is that the meaning of the both sentences in the different languages is just the same.

There are other examples prove that word for word equivalence cannot always be applied. For example, how can the following cultural specific terms that exist only in specific culture and language be

translated into English الزكاة-alzaka، العمرة- alumrah، الطواف- altawaf? Only sense for sense equivalence can be applied here to give the same ideas of the above mentioned terms in addition to any similar ones. Of course there are no exact words that can replace them in another language or culture. Here is another example, imagine this English simile “as cool as cucumber” if it is translated into Arabic by applying word for word equivalence. Without any doubts, it is literal translation is going to be so ridiculous and funny.

For a further example, ‘يبكي - ybki’ has a word for word equivalence which is ‘cry’. Also, ‘يتظاهر بالبكاء - yatazahar bialbuka’ and ‘feigned crying’ are word for word equivalent. On the other hand, the word ‘غيلة - ghyla’ in ‘قتل غيلة - qutila ghyla’ has only sense for sense equivalence in English which is ‘killed with a cold blood’.

As a conclusion, word for word equivalence is not always applicable and acceptable. Every culture and language has its own idioms and proverbs. That is why these idioms and proverbs cannot be transferred into another language or culture by simply replacing them with equivalent words as long as they do not exist in the target language or culture. On the contrary, sense for sense equivalence is the alternative for that. But, the literary translator has to keep in mind that it requires creativity most of the time.

Creativity in Translation:

The mainstream constituted by most laymen about the translator’s role is that he/she only translates what is written. For them, translation is an easy profession that anyone can be a translator. Of course, this mainstream is no longer acceptable for the translation experts and professionals. Translation is one of the hardest professions that cannot be done by anyone who has no idea about the translation rules. That is why not any bilingual can call himself/herself a proficient translator as Dr. Kolawole concludes in one of his papers.

Translating texts specifically the literary ones require a degree of creativity. Creativity includes changing in reading the source text which breaches the fidelity if we assume that it means literal translation. So, there will be different texts; one is written in the source language and the other is written in the target language but both have the same meaning.

Creativity in translating literary texts includes many techniques such as manipulation, alteration, omission, and other techniques if necessary. For example, instead of translating the following sentence ‘Too much food made him sick’ as ‘جعلته الطعام الكثير مريضاً’ – ja’alah alta’am alkthyr maridan’ which is the normal and typical Arabic. But, at the same time it is so literal. It can be translated as ‘امرضه افراطه في الطعام’ - amradaho airatah fi alta’am’. The second Arabic translation is more aesthetic than the first one because it is not literal but it transfers the same idea (As-Safi, 2011:113).

For a further example, here are an excerpt taken from A Farewell to Arms by Ernest Hemingway and two translations for it:

The plain was rich with crops; there were many orchards of fruit trees and beyond the plain the mountains were brown and bare. There was fighting in the mountains and at night we could see the flashes from the artillery. In the dark it was like summer lightning, but the nights were cool and there was not the feeling of a storm coming.

One version of translating the previous passage has been done by Munir Baalbaki and mentioned in As-Safi's Translation Theories, Strategies and Basic Theoretical Issues. It is as the following:

"كان السهل غنيا بالمحاصيل. كان ثمة كثير من جنائن الأشجار المثمرة، ووراء السهل كانت الجبال سمراء عارية، كان القتال دائرا في الجبال، وخلال الليل كان في استطاعتنا أن نرى وميض المدافع، وكان يخيل للمرء في الظلمة وكأنه برق الصيف، ولكن الليالي كانت باردة، ولم نكن نستشعر أن عاصفة توشك أن تهب".

The same passage has been translated differently by As-Safi (2011:115) in the following way:

"سهل غني بالمحاصيل كثرت فيه جنائن الأشجار المثمرة ومن ورائه أسمرت الجبال وتعرت حيث دار فيها القتال. وخلال الليل استطعنا رؤية وميض المدافع بدا في الظلمة كأنه برق الصيف. لكن الليالي لطفت حرارتها ولم يساورنا إحساس بأن عاصفة آتية".

As a reader, the difference between the two translations is so conspicuous. The first one is so literal, static and cold for not having any sense of creativity. It makes you feel that you are reading a newspaper report or an article. The second translation is dynamic, full of emotions, aesthetic and has artistic features. It gives you the real feeling of reading an original literary text.

Hence, fidelity to such works does not work at all. You may be faithful to the notion and sense but never to the words because of the application of esthetic communication theory. But, to which extent can the translator be free? Is there a limit for his/her freedom and creativity?

Mistakes of Translation:

Creativity doesn't mean changing the original text. If the translator wants to apply creativity for having a familiar text, he/she has to make sure that all the ideas mentioned in the original text are covered and translated. That means the translator cannot be extremely free when applying creativity in translation. In other words, the translator cannot add new ideas to the translated text nor omit ideas that are mentioned in the original text.

Vladimir Nabokov, a Russian-American novelist, has stated in one of his articles that there are three mistakes that may occur by the translators. He considers that omitting words and sentences intentionally because the translator does not bother himself/herself trying to understand them or because they are so

difficult to be understood by the readers as a serious mistake. However, the most serious mistake for him is to polish the original words intentionally to make them suitable for the readers.

For Nabokov, the translator has to be as gifted as the chosen author. Also, the translator has to know both nations and languages in addition to the author's style

and method. Thirdly, the translator has to be eligible to work as if he/she were a real author. These three attributes have to be in any translator for creating an ideal translated text.

However, Nabokov translated *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* which is mainly written for children into Russian. While translating, he changed some elements in the original English text in order to be more suitable for the Russian children. Even though he made changes, he didn't deform the original text by oversimplifying it.

Zohar Shavit, a Professor at the Unit for Culture Research, used the term "freedom of manipulation". It means that the translator while translating for children, he/she is allowed to change the text by adding to or omitting from the original text. All of this is allowed for the purpose of making the new translated text suitable for the children. That is maybe why Nabokov included changes in his translation to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* though his changes were not including omitting major events or adding new events.

6. Aesthetic Communication Theory:

Since talking about translating literary works and creativity, we shall go into aesthetic communication theory. It is a theory that has been placed by A.B. As-Safi. It only covers the aesthetic side of the text which means that it is only applicable on literary texts. It cannot be applied on other types of texts. It states that literary composition is just like literary translation. They are both dynamic which is another word for creative as As-Safi has said.

As-Safi has put down seven rules that must be achieved in the literary translation to be considered as aesthetic and dynamic:

- 1- Be dynamic rather than static; do not be literal in translating literary works.
- 2- Be creative and aesthetically communicative; that is how the style of the literary translation should be.
- 3- Comply with the target linguistic system; it is right that you are creative and not translating word for word, but you have to stick to the grammar of the target language.
- 4- Be appropriate; choose the pragmatic meaning that fits the message of target/ translated text.
- 5- Be natural.
- 6- Be acceptable to the target audience; this is the answer of to which extent you may be creative.

- 7- Aspire to occupy a position in the target literature as any other original works of arts; it is known that translating a literary work is more difficult than writing a literary work. However, you have to do your best to make your translation sounds original to compete for having a high position as an extraordinary translator for the literary works in that language.

So, creativity is important in translating literary texts but at the same time the translator has not to underestimate the importance of fidelity. Both can be used for creating a new accessible translated text. By applying creativity, the translator makes sure that there are not odd words for the target readers and by applying fidelity, the translator makes sure that he/she covers all the original ideas which are delivered by the author.

This concludes the outcome of this paper which is translating literary texts by only applying fidelity does not see the light. It is just like beating your head against a wall. The translator will waste his/her time if he/she only translates any literary text by applying literal translation. Creativity has to be used alongside fidelity of translating the intentions and ideas.

Conclusion

One of the most arduous problems in translating literary texts is found in the differences between cultures. Peoples of various cultures look at things from different perspectives. They may even have cultural specific terms and items which are only used by their own culture and people. Thus, they will end up having no equivalents when translating into other languages and cultures.

The lack of equivalents and sometimes their absence leads to leaving the literal translation that gives the readers the feeling of oddness and peculiarity. It is therefore leads to moving toward the creativity which means that the readers are going to read familiar lines that are full of emotions and artistic features. In order not to go back to the same problem of weirdness, creativity has to be applied with some constrains and disciplines due to the unacceptability of having a new text which is far away from the author's intention.

The translator cannot be free and creative all the time. He/she has to create a balance or equilibrium between fidelity and creativity. The translator has to translate the sense and the intention of the author instead of translating the words of the text. But, translating the intention of the author must be put down in a way fits and matches the target culture and audience.

In all, everything has mentioned in this paper refutes some translators' belief that fidelity and creativity are impossible to go along with each other in literary translation. On the contrary, faithfulness and beauty may exist in the same translated literary text by creating an enough degree of equilibrium between them.

Recommendations:

If once you are between two choices of reading translated novels and you know that each one is translated by a different translator, choose always the novel that is translated by a translator who is known by abandoning the literal translation. Then you are not going to feel that it is translated at all. You will think that you are reading an original novel. You will even enjoy it because it will reflect the same emotions that are reflected by the original writer.

Try to do it yourself. Try to translate a paragraph from an English novel into Arabic. First, try to translate it literally. Translate word for word. Read your translation when you finish which I am pretty sure that it is going to be odd and so rigid. Even you will not feel the joy it has. Next, try to translate the same paragraph again. But this time, do not translate it word for word. Instead, try to be different by switching words, omitting unneeded phrases, looking up the meanings of idioms if there are any and so on. This way, your efforts to make the translated paragraph more vivid are not going to be wasted.

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الدقة والإبداع في الترجمة الأدبية بين اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية

الملخص: هدفَ هذا البحث إلى إيجاد حل لمشكلة ترجمة الأعمال الأدبية حيث استعرض في المقدمة الفرق بين النصوص الأدبية والنصوص الواقعية. كما تم عرض المشكلة التي يواجهها معظم المترجمين والتي تتمحور حول أيهما يعد أفضل استخدام؛ الترجمة الحرفية للكلمات أم ترجمة الأفكار؟ وقام الباحث بمناقشة محوري الدقة ألا وهما: الترجمة الحرفية والترجمة الحرة، كما تعرض لنتائج تطبيق كل محور وآراء عدد من الباحثين في كل منهما. وقام بعد ذلك بتوضيح مشكلة الترجمة الحرفية عن طريق تعريف مصطلح التكافؤ بنوعيه؛ وهما تكافؤ الكلمة بالكلمة وتكافؤ المعنى بالمعنى. كما لفت هذا البحث- أيضاً- الانتباه إلى مشكلة تطبيق الترجمة الحرفية (تكافؤ الكلمة بالكلمة) التي تواجه المترجمين في معظم الحالات، ولذلك ناقش موضوع الإبداع بالترجمة في ترجمة النصوص الأدبية. وللتفصيل أكثر بهذا الموضوع تم عرض المشاكل التي قد تحدث أثناء الترجمة الأدبية بالإضافة إلى قواعد النظرية الجمالية. وأظهر هذا البحث في النهاية أن الإبداع هو دائما الأمر المفضل للقارئ؛ بشرط أن يتم تطبيقه بشكل متوازن مع دقة ترجمة الأفكار ونوايا الكاتب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة الحرفية، الدقة، الترجمة الحرة، تكافؤ الكلمة بالكلمة، تكافؤ المعنى بالمعنى، الإبداع، النظرية الجمالية