The Problem of "Terms" in Translation from English into Arabic

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Abstract

The word 'term' can be defined as "a word or expression that has a precise meaning in some uses or is peculiar to a particular field", (A New Webster Dictionary, 1981:796). The point in a term is being a tool of gathering information, some qualities or features in the smallest linguistic semantic space, i.e., the utterance in which it replaces that particular notion, (اسماعيل, 1987: 3). Kvam (2007:2) defines a "term" as 'the systematic designation of defined concept within a specific field requiring specialized knowledge'. It is quite necessary for translators to be able to translate new terms from English into Arabic since the former is witnessing great invention and molding of new terms or neologisms. The problem of terms, as mentioned by Gentzler(1993: 16), has historically troubled translators. Besides, calling for one-to-one transfer approach and method revolves around decoding and recoding process increasingly difficult to hold.

The present study is an attempt to shed some light on this aspect of translation. It is divided into two sections; the first of which is dedicated to new English terms or what is called neologisms and their translation into Arabic. Besides, it deals with formation of new terms semantically and morphologically. Section Two, on the other hand,

focuses on some criteria for translating new terms and their application. The study ends up with some conclusions.

<u>Section One</u>

1.   1   Preliminaries

Apparently there is confusion in the semantic understanding of a term in the one language; the thing which makes it even more complicated when translated into other languages. Consider, for example, the word 'technique'. It is 'تكنيك' for some people and 'تقنية' for others- in different pronunciation-. The same word might be 'المعالجات , 'التقنية الفنية' ,'الحيل الفنية' , 'الصنعة الفنية' , 'الأسلوب الفني في التنفيذ ' الفنية', 'اسلوب المعالجة', etc. Another instant for that confusion can be seen in 'the Modern Arab Poetry' or ' الشعر العربي الحديث' which is the same الشعر ,   الشعر العراقي,الشعر الجديد , الشعر المنطلق ,شعر التفعيلة ,الشعر المرسل as المنثور , النثر الشعري , قصيدة النثر .   The same notion can be referred to as والشعر الحر as mentioned by نازك الملائكة in her book قضايا الشعر المعاصر which is different from that mentioned by احمد زكي ابو شادي in his book الشفق الباكي.

Actually we need a concentrated language, i.e., term language. It is the high-ranking style that can be condensed to talk about principles and the cause of totality; whereas the primitive thinking does not know general meanings and totalities, but stops at material things and particles. This invites us to choose our terms precisely without mixing up meaning. It is better for Arabic now to stop being just grandiloquent language with enormous number of synonyms. We need it to be close to the language of science where terms are like algebraic symbols used instead of the intended ideas,(مواسي, 2006).

السليمان (2006) believes that it is necessary to find a mechanism that helps translators mold new terms and notions instead of borrowing them haphazardly. It seems that Arab linguistic Academies do not keep up with terms development. Molding new terms in Arabic requires translators to be well aware of the rules of derivations and Arabization. During the Middle Ages, the Europeans borrowed so many Arabic terms and used them in their languages when the Arabs were at the peak of their scientific and cultural progress. Today what happens is just the opposite since there is a great gab that demands Arab translators to do their best to render those terms into Arabic, particularly the English ones. New terms or what is called neologisms can be defined as newly coined lexical items or existing lexical items that acquire a new sense. They usually attract and please everyone unless they are opaque and obscure, (Newmark, 1988: 140).

The problem lies in the fact that there are no common terms agreed upon by all Arab countries to stand for those English terms. What makes it more complicated that about 50-100 new English scientific terms are formed daily (ibid). Though many Arab linguistic institutes, academies and figures are trying their best to translate these terms as fast as they can, still their effort is insufficient.

Some people might argue that it is ok to use some terms as they are in English since there are many foreign words that have entered into Arabic and been used as they have been and are used in their original languages, like 'كاغد' from Farsi, 'قرطاس'form Greek χαρτις, 'راموز' from Syriacܪܡܘܙ, 'هيكل' from Sumerian 'Egal', etc. Catford (1965: 101) points out that there are some terms essentially untranslatable because they often need not be translated since they are already present in the lexis of many languages. He calls them

'international terms' like 'democracy'. An 'international term' is a lexical item with almost similar phonological/graphological exponents in several languages and a common contextual meaning.

Certainly there is a difference between lexical borrowing and conceptual borrowing which is normal in world languages and there is nothing wrong with it. What is wrong is the performance of some translators who borrow some foreign terms and force them within their Arabic translations without bothering themselves with looking for appropriate equivalents for those terms in Arabic. Moreover, some of them do not even explain such terms in a footnote leaving their readers in a mess. Kvam (2007) deals with the topic of translating terms pragmatically. He (ibid: 9) believes that the process of translating terms depends on the need of a given interaction. This clearly shows that terminology is a social category, i.e., it is not about a lexeme as corresponding to a predefined concept, but about how a lexeme is contextualized in a specific social setting.

It is quite normal to love our Arabic language and to keep it intact for many reasons, but at the same time we have to keep up with modernization without harming our language. The problem lies in the irrational procedure that decides the prevailing and familiarizing of certain foreign terms in Arabic. Obviously, this is unsolved problem especially if we know that the many Linguistic Academies (المجامع اللغوية) in different Arab countries bear responsibility for that problem since they do not keep up with the scientific development worldwide and stand behind in serving Arabic though they were founded for that purpose. However, there are certain steps to be followed in order to solve that problem; first, Arab countries have to renovate their linguistic academies by depending on creative linguists and translators

to fill the gap between the scientific development and lexis. Second, they have to take part in finding solutions and procedures that enable Arab translators mold new terms equivalent to those new terms formed in foreign languages so that they can be adjusted and adapted in Arabic in a proper way without being extravagant. Besides, those academies have to communicate with each other periodically and permanently without leaving any problem without solution.

1.   2 Technical Translation and New Terms

To talk about technical translation, one has to mention something about content-focused text. While the type of a text concerns essentially the translation method and the relative priorities of what must be preserved in the target language, the type of text concerns the linguistic elements to be considered when translating. Assuming this, the principal kinds of text in the content-focused type would include the natural sciences and other technical fields. That type of texts is concerned with the effective communication and accuracy of information. Those texts are judged I terms of their semantic, grammatical and stylistic characteristics which are reflected in their translation. They are generally designed to provide information rapidly, accurately, and comprehensively, or describe a situation, (Reiss, 2000:27-8).

The content can be satisfactorily translated only by using the special; terminology of the respective fields. The distinctive characteristics of this type of texts have to be material accuracy, precise information and current language. The use of specialized technical terms is another prerequisite of that type, but in the end the critical distinction is the readership addressed by the author. If the author has some specialists in mind, whether textbooks or technical journals, the translator should observe a comparable precision in

technical terminology. However, one should never forget that the translator has to be seen as an artist, an engraver, or a calligrapher, one who molds words, (Gentzler: 1993: 19).

Once a given text is identified as belonging to the content-focused type, an important component of its translation method has been determined. These types of texts require invariance in transfer of their content. This makes the critic ascertain whether their content and information, including terms, is fully represented in the target language. The language of the translation should be essentially oriented to the usage of the target language. The target language must dominate since in this type of text the informational content is most important, and the reader of the translation needs to have it presented in a familiar linguistic form, (Reiss, 2000: 30-31).

A mastery of the sophisticated terminology of a field is essential if a translated text is to be at all acceptable and not strike the reader as odd. Every text requires that the translator be sufficiently familiar with its field so that he can construct a lexically adequate version in the target language. This is obviously true for all purely technical texts where terms have to accord with the common usage of the target language. However, new terms do not necessarily be within technical texts only. Any kind of text, even a literary one, might have such new terms, i.e., they are not at all peculiar to specializations. They are common to all texts where translation requires an intimate knowledge of the subject.

Gentzler (1993: 17) cites Richards (1953) who shares the above opinion and adds that translator with proper practice and education can come to know the proper methodology to achieve the correct understanding of the primary text. He maintains that literary scholars could develop rules as a means of solving a communication problem

and to arrive at perfect understanding, and correctly reformulate that particular message.

It all goes to show that the subject matter of a text has to be well understood and recognized by the translator. Still the subject-related determinants are primarily on the lexical level in the target language. Furthermore, a translation of a technical text might have a strong component of foreign loan words; otherwise it may run the risk of appearing unprofessional, (Reiss, 2000: 70-71).

1. 3 Formation of New Terms

Forming new Arab terms can be done according to two procedures; the first of which is within the domain of semantics, i.e., giving new meanings to already exist words. As for the second one, it is within the scope of morphology, i.e., forming new words by using different morphological processes.

1. 3. 1 Semantically New Formed Terms

Within the domain of semantics, new words or neologisms can be formed by following one of these three procedures:

1- Lexically and semantically new word, e.g., قطار , though it has become rather as old as trains!

2- Lexically old but semantically new words, i.e., it has been given a new meaning, like the word ذرّة (its old meaning is 'a very tiny ant' but the new meaning is 'atom'). Sometimes Arabic uses the metaphoric meaning to denote new concepts, like البريد والبرق , where the former means 'the messenger' and the latter means 'lightening' beside their relatively new meanings.

3- Lexically old but semantically new words that lost its old meaning and has gained a new one, e.g., سيارة since it has lost the old

meaning that denoted a caravan and has gained a new meaning that denotes a car or automobile, (العبيدي, 2006). See also Newmark (1988: 141).

Moreover, we can make use of the already existing Arabic terms as much as possible, like الشب : alum, النشادر: ammonia, الجير المطفي: calcium hydroxide,..etc., (Ilyas, 1989: 112). Besides the aforementioned procedures of forming new words semantically, we can use literal translation to refer to some concepts, like كرة القدم: football, وكالة انباء: news agency, etc., (بو حجرة: 1998: 95).

1.　3. 2　Morphologically New Formed Terms

These new terms can be formed following three procedures:

1.　3. 2. 1　Derivation: الاشتقاق

Most Arabic words are derived from a specific number of letters that are called stem or root. Usually the stem contains three letters and it may contain two or four. Hence the possibility of forming a large number of derivatives is very common and it differs from stem to another. This procedure opens new horizons to derive new terms in Arabic. For instance, the name of a tool or instrument can be derived according to the following meters: مفعال like محرار, مفعل like مجهر, فعّالة. Besides, مفعلة like مِكنسة . فاعِلة like طائرة, فعّال like نفاث, غواصة like there are some other names of tools that are irregular, (الحملاوي: 1957: 83-84).

1.　3. 2. 2　Blending (Al-Naht): النحت

Parts of two words or more are combined to produce a single term. In the past, Arabs used this way to produce words like بسملة , بسم الله which means الحوقلة, لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله which means سامراء, which means

that means سُرَّ من رأى, etc. This process is very common in other world languages, especially English; but not in Arabic since many Arab linguists were and are hesitant to consider it one of word formation processes. However, some Arab physicians and scientists have found out that it is the best way to follow in translating foreign terms into Arabic. As a result, Academy of Arabic in Cairo in 1948 decided to allow Blending or Naht in sciences and arts to fill that need on the condition that the newly formed word must be acceptable and of a definite Arab root. Following that procedure, al-Naht has been one of the productive ways of forming new words in Arabic without violating its nature. Thus, words like الزمكان space-time, كهرومائي hydroelectric, etc. have appeared in Arabic, (Ilyas, 1989: 113).

1.   3. 2. 3   Arabization: التعريب

It means borrowing a foreign word and molding it in order not to be difficult to the Arab tongue or ear. It is not a new process since many foreign words have appeared in Arabic for a long time. Many well-known foreign terms are so common in Arabic nowadays like, تكنولوجيا , تلفزيون, راديو , انترنت,etc.

Arabs in the past were so clever in using Arabization to the extent that many words that are thought to be Arabic are originally foreign. For example, words like, ديوان , دولاب , هندسة , بريد , طراز are all Persian; whereas terms as, إسطول , منجنيق, درهم ,بطاقة have been brought from Greek. Moreover, some words from the Glorious Qur'an are of Syriac or Hebrew origin like, آمين, صراط, طاغوت ,طوفان, جبروت, etc.

However, there are many Arabic words in other world languages. For instance, about 70% of Turkish words are of Arabic origin. Besides, hundreds Arabic words exist in Persian and some other European languages,(بو حجرة: 1998: 88-90).

As for translation, it is too difficult to use certain new terms since there are no fixed criteria to coin such terms. As a result, taste or approval can be the judge. In this case, where there are no rules or bases to decide what is acceptable and what is not, more problems are to appear and there will be no solution to them. Since all sciences have their own rules and theories, terminology is not less than other sciences; i.e., it can have its own rules, theories and criteria.

1. 4 Reiss's Suggestions

To overcome the difficulty of translating neologisms or terms, Reiss (2000: 76-77) suggests four genuine possibilities:

1-   Using loan words, i.e., borrowing not only the concept but even the source language's word.

2-   Loan formations, i.e., constructing new words in the target language.

3-   Using the foreign expression and adding an explanatory footnote.

4-   Using an explanatory translation.

However, these possibilities should not be used indifferently, but employed judiciously according to the demands of the particular text type at hand. Yet, purely technical texts prefer the first two possibilities since interested and educated readers are quite familiar with the foreign technical terms. If the translator finds it essential to explain a specific term, he has to bear in mind that the closer the explanatory element is to the original text and the briefer and more suggestive of the foreign situation it can be, the better.

It is quite natural to look at Reiss's suggestions as acceptable and suitable for all world languages. However, Arabic still has its own peculiarities and genuineness that makes translators as well as critics be more sensitive towards the rendering those new terms.

<u>Section Two</u>

2.   1   Criteria for translating Terms

Criteria here mean providing the translator with all the means that help him find the right equivalents to the new terms used in foreign (source) languages. Using criteria in translation will solve the problem of unifying terms in Arabic texts in the short and long run.

الغنامي (2006)   proposed some criteria that can be relied upon in deciding the degree of acceptance of the new terms used generally by common people and specifically by translators:

1- The criterion of precision where the lexical item refers to the signified object or idea precisely.

2- The criterion of clarity where the term has to be clear.

3- The criterion of derivation where the term can be derived from other semantically conceivable words.

4- The criterion of harmony in which the new term has to be harmonious with the past, present and future of the target language.

5-   The criterion of comprehensiveness where the new term is to be inclusive to all the related meanings in the target language.

6-   The criterion of dominance that can be relied upon instead of the criterion of comprehensiveness when there are some semantic obstacles in the target language.

7-   The criterion of brevity: when there are two terms having the same meaning, it is better to choose the brief one.

8-   The criterion of approximation; i.e., if it is difficult to find a suitable and precise equivalent in the target language, it is advisable to use an approximate term. Approximation is of two types: original and communicative. The former means translating the term within the scope of usage in the target language; whereas the latter means using the source language constructions and metaphors and transforming

them into the target language. It is better not to use the latter unless it is impossible to use the former. (الغنامي: ibid) mentions that this type of approximation, i.e., the communicative one, is used in translating proverbs and sayings. However, this is not quite true since translating proverbs and sayings need deep knowledge in both languages and then choosing the most suitable equivalents to gain a similar effect on the target reader.

9-   The criterion of equality where the new translated term is equal to the original term in all aspects, such as, preciseness, impact, creation, linguistic effect, etc.

 10-The criterion of suitability which means that the term has to be suitable to all kinds of discourse and takes its meaning within that discourse.

11-The criterion of newness. If the term is new even in the source language, it is better to revive a deserted term in the target language or bringing a new term coined according to the abovementioned criteria.

3.   2   Application of the above Criteria

It is important for Arabic translators particularly and linguists generally to exert more effort in order to sustain the Arabic language with all its particularities and specifications. If they do not do that, Arabic will be more like foreign languages than itself. In this respect, it should be borne in mind that 'common mistakes' are committed by most Arab users since most linguists and translators feel lazy to defend Arabic against foreign terms or these 'common mistakes'.

Few years ago, the well-known term 'حاسوب' did not exist but only the term ' عقل ألكتروني' and then the term 'كومبيوتر'. The former has vanished and the latter has given space to the term 'حاسوب' which has occupied Arabic writing and usages. This happens since Arabic

intuition accepts and approves it because it has all the Arabic specifications and it complies with all the aforementioned criteria, especially 'derivation', such as, حوسب، يحوسب، حوسبة، محوسب، حاسوبيات …etc. Actually this term has enriched Arabic with all its derivations. It is impossible to derive some other words from terms like, عقل الكتروني or كومبيوتر.

This proposal has to be conducted not only by individuals but large institutions like scientific academies with qualified professors of the most common world languages. Translation and translators are very much in need for such a work. It is also crucial for the rules of these academies to be effective and valid in all Arab countries for two reasons:

1-   To test and examine carefully the new Arabic term according to the mentioned criteria, i.e., accuracy, derivations, brevity, etc.

2-   To insert the new Arabic term into Arabic dictionaries officially and to ask journalists, writers, translators, etc. to use that term since those people are the basic medium to diffuse new terms. Journalists, in particular, have an intrinsic positive role in enriching Arabic, on the one hand, and a negative role in filling it with foreign terms, on the other.

Fulfilling that supposed effort of Arabic academies is very much related to political decisive will in order to be forced on every user of Arabic. This is really done by many Countries, like Israel, which has forced its media and all common institutions to use certain terms. The same happened in France which exerted much effort to replace about 10 English terms that had entered French few years ago. It imposed financial fines on those who used those terms, (العبيدي , 2006).

It is quite necessary for Arabic language academies and Houses of Wisdom in all Arab countries to unify their effort and have their say regarding the issue of translating foreign terms. They have to consult and ask for the advice of translators, linguists and professors in order to solve the problem of translating foreign terms without harming Arabic. For instant, instead of having several equivalents for the term 'cell phone' like, الهاتف الخلوي , النقال,الخلوي , الموبايل ,الجوال , الموبيل,...etc., it is better to use one unified term in all Arab countries. This might be done starting from schools, governmental and non-governmental institutions and all mass media. The same problem may be found in a term as, AIDS which has many equivalents different in pronunciation, like, أيدز, إيدِز, آيدِز, and the French سيدا used in North African Arab countries. We can rarely hear the exact translation of this foreign term, as " متلازمة نقص ال مناعة المكتسبة, which seems rather long as compared with the English acronym or term.

Actually it is not a matter of having specialized dictionaries of terms. But it is very much related to using these terms and making them popular in Arabic. All effort has to be focused on having unified terms that can be used freely and easily in all Arab countries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

After that cursory look at the translation of new terms into Arabic, it has been concluded that:

1- Neologisms have to comply with Arabic morphology and intuition.

2- There are certain points that should be followed in the process of coining new terms.

3- All the aforementioned processes are quite acceptable in coining new terms.

4-   The problem of translating new terms does not involve technical texts alone but all types of texts.

5-   It is still not too late to handle the problem of rendering new terms if all Arab countries work together.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1-   Arabic Academies and Houses of Wisdom in all Arab countries have to take their role in accepting or refusing neologisms.

2-   Those Academies have to work together with professional professors and qualified translators in order to decide on accepted neologisms.

3- It is important to prepare qualified Arab translators to take their role in translating new terms.

4- Departments of translation, Arabic language, and Foreign Languages have to work together in order to arrive at the desired aims.

5- ALECSO (Arab League Education, Culture, and Sciences Organization) has to develop its department of Arabization and encourage Arab countries to work seriously and activate this department.

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