

## The Role and the Impact of the Translator's Education with Specific Reference to Some Cultural Problems in Translation

---

Dr .Abdul Salam Abdul Majeed Al-Oqaily

Dep. of Translation , College of Arts , University of Basrah

### Abstract

One of the most recent developments in translation theory is the introduction of culture as a factor into the process of translation. Language and culture are closely intertwined. They are inseparable because language is composed of linguistic elements that vary in culture. Anyone who has had any experience with another language finds that certain elements cannot be directly translated. Some languages seem to express certain elements in certain ways, and such feelings or experiences can be expressed only by long-winded circumlocutions in the other language. Cultural aspects can complicate translation .Within the two divergent cultural areas, an English-Arabic translator faces a difficulty in finding cultural equivalences.

This paper intends to explore the aspect of the translator's education with regard to its role and impact in making a creative translator who will be capable of transferring the various culture characteristics of any piece of writing to any language. It also aims to indicate that good knowledge of the source language and the target language results from understanding both source culture and target culture.

The hypothesis underlying this paper is that the translators' education is the cornerstone of success in translation since it leads to creativity. In other words, a translator must have a good general education, of which culture is apart, in addition to the required language skills. The paper deals with culture as socially acquired knowledge together with its awareness and importance exemplified by the role of the translator as a pivot in any process of translation, in addition to a brief discussion of some problems of cross – culture translation and the way through which the translator can overcome such problems.



## الملخص :

أحد أبرز التطورات في نظرية الترجمة هو دخول الثقافة ( Culture ) كعامل أساس في عملية الترجمة. فاللغة (Language) والثقافة عنصران متواشجان، كون عناصر اللغة تختلف باختلاف الثقافات. وحتى إذا امتلك شخص ما دراية في أي لغة فإنه سيواجه صعوبة بالغه في ترجمة بعض نصوصها. فاللغات تحاول رسم ثقافتها بطرق عديدة مما يؤدي إلى مثل هذه الصعوبة.

يحاول هذا البحث الكشف عن سمة ثقافة المترجم ( Translator's Education ) قدر تعلق دورها وتأثيرها بخلق مترجم مبدع يتمكن من نقل الظواهر الثقافية المختلفة في أي نص. ويشير البحث أيضا إلى أن المعرفة الجيدة للغة الأم ( SL ) واللغة الهدف (TL) ناتج عن فهم ثقافة هاتين اللغتين.

ويستند هذا البحث إلى فرضية أن ثقافة المترجم هي حجر الأساس للترجمة، كونها تؤدي إلى الإبداع ( Creativity ) في فضائها. لذا يتوجب على المترجم أن يمتلك ثقافة عامة إضافة إلى المهارات اللغوية اللازمة التي يجب عليه امتلاكها لترجمة نص ما. فالبحث يتعامل مع الثقافة باعتبارها "معرفة اجتماعية مكتسبة" مقترنة بإدراكها واهتمامها المتمثل بدور المترجم كنقطة ارتكاز (Pivot) في عملية الترجمة، ويناقش باختصار بعض الصعوبات الثقافية وطريقة تجاوز المترجم لها.

## 1. Introduction

Translators need a variety of skills and traits to be successful in their art. One of the ongoing debates about translation revolves around the question of whether, and in what degree, the translation should reflect the syntax, or form, of the original language. All translators agree that the translation should reflect faithfully the message of the original, but all are not agreed on whether the translation should adhere closely to the grammatical forms of the original language. In other words, they must be fluent in the two languages and cultures. The meaning of utterances comes not only from the words spoken but also from culturally agreed-upon conventions for how those words are used and interpreted, as well as from how they have been used within a given culture. The greatest source of difficulty is that words are often have different meanings depending upon culture. These culture dissidences pose greater difficulties for a translator. Therefore, the translator should have a comprehensive knowledge of both the source and target languages of the texts together with a comprehensive knowledge of the cultural aspects. As the altimet aim of the translator is to achieve a measure of equivalence at the text level, this comprehensive knowledge of the linguistic and cultural aspects will enable him to find both linguistic and cultural equivalences. Cultural study, then is an area that potential translators cannot overlook as it is invaluable to the understanding of the nuances of any work to be translated.

## 2. Definition:

The definition of " culture " varies and includes a wide range of aspects .According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary ( Hornby , 2005 : 373 ) culture is defined as " the customs and beliefs , art , way of life and social recognition of a particular country or group " .Newmark (1988: 94 ) defines culture as " the way of life and manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression " , thus acknowledging that each language group has its own culturally specific features . Nida ( 1964 : 154 ) defines the concept of culture as " the total beliefs of a society " . Yule ( 2006 : 216 ) considers culture as " socially acquired knowledge " . In fact it is this kind of knowledge which we initially acquire without conscious awareness .

Perhaps one of the most intriguing of all language-related topics is the relationship of language to thought and culture. Jordan and Weed (1995:9) maintain that language is the store and reflection of a culture. It is closely related to man's ecology, including his/her environment and literary, religious and other traditions in his/her society. It acts internally as tool of thought, and interpersonally as a tool of communication.

Culture is the product of the mind. So there is a sort of relationship between language, culture and thought. Many theories have attempted to reconcile language and thought by means of environmental and culture influence.

### 3. Cultural Awareness

Yule ( 2006 :216 ) argues that we can develop awareness of culture , and hence our knowledge , only after we have developed language . The particular language we learn through the process of culture transmission provides us with a ready – made system of categorizing the world around us and our experience of it. We can see that there is a strong relationship between language and culture which can be termed " langue culture " , and implied that language and culture are inseparable because " language is composed of linguistic elements that vary by culture"( Tannen , 2006:369).Thus speakers use a range of linguistic elements to convey meaning in conversation , but the appropriate ways to use these elements vary from culture to culture . These culture differences affect encounters between speakers from different countries which provide insight into how language works to create meaning and how language shapes the way a speaker perceives and orders the world .

Baker (1992:21) summarizes the whole issue in that the source language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. The concept in question may be abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief , a social custom or even a type of food. An example of an abstract English concept which notoriously difficult to translate into other language is that expressed by the word "privacy". This is an English concept which is rarely understood by people from other cultures. An example of concrete concept is ' airing cupboard' in English which, again, is unknown to speakers of most languages. This leads to one of the main rules in translation is "to keep context", and that the language of the document is itself the heart of the context.

#### 4. Cultural Addressing

Karamanian ( 2001:1 ) states that the term culture addresses three categories of human activity as far as translation is concerned . They are:

- 1- **The personal** , whereby we as individuals think and function as such .
- 2- **The collective** , whereby we function in a social context .
- 3- **The expressive** , whereby society expresses itself .

She ( op.cit ) also mentions that translation involving the transposition of thoughts expressed in one language by one social group into the appropriate expression of another group entails a process of culture de-coding , re-coding and en-coding .As cultures are increasingly brought into great contact with one another , multicultural considerations are brought to bear an ever increasing degree of addressing .

#### 5. Role of the Translator

Any study of the principles and methods of translation cannot provide us with a practical act of translation if it does not take into account the translator himself . It is important here to point out that the translator is the pivot in any process of translation , therefore his role is central . For reasons of convenience , we will deal with the role of the translator from three angles : as a **pioneer** , as a **generator** , and as a **member** of a team .

As a **pioneer** , Nida ( 1964 : 298 ) indicates that the ideal role played by the translator requires that there should be a person who has complete knowledge of the SL and TL . Also he should have very close ideas about the subject matter and content of what he is going to translate.

As a **generator** the translator does his job as a specialized person in linguistic and interpretive issues . He can be considered as a source and can suggest some possible ways of transferring a message to the receptor language . He could do his best to refine the message , to omit what is regarded as intrusive, and to

correct the obvious errors . In his final analysis he can operate as technical assistant .

Equally, as a **member** of a team ; Nida ( op . cit ) states that it is possible for the translator to share with other people the formulation of the message form in the receptor's language .

For instance, one person may suggest the equivalent translation in the receptor's language . A second person may be responsible for the style . This means that a number of translation committees can be established in the following :

One member is an expert in the text , another one is an expert in interpretation , a third one has enough knowledge of religious beliefs , the fourth is an expert in lexical and grammatical components , and the fifth member has good knowledge of style . To conclude his division of these roles Nida states that he refers that every member should complement the other . He considers that having the ability in one aspect only is a bad matter ; therefore it is preferable to have complementary qualifications among translators who work as members of a team (ibid:300) .

### **6.Language , Culture and Translation**

The introduction of culture as a factor in the process of translation is one of the most recent developments in translation theory . For example , the German School of translation views literary translation as part of literary language , and is therefore a cultural activity which enriches the cultural heritage of a county ( Aziz , 2000 : 85 ) .

The dimension of culture process of translation raises a problem concerning the fact that how far the translated text should intrigue in the target culture and how much should it relate to source culture . Aziz and Latiwish (

2000 : 85 ) point out that there is no clear cut answer to this question . They indicate three general trends :

1-Translation may result in a shift towards the target culture and translated text may or may not merge completely in the culture . This tendency may be termed integration .

2- Translation may result in a shift away from both the target culture and source culture .This tendency may be called alienation .

3- The last trend favors preserving the source culture. This may be called source translation .

Normally , a translator can treat cultural terms more freely than institutional terms . Newmark ( 1973 : 83 ) thinks that the translator is not called to account for faulty decisions , whether he is translating imaginative literature or general works ( e.g .history ) . He also adds that since little can be explained to the spectator , cultural terms are rather more likely to be translated or given a cultural equivalent in a play than in fiction . Newmark(ibid) concludes that if the cultural term becomes widespread it may be adapted in the TL .

In respect of this use, we may find out that translation as an applied art means that those who want to practice it must meet some basic conditions . The most important one is the mastery of the two languages . Al-Wasity etal ( 1979 : 8 ) refer to the fact that this mastery should cover, in the two language vocabulary , lexical and grammatical constructions and idiomatic expressions . Also , translation stipulates the background and civilization components of both speakers or writers of languages .



## **7. Translation and Theory of Translation**

Culture can practice creativity in translation by the inclusion of new texts inside it . Torop ( 2006 : 16 ) shows that the theory of translation starts to evaluate the concept of identity especially in the field of cultural studies . It is important to state here that there is a necessity to understand the cultural identity for the sake of having a complete understanding of the political , social , economic and technological development .

Jacobson as quoted in Torop (ibid) distinguishes three types of translating : they are the intra – lingual translation , the inter – lingual translation and the inter – semiotic translation . What is important is that a translator should bear in his mind that cultures have special systems or languages ; therefore understanding a certain culture means understanding its language , and the system of signs working within it ( Torop , 2006:17 ). This fact leads to the conclusion that we can consider both culture and translation as two unified concepts working with an effective culture which helps us to come closer to its mechanism in a way enabling the translator to analyze translation , and culture very deeply .

## **8. Cultural Context**

Aziz (1981:193) states that Cultural context is the most difficult to describe and the most difficult to deal with in theory and in translation practice because it refers to the environment in which we live and form the framework for our thought . We all know that such phenomena as family relationships or color systems can differ greatly from one culture to another, but these are only very few of the areas in which culture determines our thought . Here is another example: the definition of what is edible varies greatly across cultures. In most cultures of the world many varieties of insects such as ants and larvae are considered edible and highly desirable as food , while in other places such

things might be poisonous . Horse meat and the flesh of small animals such as dogs , cats , and monkeys are considered edible in many cultures and in some places even human flesh is eaten .

Words only have meaning in terms of the culture in which they are used , and although languages do not determine culture , they certainly tend to reflect a society 's beliefs and practice . Consider the example of a word like " bread". At first glance, it is a very simple word, referring in everyday use to just one thing, with obvious translations in other languages. But ask people from England, France or China to describe or draw " bread", and they will describe different things, based on their individual cultures. Again, consider the words 'owl' and 'bum'. They point to the same class of birds. "owl" occurs in English literature as a symbol of wisdom; in Arabic literature it symbolizes ill-omen.

## **9. Cultural Problems of English – Arabic Translation**

Translation is a kind of activity which involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions . It is not an easy process. Understanding translation will improve our knowledge of how to communicate with others . [The most frequent difficulties are those that result from failure to recognize the meanings of words or phrases peculiar to a particular context in the mind of the listener or reader ( Toury , 1978 : 200 ) ].

Aziz ( 2000 : 90) states that cross cultural translation raises a number of problems . The greater the gap between the source and the target cultures the more serious the difficulty would be . This is true of translation between English , which is part of the Western culture and Arabic, which belongs to the oriental culture . Problems of culture may be divided into : (a)geographical ,( b ) religious,( c ) social,(d ) material ,and ( e ) linguistic

### ( a ) Geographical culture :

Two cultures involved in translation may have different backgrounds related to such things as climate , plants and animals .The Arabic speaking person usually inhabits in countries generally characterized by hot and dry climate . The culture of Britain and Western Europe , on the other hand , is cold and wet . Within these two cultural frameworks , the various geographical terms will acquire different shades of meaning for the people using them .

Associating " a summer's day " with lovely weather " is an English notion. In Arabic countries , where a summer day is hot , it would be unusual for a person to compare his beloved to any time in summer . The season of " lovely weather " is spring .In all these changes the translator's aim is to find a term familiar to the reader .(ibid).

### ( b ) Religious culture :

Religion has deep roots in various cultures and is revealed in how people speak and behave. However, some societies are more religion conscious than others. Generally speaking, the influence of religion is stronger in the East than it is in the West. In Arabic speaking countries, the word "Allah" is used in variety of communicative functions ranging from promising to threatening well – wishing and greeting, as the following examples show :

1-I'll freeze you, in faith.

لأودبنيك والله .

2-No, truly: "it is more than manners will".

لا والله ، فهذا فوق ما تحتمل اداب السلوك .

The religious difficulties are part of the ideological problems, side by side with politics. Religious differences among societies pose translational difficulties.

(c) **Social culture:**

Social ideologies raise a number of problems .These include the attitudes of various communities towards love marriage, etc. The following examples reveal the difference between the attitudes of the English speaking community and the Arabic speaking community:

3-Come Kate, we'll to bed.

هلم يا كيت نبداً حياتنا الزوجية .

The English expression "to bed" is suggestive for the Arabic reader. The translator renders it . حياتنا الزوجية . by using an abstract expression

4-By this virgin palm now kissing you, I will be yours.

واني اقسم بيدي هذه الطاهرة التي تصافح يدك الآن اني سأكون ملكا لك .

The word "kissing" is replaced by "shaking your hand" تصافح which is more decent.

Also, the words "Wooing" and "courting" which refer to a social practice not found in the Arabic culture are among the most difficult English social terms to render into Arabic. (ibid:94).

One can say that an English writer does not hesitate to speak about topics concerning "sex", whereas an Arabic one does. Even in main things such as " greetings" one can find differences between the English society and the Arabic one. An Arabian starts meeting others by saying "صباح الخير" even to the nearest relatives of his, but the English person uses only a smile or says "Hello". For the English society, the phrase " good morning" is used in formal settings.

(d) **Material culture:**

The term "material culture" has a broad sense and includes things such as food, means of transport and other objects that people use in their daily life .These may differ from one speaking community to another. Highly developed industrial countries use various material things which may not be found in less

developed. Some aspects of material culture which concern daily life, like food, furniture and means of transport are sometimes problematic. Here is an example:

هذه البسبوسة فريدة -5

This sweetmeat looks delicious.

But is بسبوسة to an Arabic the same as "sweetmeat" to an English man? The answer is, negative (ibid:95)

One of the solutions to solve material difficulties is though translating the lexical items into Arabic according to Arabic morphological rules.

### (e) Linguistic culture:

How people view the external and what differences they draw between the various parts are to be reflected in their language. At the level of the verb phrase, English has a complex verb system (e.g. go, went, is going, have been going, may have been going), whereas Arabic has simple verb system consisting of المضارع (the imperfect يذهب) and الماضي (the perfect ذهب). In adjectives, English has three degrees of comparison: big, bigger, biggest, Arabic has two : اكبر and كبير

English has two terms in number system: the singular (one) and the plural (more than one), whereas Arabic has three terms; singular (one), dual (two), and plural (more than two). For example, to translate "جاء الرجلان" it is said. "The two men came". So, English uses the number "two" to replace the dual system in Arabic. The basis of these differences and other ones like gender, pronouns is linguistic.

This means that those who want to practice these linguistic differences should have certain requirements. The most important one is the mastery of the two concerned languages.

## 10. Conclusion

Translation studies are essentially concerned with a web of relationships. These relationships express the need for having wide education by the translator because it is education, including linguistic and cultural aspects, which count for creativity in translation. Also, we can notice that understanding the culture is a must for the translator therefore culture is introduced as a very important factor in the process of translation. It is noteworthy to see that a translator must meet the requirements of culture since they will make him a creative translator.

On the other hand, the cultural problems are more complicated than the linguistic ones. Since they deal with the essential and passionate meanings. These problems usually emerge, and only professional translators can reveal them. Consequently, the translator should be familiar not only with the linguistic aspects of the texts but also with the cultural ones. Hence, the translator must be accustomed to other cultures so that he can subdue the texts, which he renders, to be suitable and comprehended without being affected by the culture he belongs to. He does so to avoid misconception or any other passive creations that may be caused as a result of this kind of translation.

For the translators , then , it is important to consider not only the lexical impact on the TL reader, but also the manner in which cultural aspects may be perceived. This entails that culture shapes the way a translator understands the text. That is why the translator's education is regarded as a cornerstone of success in translation.

## Bibliography

- Al – Wasyty , et al . ( 1979 ) **An Introduction to Translation** (in Arabic) Vol.1,  
Baghdad: Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research .
- Aziz , Y , Y , and M . S Lataiwish ( 2000 ) **Principles of Translation** ,  
Benghazi : University of Gharyouns.
- Hornby , A.S (2005) **Oxford Advanced Lerner's Dictionary of  
Current English** ed. Sally Wehmeir, (7<sup>th</sup> ed.) Oxford:  
Oxford University press .
- Karmanian , A .Articia ( 2001 ) 'Translation and Culture ' **Translation Journal  
and the Author** , available in :Http: \ accurapid .com\ journal \ 19 culture  
2.htm last update on : 6-1-2007 .
- Jorden, G. & Weedon, C (1995). **Culture Politics: Class, Gender, Race and  
the Postmodern.** Oxford: Black Well publishers LTD.
- Mona, Baker(1992). **In other words:** A course Book on translation. London:  
Routledge.
- Newmark , P. ( 1982 ) **Approaches to Translation** , London:  
Pearson Education limited.
- ( 1986 ) **Approaches to Translation** , Oxford : Pergamon  
Institute of England .
- ( 1988 ) **A Textbook of Translation** . London : Routledge.
- Nida ,Eugene ( 1964 ) **Towards a Science of Translation** ( in Arabic Trans.  
Majid Alnjaar, ( 1976 ) Baghdad: Ministry of Information .
- Tannen ,Deborah ( 2006 ) "Language and Culture" . **An Introduction to  
Language and Linguistics** eds. Ralph W .Fasold and Jeff Conner –Linton,  
Cambridge : Cambridge University Press .

Torop , Peter ( 2006 ) " Translation and the Theory of Translation " ( in Arabic ) trans. Najah Al-Jubaily , **Al-Adib** , Vol.135, third year , October, 2006 .

Toury , G . ( 1978 ) , **The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation .**  
London: Routledge.

Yule , G . ( 2006 ) **The Study of Language** (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) , Cambridge :  
Cambridge University Press .