



Problems of Translating Personification in Some Selected Short Stories by Ernest Hemingway into Arabic

مشكلات ترجمة التشخيص في بعض القصص القصيرة المختارة لأرنست هيمنجواي إلى اللغة العربية

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المستخلص

تُعدّ ترجمة النصوص الأدبية عملية معقدة تتجاوز التحويل اللغوي البسيط، إذ تتطلب حساسية تجاه الأساليب البلاغية والثقافية والفنية. وتُعدّ ترجمة التشخيص – أي إضفاء الصفات البشرية على الكيانات غير البشرية – من أبرز التحديات في الترجمة الأدبية، لما لها من أثر في تعزيز الصور الحسية والبعد العاطفي للنص. ويُعرف أرنست هيمنجواي بأسلوبه الدقيق والمقتضب، ويستخدم التشخيص بشكل متكرر لإضفاء حيوية على السرد وتعميق الأثر الشعوري.

يتناول هذا البحث صعوبات ترجمة التشخيص في قصص هيمنجواي القصيرة إلى اللغة العربية، من خلال تحليل الفروقات اللغوية والعوامل الثقافية، ودراسة استراتيجيات الترجمة المختلفة، ومدى فاعليتها في الحفاظ على المعنى الفني والجمالي للنص الأصلي. ومن خلال التحليل المقارن، يُبيّن البحث كيف تؤثر أساليب الترجمة، مثل الترجمة الحرفية، والتكليف، وإعادة الصياغة، في الأثر الأدبي للتشخيص. وتشير النتائج إلى أن التكليف غالباً ما يُنتج ترجمات أكثر سلاسة وملاءمة ثقافية في اللغة العربية، مع الحفاظ على الأثر الأسلوبي المقصود.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الترجمة الادبية . التشخيص. التكيف

Abstract

Translating literary texts is a complex process that extends beyond mere linguistic conversion, requiring sensitivity to stylistic, cultural, and rhetorical devices. One of the key challenges in literary translation is rendering personification where non-human entities are attributed human characteristics into another language while maintaining its literary and stylistic effects. Ernest Hemingway, known for his precise and minimalistic prose, frequently uses personification to create vivid imagery and enhance the emotional depth of his narratives.



This research explores the difficulties of translating personification in Hemingway's short stories into Arabic. The study examines linguistic differences, cultural factors, and various translation strategies, assessing their effectiveness in preserving the original text's meaning and artistic value. Through comparative analysis, the research demonstrates how different translation approaches literal translation, adaptation, and paraphrasing, affect the literary impact of Hemingway's personifications. The findings suggest that adaptation often yields more natural and culturally appropriate translations in Arabic while maintaining the intended stylistic effect.

Key words

Literary Translation , Personification. Adaptation

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) is widely recognized for his economical and straightforward writing style, which he described as the "iceberg theory" where deeper meanings are suggested rather than explicitly stated. Despite this simplicity, Hemingway's writing contains rich stylistic devices, including metaphor, symbolism, and personification. Personification, the attribution of human qualities to non-human entities, is particularly prevalent in his works, enhancing imagery and reinforcing themes

The translation of literary texts, particularly those involving figurative language, presents significant challenges. English and Arabic belong to different linguistic and cultural traditions, making the direct transfer of personification from one language to another problematic . Arabic literature traditionally leans toward metaphor and allegory rather than direct personification, requiring translators to modify expressions to fit the stylistic norms of the target language .

This study investigates the complexities of translating personification in Hemingway's short stories, exploring the linguistic and cultural barriers that arise. It also examines how different translation techniques affect the preservation of literary aesthetics in Arabic translations.

1. Definition and Function of Personification

Personification is a literary technique that attributes human qualities to non-human entities, such as animals, inanimate objects, or abstract concepts. This method allows authors to infuse life into elements that are not alive, enabling them to express emotions or actions that are typically human. Through



personification, writers can make the literary experience more dynamic and engaging for the reader (Preminger et al., 1993).

2. Functions of Personification in Literature:

2.1. Enhancing Sensory Imagery

Personification stimulates the reader's imagination by making non-living objects or abstract ideas seem active. It helps to build vivid sensory images, which make scenes or events more tangible and engaging in the reader's mind. For example, when one says "the trees danced in the wind," personification animates the scene, making the trees seem lively and interactive with the environment. (M.H. Abrams)

2. 2. Indirect Expression of Emotions

Personification allows the author to convey emotions of characters in a more subtle way, avoiding direct statements. For instance, describing "the storm raging with anger" uses personification to represent emotional turmoil, giving depth to the character's inner conflict without stating it explicitly (Newmark, 1988).

2. 3. Creating Symbolic Meanings

Many instances of personification carry deeper metaphorical meanings that enhance the thematic elements of a story. By attributing human traits to concepts or forces, writers can explore complex ideas like time, death, or love in a more accessible and powerful way. For example, when we say "time flies," time is personified as a being that moves swiftly, giving the reader a more profound understanding of the fleeting nature of life (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

2. 4. Building Atmosphere and Mood

Personification plays a key role in establishing the atmosphere and mood of a narrative. By giving human qualities to natural surroundings or elements, the writer can create emotional tones that resonate with the reader. For example, saying "the moon smiled down on the village" brings a sense of warmth and calm, whereas "the dark clouds loomed over the town" can evoke a sense of foreboding and tension.

2. 5. Enhancing Relatability

Personification helps make abstract or distant concepts more understandable and relatable. When ideas like "fate" or "time" are personified, they become



tangible and easier for readers to connect with on a human level. This allows readers to emotionally engage with broader themes in a more relatable way.

2. 6. Supporting Character Development

Personification can also aid in character development by externalizing an internal struggle or emotion. For example, a character might be described as being "chased by regret," with regret itself becoming a personified entity that interacts with the character. This technique allows readers to better understand the character's internal state and emotional journey.

3 .Modern Perspectives on Personification

Recent studies in literary theory have explored the psychological and cognitive effects of personification in greater depth. Cognitive linguistics, for example, emphasizes how humans instinctively personify non-human elements as a natural cognitive process. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), our thinking is inherently inclined to map human experiences onto the non-human world, which is why personification is so prevalent across cultures and literature.

Additionally, some modern critics argue that personification is not just a creative writing tool but also a way to convey deeper meanings and societal commentary. When elements like "the cruel sun" or "the silent sea" are personified, they can symbolize humanity's relationship with nature, thus adding a layer of ecological or philosophical commentary to the narrative (Saldanha, 2014).

4. Challenges of Translating Literary Devices into Arabic

Translating literary devices between languages, especially when shifting from English to Arabic, presents several challenges due to the distinct linguistic, cultural, and stylistic characteristics of each language. This process becomes particularly complicated when translating figurative language, as these devices are deeply influenced by both the structure and cultural contexts of the languages involved (Baker, 1992; Hatim & Mason, 1997).

5. Linguistic Variations

The structural differences between English and Arabic make translating literary devices such as metaphors, similes, and personification particularly difficult. English is often more explicit in its use of figurative language, whereas Arabic can favor more implicit forms. For instance, the use of personification in English may directly attribute human qualities to inanimate objects or abstract



concepts, but such expressions may not feel as natural or appropriate in Arabic, which often relies on more indirect, symbolic expressions (Baker, 1992).

In Arabic, metaphors tend to be more implicit and culturally rooted. The syntactic flexibility in Arabic allows for a subtler and more poetic expression of metaphors, which can be difficult to render into English without losing nuance or meaning (Badawi & Carter, 1985). Furthermore, word choice and the connotation of terms vary significantly between the two languages, which complicates finding equivalent expressions without altering the intended impact of the literary device (Hatim & Mason, 1997).

6. Cultural Differences

Cultural context plays a pivotal role in how figurative language is perceived and used. Personification in English, which frequently attributes human emotions or intentions to nature, objects, or ideas, may not resonate the same way in Arabic. For example, phrases like "the wind whispered" or "the night wept" are common in English literature, but in Arabic, similar expressions might seem overly literal or alien, as Arabic literature often favors different types of imagery rooted in its own cultural and historical traditions (Badawi & Carter, 1985).

Moreover, literary devices are often shaped by religious, historical, and social contexts, which vary significantly between cultures. Arabic literature, for instance, draws heavily on Islamic, pre-Islamic, and medieval influences, which may not have direct parallels in English literary traditions. This means that a literal translation of a metaphor or symbolic image from one language to the other might result in a loss of cultural significance or fail to evoke the same emotional response (Katan, 2009).

7. Differences in Literary Style

Arabic literature traditionally favors a more implicit, subtle style of expression, particularly when it comes to metaphor and personification. Arabic poets, for example, might prefer to hint at emotions or ideas through suggestive language, leaving much to the imagination of the reader. In contrast, English literature often embraces directness and clarity, particularly in its use of literary devices. This difference in literary style can result in difficulties when translating literary works from one language to the other, as the translator must decide



whether to preserve the indirectness of Arabic expression or to adapt it to a more direct English literary style (Hatim & Mason, 1997).

8. Recent Developments in Translation Studies

Recent translation studies have emphasized the need for a more nuanced approach to literary translation, acknowledging the importance of preserving both the aesthetic and cultural qualities of the original work (Katan, 2009). Contemporary scholars advocate for a more dynamic translation approach that allows for creative solutions to these challenges, rather than strict word-for-word translations. This approach encourages translators to consider the broader cultural and stylistic context in which a literary device operates, ensuring that the translated work resonates with its new audience while maintaining fidelity to the original text.

Additionally, advancements in technology, such as machine translation and corpus-based studies, have allowed for more precise analysis of literary devices across languages. These tools can help translators understand how certain devices function in different linguistic contexts, leading to more accurate and culturally sensitive translations (Baker, 2006).

In conclusion, translating literary devices from English to Arabic requires an understanding of both the linguistic structures and the cultural contexts that shape each language. The differences in figurative language, literary style, and cultural perception of literary devices make this task complex, but with careful attention to both the source and target languages, it is possible to achieve a translation that captures the essence of the original work while respecting the distinct characteristics of Arabic literature.

9. Personification in Hemingway's Writing

Hemingway frequently employs personification to enrich his storytelling. Some notable examples include:

“The sun was gone, but he had left his promise in the sky.” (A Farewell to Arms, Hemingway, 1929).

“The wind whispered through the trees.” (The Snows of Kilimanjaro, Hemingway, 1936).

“The city was asleep, wrapped in its quiet solitude.” (A Clean, Well-Lighted Place, Hemingway, 1933).



These instances illustrate how Hemingway gives human-like qualities to nature, reinforcing themes of solitude, struggle, and existential reflection (Leech & Short, 2007).

10. Translation Strategies for Personification According to Peter Newmark

In the field of translation studies, Peter Newmark is widely recognized for developing a comprehensive framework that guides translators in navigating the challenges posed by stylistic and cultural disparities between languages. Among the many rhetorical devices that require such guidance is personification a literary tool that imbues non-human elements with human characteristics to enhance imagery, emotional tone, and narrative effect.

Newmark (1988) suggests that translating figurative expressions such as personification demands more than a literal rendering; it requires attentiveness to both the function and impact of the original metaphor in its context. Since the target language may not interpret the same personification in the same way, translators must balance fidelity to meaning with cultural appropriateness and reader reception.

Rather than advocating a single method, Newmark outlines a set of flexible procedures, several of which are especially pertinent to translating personification: Below are the key translation strategies used in addressing personification, with analysis and examples.

10.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to rendering personification from the source language into the target language with minimal alteration, preserving both the lexical content and the imagery. According to Newmark (1988), this approach is appropriate when the syntactic and cultural structures of both languages align sufficiently to retain the effect. For instance, the English sentence “The wind whispered through the trees” can be literally translated into Arabic as “همست الرياح بين الأشجار.” While this preserves the personification and remains faithful to the source text, it may feel unnatural to Arabic readers since “whispering” is inherently a human action. As Newmark suggests, literal translation often serves as a starting point, but the translator must assess whether it communicates effectively within the cultural and linguistic norms of the target language (Newmark, 1988).

10.2. Adaptation



Adaptation, as defined by Newmark, involves replacing a cultural or rhetorical element in the source language with one that is more familiar and natural in the target culture. This is particularly valuable in poetry or figurative language, where direct translation would sound forced.

For example, “The waves danced under the moonlight” could be literally rendered as “ترقصت الأمواج تحت ضوء القمر”، but such expression may clash with Arabic literary expectations. A more adapted rendering would be “تلاعبت الأمواج”، which retains the sense of movement without applying an overtly human trait. This aligns with Arabic stylistic conventions and poetic resonance, echoing Newmark’s emphasis on communicative effectiveness over strict fidelity when necessary (Newmark, 1988).

10.3. Semantic Translation / Paraphrasing (Newmark’s “Semantic Translation”)

Semantic translation prioritizes meaning, tone, and nuance of the original, often employing paraphrasing to ensure the target expression remains culturally and stylistically appropriate. While preserving the author’s intent, it allows restructuring for improved naturalness.

Take the sentence: “The city was asleep, wrapped in its quiet solitude.” A literal Arabic translation like “كانت المدينة نائمة، ملتفة في وحدتها الصامتة” may feel contrived. A semantically and stylistically refined version would be “ساد الهدوء على”، which conveys the same imagery with more poetic fluidity in Arabic. This approach reflects Newmark’s principle that semantic translation aims for close approximation of both meaning and form, while adapting to the expressive norms of the target language (Newmark, 1988).

10.4. Communicative Translation / Modulation (Newmark’s “Modulation”)

Communicative translation, often achieved through modulation, reshapes expressions to make them more natural and acceptable in the target language, even if it diverges lexically from the original. It focuses on reader comprehension and cultural alignment.

Consider “The mountains stood tall, watching over the valley.” A direct translation like “كانت الجبال واقفة تراقب الوادي” might appear unnatural in Arabic. Through communicative translation and modulation, it becomes “كانت الجبال شامخة كأنها تحرس”، replacing direct personification with a simile—an accepted stylistic device in Arabic. This ensures cultural resonance and poetic fluency (Newmark, 1988).



Omission

When a figurative expression in the source text does not contribute significantly to meaning or would disrupt natural expression in the target language, Newmark allows for omission. This strategy avoids unnatural phrasing while maintaining overall coherence and clarity.

For instance, “The old man’s boat creaked as it moved through the water” could be translated literally as “قارب الرجل العجوز يصرخ أثناء تحركه في الماء”، which may feel jarring. By omitting the anthropomorphic “creaked” and replacing it with a more neutral or naturally expressive phrase like “تحرك قارب الرجل العجوز في”، the translator ensures fluency. While some stylistic texture may be lost, the translation remains accessible and idiomatic, consistent with Newmark’s guidance that omission be used judiciously (Newmark, 1988).

11.Challenges in Translating Hemingway’s Personification into Arabic

11.1 Linguistic and Structural Differences

English frequently utilizes personification in describing natural phenomena, such as in “The waves danced under the moonlight”. A literal translation like “رقصت الأمواج تحت ضوء القمر” may not align with Arabic poetic norms. A more fitting equivalent would be “تلاعبت الأمواج بضوء القمر”، which modifies the structure while preserving the essence, demonstrating effective modulation and adaptation.

Similarly, “The wind whispered through the trees” translated literally as “همست الرياح بين الأشجار” may sound unnatural. A semantic or communicative alternative, such as “عبرت الرياح بين الأشجار”، removes the personification but retains the image of movement, preserving poetic effect (Hafez, 2009).

11.2 Cultural Adaptation

As Newmark emphasized, figurative language often requires cultural adaptation. Arabic literary tradition—shaped by classical and Islamic influences—tends to avoid overt humanization of nature, favoring abstract or spiritual descriptions (Badawi & Carter, 1985).

Translating “The mountains stood tall, watching over the valley” as “الجبال واقفة” might conflict with Arabic rhetorical expectations. An adapted version like “كانت الجبال شامخة كأنها تحرس الوادي” uses a simile instead of direct personification, ensuring stylistic compatibility.



In another case, “The old man’s boat creaked” might be more fittingly rendered as “كان قارب الرجل العجوز يئن وهو يتحرك في الماء”، using a less anthropomorphic yet evocative verb. This reflects cultural sensitivity in translation, aligning with Newmark’s emphasis on balancing fidelity with audience expectations.

12. Religious and Philosophical Influence on Personification

Islamic philosophy plays a key role in shaping how nature is portrayed in Arabic literature. In Islamic thought, nature is seen as a manifestation of divine power, not an independent entity with human-like emotions. As a result, it is uncommon to describe the sky or nature with human feelings such as anger or rage. For example, translating "The sky raged with fury" literally as "السماء غاضبة" may not be appropriate. A more fitting translation would be "السماء كانت عاصفة بقوة" (The sky was storming with strength), which emphasizes the force of nature without attributing human emotions (Badawi & Carter, 1985).

13. Influence of Modern Literary Styles

With the evolution of contemporary Arabic literature, influenced by Western styles, personification has become more commonly used. Authors such as Naguib Mahfouz have employed personification in a way that fits with Arab cultural norms (Mahfouz, 2008). Therefore, some modern translations may be more accepting of personification than classical Arabic literature would be.

Findings

1. Adaptation, replaces human-like actions with expressions natural in Arabic. “The waves danced” → “تلاعبت الأمواج” it Preserves movement imagery while avoiding direct anthropomorphism, aligning with Arabic literary norms.
2. Paraphrasing / Semantic Translation, this strategy reformulates the sentence using similes or descriptive phrases. “The mountains watched” → “كأن الجبال تحرس” it Retains metaphorical effect through Arabic's strong simile tradition.
3. Modulation shifts the lexical or syntactic structure to suit Arabic expression. “The boat creaked” → “انتز القارب” it Conveys sound metaphorically without forced personification.
4. Literal Translation violates Arabic norms by attributing human behavior to nature. Example: “The wind whispered” → “همست الرياح”
5. Omission Removes emotional depth and weakens the figurative imagery. Example: “The night wept” → “ساد الليل صمت حزين”



Conclusion

Translating personification in Ernest Hemingway's short stories into Arabic presents a multifaceted challenge that extends beyond linguistic boundaries into the realms of culture, literary convention, and philosophical worldview. While personification serves as a key stylistic device in Hemingway's prose—imbuing nature and objects with human qualities to evoke emotion and deepen thematic resonance—its direct transfer into Arabic often clashes with traditional norms that favor metaphorical subtlety and spiritual abstraction.

This study finds that literal translations frequently result in awkward or culturally incongruous renderings. In contrast, adaptive strategies—such as semantic translation, modulation, and cultural substitution—better preserve the aesthetic function of personification within Arabic literary frameworks. These techniques allow translators to maintain the emotional and symbolic undertones of the source text while respecting the stylistic expectations of the target language.

Furthermore, the evolving landscape of modern Arabic literature, increasingly open to figurative expression influenced by Western literary forms, offers greater flexibility and creative latitude for translators. This convergence between classical restraint and modern expressiveness highlights the translator's dual role as both interpreter and cultural mediator. Ultimately, the successful translation of Hemingway's personifications depends not merely on linguistic accuracy, but on an informed sensitivity to the cultural and rhetorical dimensions of both languages. This reinforces the notion that literary translation is an art form—requiring not only technical skill but also aesthetic judgment and intercultural awareness.

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