

# Investigating the problems of translating literary Texts

## التحقيق في مشاكل ترجمة النصوص الأدبية

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## **Abstract**

Translation is an attempt to replace a written message in one language by the same message in another language .Literary translation consists of the translation of creative and dramatic prose and poetry into other language. This means the translation of literature from ancient languages and the translation of modern fiction so that it can reach a wider audience. Literary translation is very important because it helps to promote shared values among the people of different communities. It is important to have access to the stories and experiences beyond the borders of one's own country.

This paper investigates the problems of translating literary texts. Translators usually have to deal with six different problematic areas in their work, these include: lexical- semantic problems, grammar, syntax, rhetoric, pragmatic and cultural problems. Translating literary texts, however, is not an easy task because it offers many problems for the translator who should be bilingual and bicultural.

This paper tries to show the problems of translating literary texts face the translators when handling a literary text to translate in English and Arabic. so the application is made to sentences contain: lexical, grammatical, stylistic, figurative and cultural problems from the novel by Jack Anderson and Bill Pronzini titled "the Cambodian file" ,it is a major novel of love and war that reaches beyond battle and deep into the human heart .

## الملخص

الترجمة محاولة لاستبدال الرسالة المكتوبة بلغة ما بنفس الرسالة بلغة أخرى ، وتتكون الترجمة الأدبية من ترجمة النثر والشعر الإبداعي والدرامي إلى لغة أخرى. وهذا يعني ترجمة الأدب من اللغات القديمة وترجمة الأدب الحديث حتى يصل إلى جمهور أوسع. الترجمة الأدبية مهمة للغاية لأنها تساعد على تعزيز القيم المشتركة بين أفراد المجتمعات المختلفة. من المهم أن يكون لديك إمكانية الوصول إلى القصص والتجارب خارج حدود بلدك.

تبحث هذه الورقة في مشاكل ترجمة النصوص الأدبية. عادة ما يتعين على المترجمين التعامل مع ستة مجالات إشكالية مختلفة في عملهم ، وتشمل هذه: المعجم - المسائل الدلالية ، والقواعد ، وبناء الجملة ، والبلاغة ، والمشاكل العملية والثقافية. ومع ذلك ، فإن ترجمة النصوص الأدبية ليست مهمة سهلة لأنها تقدم العديد من المشاكل للمترجم والذي يتعين عليه ان يكون ثنائي اللغة وثنائي الثقافة.

عرض الباحث في هذا البحث مشاكل ترجمة النصوص الأدبية التي تواجه المترجمين عند التعامل مع نص أدبي لترجمته باللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية. لذلك تم عمل التطبيق على جمل تحتوي على: مشاكل معجمية ونحوية وأسلوبية ومجازية وثقافية من رواية جاك أندرسون وبيبل برونزيني بعنوان "الملف الكمبودي" ، وهي رواية رئيسية عن الحب والحرب تتجاوز الصراع العميق في قلب الإنسان.

## **1.1 Introduction**

Translation is not impossible, since their well-known human activity has been practiced between different languages of the world since ancient times .By which man conquered the barrier of language. On the other hand, it is not a smooth and straightforward activity which can easily be carried out. What supports this fact is that translators have always faced perplexing problems and difficulties while carrying out their exhausting task which requires many talents and capabilities on the part of the translator. Indeed, some texts are easy to translate, but others are so difficult that they may almost be described as untranslatable. ( Ilyas , 1989: 117 )

Translation is regarded as a number of problems of different kinds that offer suitable and possible solutions. When translating, the translators faced with problems which bring (him or her) stop translating to think and rethink and use dictionaries. The problems need solutions which can be acceptable and possible (Gahazala, 2006: 1)

Problems of translation are posed by the grammar, words, style and sounds of the source language (i-e, English) when translated into target language (i-e, Arabic) while has different grammar and semantics different words, sounds and style. Solutions for these problems are suggested on the bases of the types of text, context, readership and grammatical differences. (Ibid: 2)

Raffaterre (1992, 204: 205) believes that literary translation is noticed as one of the main ways of communication across cultures. It demands various characteristics that the translator has to pay attention to,

consisting all the ST literary features such as, sound effects, morphophonemic, selection of words, figures of speech, style.

Bellaag (1997: 20) states that these characteristics as following: “expressive, connotative and subjective and symbolic focusing on both form and content, subjective, allowing multiple interpretations, timeless and universal, using special devices to 'heighten' communicative effect and tendency to deviate from the language norms.

As regards to literary translation and strategies, Newmark (1988: 96) defines translation strategies as the procedures suggesting the solution of a translation problem. There are many procedures and techniques discussed by different scholars.

Nida (1964: 129) suggests two methods of translation: formal and dynamic equivalence whereas Newmark proposes two methods: transference and componential analysis.

A good translation should keep the same function in the new language. Translation must make sense and transfer the spirit and manner of the original and should give the same effect upon the receiving audience (Ibid: 134)

In contrast, Venuti (1999: 74) indicates that translation involves looking for similarities between language and culture. A translation problem is any difficulty which leads us stop translating to check the meaning of a word.

Ten types of translation problem according to Bassnet (1992: 204) type (1) Structure of the language which means the structure of sentences in English and other languages that

maybe different. Type (2) is “cultural difference “which practiced by the speakers of each language. Type (3) of Bassnet's translation problems is “compound words” which means combination of two or three nouns and adjective. Type (4)" verbs made up of two words", for example: break a part, break a way. Type (5) “ missing terms which means the absence of certain terms in some language, e.g., the term child adoption has no related word in another language, because it does not happen in that area! Type (6) “ words with several meanings in the English language that have different meanings like break (a plate) or take a coffee break. Type (7) “ lack of technical knowledge” which means that the translator should have good knowledge of certain subjects because some translators are not experts in the field. Type (8) “limited time" this is a big problem that the translators face when translating. Type (9) “ personal challenges” caused because of the environment around the translator. Type (10) “quality vs. expense" which is the biggest challenge for the clients when they compare between cost and quality. (Ibid: 206)

Pinchuck (1977:38) states that translation problems can be divided into four types: linguistic, cultural, pragmatic and text specific problems. Linguistic problems result from the difference between the source and the target language, because no two languages have the same grammatical structures. Each two languages has different idiomatic expressions, different terms ...etc. The second type i.e. cultural problems arise from the contrast in expressing various ideas. A pragmatic problem is the third type of translation problem referring to any issues relating to time,

place and context. The last type (text specific problems) concerned with a particular text.

Ghazala ( 2006: 83) on the other hand , distinguishes five of translation problems: ( grammatical problems ,lexical problems, , stylistic problems, figurative problems and cultural problems. The first type of translation problems is the "grammatical problems" which contains word order, tense, duality and passivation. The second type the "lexical problems": such as polysemy, idioms, collocation, addition and ellipsis. Type three is "stylistic problems" which include formality vs. informality and ambiguity. The fourth translation problem is "figurative problems" which are divided into metaphor and simile. Type (5) of Ghazala's translation problem is "cultural problems" which are classified into" foot notes" and transliteration. (Ibid: 92)

## **1-2- Data and Methodology**

The analysis in this paper based on various and selected texts of the first part of a novel by Jack Anderson and Bill Pronzini titled ‘‘The Cambodia File ‘‘ .It is a major novel of love and war that reaches beyond battle and deep into the human heart. Each Extract involves the discussion of the problems faced by the translator, along with solutions of the problems suggested. The modal adapted is Ghazala's five types of translation problems.

## **1.3 Date and Analysis**

In this section, twenty seven extracts containing different translation problems will be discussed according to Chalaza's



five types of translation problems, in addition to suggesting another structure for the same sentence.

1"Under the sun the muddy brown surface of the river glistened with quicksilver highlights."(P.6)(Par.4)(L.5,6)

"لمع سطح النهر البني الموحد تحت أشعة الشمس ، مرسلا أضواء زئبقية".

The English word order is (A) SVC, the (A) indicates the adverbial phrase "under the sun" which is put at the beginning of the sentence .In Arabic, the word order is not necessarily to be the same because the Arabic word order is different from the English one.

2."AS they crossed to the reception desk, Kim explained that the hotel had been mostly without electricity for the past few weeks."(P.10)(Par.3)(L.1, 2, 3, 4)

"وبينما ذهبنا الى مكتب الاستعلامات ، بينت كيم لتتالي بأن التيار الكهربائي كان قد انقطع عن أغلب أجزاء الفندق على مدى الاسابيع القليلة الماضية".

Here we have two past events, one before the other .The construction (كان قد) equals the English past perfect and expresses the same situation, i.e. two events happening one after the other.

3."But when he stopped and peered out there he realized that they were two bloated bodies clad in peasant dress, floating, face down and side by side like the parody of the lovers who strolled together on the quay." (P.7)(L.3, 4, 5, 6)

"لكنه حين وقف وحدق نحوها أدرك أنها جسدين منتفخين عليهما ثياب قروية .كان الجسدان عائمين جنباً الى جنب و وجهيهما متجه للأسفل، وحالهما هذه أشبه بالقصة الساخرة للعاشقين الذين تمشياً معا على رصيف الميناء".

This is a long English sentence concerning two persons seen by a third party .The sentence explains these two persons in detail, so duality is used in Arabic many times, whether with verbs, nouns, adjectives or pronouns.

4."But the plans had not been worked out in detail until November."(P.18)(Par.1)(L.7, 8)

"ألا أن الخطط لم تكن قد وضعت بالتفصيل حتى شهر تشرين الثاني (نوفمبر)".

This is another example of grammatical problems (passivation).The subject is not stated in English .The emphasis is on "the plans", so it is better to keep the emphasis in the translation on "الخطط" by foregrounding it .

5."The radios were a nuisance sometimes, but they were also a vital communication link."(P.6)(Par.3)(L.6,7)

"كانت أجهزة الاتصال مصدر ازعاج في بعض الاحيان ولكنها مع ذلك كانت وسيلة اتصال مهمة".

Here the word "radio" means "جهاز اتصال", not "مذياع".This piece of equipment is usually carried by police officers, etc. This is an example of polysemy which means a word has more than one meaning (Ghazala,2006:98)

6."But then, if she refused him he might write a negative piece anyway, out of spite. "(P.11) (Par.3)(L.4,5)

"ولكنها ان رفضت طلبه فانه قد يكتب مقالة سلبية على أية حال، بدافع الضغينه".

Another example of lexical problems (idioms), an idiom, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, is "a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words." (2005). Here in this extract the idiom "out of spite" means desiring to hurt or annoy somebody. Its Arabic equivalent may be: (بدافع الضغينة,): (حقدا منه، بحقد، بكيد، نكاية به). Any one of these expressions fits the translation.

7. "To the left and right of the reception desk, against the side walls, were two heavy plexiglass doors behind which marine guards stood at attention." (P.16, (Par.3), (L.1,2,3).

"كان عن يسار مكتب الاستقبال ويمينه وقبالة الجدران الجانبية بابان سميكان من الزجاج ضفيري الشكل، يقف خلفها حرس من المارينز وقفة منتصبة ساكنة".

The idiom "stand attention" means (يقف وقفة منتصبة ساكنة) and is used especially in military language to refer to the correct way that a soldier should follow to stand before an officer of a high rank. The translator should search for its exact meaning and avoid literal translation with idioms, as the meanings of the individual words can lead to a mistranslation of the idiom. Apart from this, the context of situation should be taken into account on the part of the translator.

8. The world press is going to have a field day when we pull out. (P.19)(Par.1)(L.2, 3)

"سيكون يوم انسحابنا يوما مشهودا في الصحافة العالمية".

The idiom "have a field day" means to be given the opportunity to do something that you enjoy ,especially something that other people do approve of. The expression (يكون يوما مشهودا) not suits both the meaning of the English idiom and the context of situation.

9."She liked to flirt with Americans and winked broadly at Foxworth as he passed."(P.16), (Par.2),(L.3,4)"

"كانت الشابة تحب ملاطفة الاميركيين فغمزت بملء عينها صوب فوكسويرث عندما مر من أمامها".

The word "wink" collocates with the adverb "broadly" i.e. they come together frequently .In Arabic ,the expression (غمزت بملء عينها) is the best since it expresses the idea in the ST, i.e. winking with one eye open rather than the usual way of winking at somebody.

10. And many of them wore the same expression of pleasure as Kim. (P.4)(L.1, 2)

"وارتسمت على وجوه الكثير منهم تعابير تنم عن السعادة، كتلك التي ارتسمت على وجه كيم".

The two words "wear "and "expression"collocate,i.e they put together in collocation to give the meaning of having a particular expression on the face .In Arabic ,after extra position and addition ,the translation became as shown above.

11."It had taken more than a week of applications and interviews at the US embassy in Bangkok, and even at that she might not have got the visa except for her father."(P.8),(Par.1),(L.2,3,4,5)

"فقد أمضت مايزيد على أسبوع في تقديم الطلبات واجراء المقابلات في السفارة الأمريكية في بانكوك، ومع كل هذا ما كان لها أن تحصل على (الفيزا) لولا تدخل والدها".

The words and expressions "applications" interviews" and "except for her father "are translated into (تقديم الطلبات) ، (لولا تدخل والدها) and (اجراء المقابلات) respectively. The added words are (تدخل، اجراء، تقديم) respectively. They make the translation coherent, more balanced and powerful. This type of translation problem is called (Addition) which means some situations where the translator is obliged to add something to the sentence to be more balanced and powerful. (Khulosi, 1982:15)

12."They walked out on the quay that sloped to the water's edge."(P.6), (Par.4)(L.3,4)

"مشيا على رصيف الميناء المنحدر صوب مياه النهر".

The word "edge" is dropped in the translation because it is not important to distinguish between their walking to the water and their walking to the water's edge .So the expression "مياه النهر" is enough.

13."Natalie saw several armed soldiers" (P.6), (Par.4)(L.5)

"شاهدت ناتالي عددا من الجنود".

The English word "armed" is redundant here and is better to be deleted since every soldier is "armed". Moreover, it will be odd in Arabic to say "جنود مسلحين"

14."On the grey –metal surface of his desk, he noticed, was an envelope marked with his name and the words "Eyes only". (P.17)(Par.1)(L.1, 2).

لاحظ على مكتبه المعدني الرصاصي اللون ظرف عليه اسمه وكلمتين هما "عينان فقط".

This is another example of duality. In English, the words "Eyes only" are plural since they refer to more than one. While in Arabic they are dual because they refer to two things.

15."They escorted her out to a government –marked Fiat."

"قام الشخصان بتوصيلها الى سيارة حكومية من نوع فيات".

Here duality also applies. The two persons referred to by the pronoun "they" are translated into Arabic by the use of duality,i.e "الشخصان"

16."But this time he had stayed away from the front: almost all of his Cambodia dispatches had been written from and about Phnom Penh."(P.11)(Par.2)(L.2,3,4)

"لكنه في هذه المرة بقي بعيدا عن الجبهة، فعلى وجه التقريب كانت كل رسائله الاخبارية المتعلقة بكمبوديا قد كتبها من "بنوم بنه" وعنها".

In this English sentence, we have the passive and the subject is implicitly mentioned, i.e of course they are written by him as he is the journalis. Accordingly, it is possible to use an active sentence in Arabic.

17."first an interview, then an invitation .And not a subtle invitation, either: "Want to go somewhere and screw?" or the equivalent effect thereof."(P.12), (Par.3), (L.9, 10, 11)

"هذا الامر سيء للغاية، في بادئ الامر أراد أجراء مقابلة ثم قام بتوجيه دعوة، حتى أنها ليست بالدعوة المهمة البته...كأنه يريد أن يقول "أترغبين بالذهاب لمكان مالأقامة علاقة حميمة أو مايشابه ذلك".

This is an example of stylistic problems .The English verb "screw" is a slang word that means "to have sex with somebody". The novelist uses vulgarity in this sentence .This vulgarity is rendered into Arabic as a formal style.

18. Body shut the door, said "Morning, Dave," and came forward to the desk. (P.17)(Par.3)(L.2, 3)

أغلق بويد الباب وقال "صباح الخير يا ديف" وتقدم نحو المكتب.

The greeting "Morning "is informal. It is used between friends, family members, etc. "صباح الخير" is an Arabic greetings .Furthermore, addressing David with "Dave" is an example of informal style. In Arabic, the same intimate tone is kept by translating it as (ديف).

19."Not to mention those elitist pseudo-liberal sons of bitches back home (P.19) (Par.1) (L.4, 5)

هذا فضلا عن السفلة في موطننا ممن يدعون إلى حكم النخبة ويحملون افكترا وتوجهات تحررية زائفة.

This is an example of Vulgarly because we have an offensive expression .In Arabic, The equivalent expression is "السفلة".

20."It's a mistake, getting too involved with them .I'm not with mine and it's going to save me all kinds of grief."(P.20)(Par.2)(L.1,2)

"فمن الخطأ أن يتعلق المرء بهؤلاء القوم أكثر مما ينبغي .لست مع عشيقتي في الوقت الحاضر".

The pronoun "mine" is ambiguous .We don't know whether it indicates a person (and who?), or a thing (and what?).The sentence does not provide enough information, it is context –dependent .The linguistic context holds the key to this problem as the conversation is about two girlfriends and the speakers are two men.

21."Free fire zones and daily briefings and swarms of refugees and bodies in the street."(P.13)(Par.2)(L.1, 2)

"مناطق القتال المفتوحة والبيانات اليومية وحشود اللاجئين والجثث الملقاة في الشوارع".

This is an ambiguous sentence because we don't know whether the word "swarm" modifies "refugees" only or modifies the two nouns "refugees and bodies". The translator should have vast knowledge about grammar in order to translate such difficult structures in a clear way .The word "swarm" originally means "a group of insets, especially bees, moving together". From the definition we understand that the word "swarm" modifies things that are alive, and for this reason we exclude"bodies"from the modification .So, the translation expresses the exact meaning of the sentence.



22. Natalie Rosen arrived in Phnom Pena –her first and last visit to Cambodia-on the last day of February. (P.8)(L.1, 2)

The expression "her first and last visit" refers to her only visit ,which is the first and the last at the same time, as the noun "visit" is singular .The translator should noticed this before translating in order to avoid ambiguity.

23."There's a whole country of women back home, don't forget that."(P.20)(Par.2)(L.18, 19)

"ثم ان في موطننا بلد مليء بالنساء، لاتنس ذلك".

In this example, the novelist compares "a country" with "a large" number of women". The image is that the country as a whole is "women". This is a metaphor which means " a word or phrase used in an imaginative way to describe somebody /something to show that the two persons or things have the same qualities .(Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary :2005).

24."He smiled like a Harvard undergraduates, which was what he had once been"(P.19) (Par.4) (L.5, 6)

"ارتسمت على شفتيه ابتسامة كأبتسامة طالب في جامعة هارفرد، اذ كان قد درس فيها".

Here the word "like" is used in a simile comparing Boyd's smile to that of a Harvard undergraduate .In Arabic, the particle "ك" is used to express this smile.

25."The air was thick with sultry dry- season heat .Sunlight reflected in dancing barbs off the water in the fountains ,made the mossy grey stone of the pagoda glisten with a sweaty sheen."(P.3)(Par.3)(L.1, 2, 3, 4)

"كان الهواء كثيفا شديد الحرارة والرطوبة. وجعل ضوء الشمس، المنعكس من ماء النافورات بشكل شعيرات راقصة، أحجار الباغودة(\*) الرصاصية الشبيهة بالطحلب تلاماً باعثة بريقاً مسبباً للتعرق".

Here the word "pagoda" has to be explained to the reader in a footnote in order to be fully comprehended .The footnote is:

26. Sampans and canoe like pirogues dolted it. (P.6)(Par.4)(L.6,7)

وكانت زوارق السمبان والزوارق الشجرية الشبيهة بزوارق الكنو على هيئة نقاط في البحر.

This sentence has two footnotes as follows:

السمبان: زورق صيني يسير بمجذاف .(المورد)

الزورق الشجري: زورق يصنع بتجويف جذع شجرة .(المورد)

27."Natalie Rosen arrived in Phnom Penh-her first and last visit to Cambodia –on the last day of February."(P.8)(Par.3)(L.1, 2)

"وصلت ناتالي روزن الى بنوم بنه في اخر أيام شهر شباط، وهي زيارتها الأولى والأخيرة لكمبوديا".

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(❖) الباغودة : هيكل أو معبد (هندي أو صيني أو ياباني) متعدد الأدوار.(المورد).

## **Investigating the problems of translating .....**

Here we have different examples of transliteration .The word "Natalie Rosen "refers to a person's name,"Phnom Penh" refers to the capital of Cambodia and "Cambodia" is the name of a state .Accordingly, all of these foreign words have no equivalents in Arabic and transliterated.



## **Conclusion**

The difficulty of translation produced from the fact that it deals with language, a very wide aspect of life .Furthermore, translation goes beyond the barrier of language as it deals directly with culture which differs considerably from one community to another .The semantic problems always receive the lion's share of emphasis by students and translators and are difficult indeed .The grammatical problems arise from the difference between the grammars of the SL and TL and can be solved by finding the equivalent or similar constructions in the TL.The stylistic problems are of less importance ,but the translator should bear in mind that style is not unrelated to meaning in both the SL and TL.The figurative problems are not problems in the full sense of the word and can be easily solved by knowing the proper articles and expressions used to express figures of speech in both the SL and TL. The cultural problems are the most difficult because they demand vast knowledge about the cultures of the SL and TL so that they can be solved .The translator should consult encyclopedias or reference books in order to solve the cultural problems .Furthermore. The translator can get in contact with people from other cultures and consequently acquire more information concerning how to solve such problems.

Consequently, since translation is thought as a reproduction and not a mirror image or reflection, the translator should be careful in manipulating his craft so that it is neither paraphrasing nor substituting. The translator has to be a good writer, well versed with the language and culture of both source and target .Therefore, a translator is

authorized with many responsibilities as he has to fulfill the reader and the critic in addition to the justification of the author's intentions or vision.

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