



## Discursive Shifts in the English–Arabic Translation of Political Propaganda: A Critical Discourse Analysis

التحويلات الخطابية في الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية للدعاية السياسية: تحليل خطاب نقدي

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### المخلص

تقدّم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً نقدياً للخطاب (CDA) للتحويلات الخطابية التي تطرأ أثناء ترجمة الدعاية السياسية من الإنجليزية إلى العربية. وتنطلق من افتراض أن عملية الترجمة تمثل فضاءً لإعادة الترميز الأيديولوجي، حيث تتوسط قوى السلطة والأطر الثقافية في توجيه القرارات اللغوية للمترجم. واستناداً إلى النماذج النظرية القائمة، تقترح الدراسة إطاراً تحليلياً موحداً يجمع بين تحليل الخطاب النقدي ونظرية الترجمة القائمة على التكيف.

ومن خلال تحليل مدونة مختارة بعناية، تكشف الدراسة عن أنماط منهجية من التحول في التقييم، وإسناد الفاعلية، وبناء الأطر الدلالية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن المترجمين يؤدّون دور وسطاء أيديولوجيين، إذ يعيدون إنتاج المعاني الإقناعية بصورة استراتيجية لتتلاءم مع المعايير السوسولوجية والسياسية للثقافة الهدف، ومع الحساسيات الدينية والمصالح المؤسسية.

وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن هذه التحويلات ليست عفوية أو عرضية، بل تشكل جزءاً من الجغرافيا السياسية للمعلومات، التي تسهم بدورها في صياغة الفهم العابر للغات للواقع السياسي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تحليل الخطاب النقدي، الخطاب السياسي، الدعاية، تحولات الترجمة، الأيديولوجيا، الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية، الترجمة الإعلامية

### Abstract

The given paper presents a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the discursive changes that have taken place during the English-Arabic translation of political propaganda. It assumes the translation process as the place of ideological contextualization, where the linguistic decision-making is mediated by the forces of power and cultural frames. Building on the existing paradigms, the study proposes a unified analytic framework that involves the CDA and adaptation-based theory of translation. It finds systematic patterns of evaluation, agency, and framing shift by analyzing a carefully assembled corpus. The results indicate that translators are ideological middlemen, and they strategically recreate persuasive meanings to suit target-culture socio-political norms, religious sensitivities and institutional interests. The analysis concludes that such changes are not accidental but rather form the geopolitics of information, which essentially form the cross-lingual understanding of the political reality.

**Keywords:** *Critical Discourse Analysis, political discourse, propaganda, translation shifts, ideology, translation In English-Arabic translation, translation in the media, recontextualization, translation In media translation.*

### Research Objectives

This research attempts to meet the following objectives:



- .1 To determine, categorize, and evaluate the most common approaches to discursive change (lexical, syntactical, pragmatic) in the English-Arabic translations of the texts on political propaganda.
- .2 To examine the ideological, cultural and institutional reasons behind these changes.
- .3 To construct and use an integrated analytical model that integrates Critical Discourse Analysis, with an effective translation model to critically analyse these phenomena.
- .4 To clarify the active, interventionist role of the translator/institution as a cultural-ideological intermediary between international political communication.
- .5 To add to a more sophisticated, politically-sensitive pedagogy and ethics of translation of sensitive political discourse.

### Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

- 1.Primary Hypothesis: The analysis of political propaganda in English into Arabic is marked by systematic, non-random discursive changes, which change the evaluative position, agency attribution and conceptualization of the source text in a significant way.
- 2.Theoretical Hypothesis: A Critical Discourse Analysis framework is best suited to explain these changes which are largely driven by ideological positioning, asymmetrical power relations and the need to recontextualize culture, as opposed to linguistic constraints (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2006).
- 3.Mediation Hypothesis: Translator (or commissioning institution) is not a neutral channel but rather an active ideological broker whose decision consciously or subconsciously sets the translated text in line with the mainstream discourses, sensitivities and politics of the target culture (Baker, 2006; Schaeffner, 2004).

### Research Problems

The following are the key issues that will be discussed in the investigation:

- .1 The Linguistic-Ideological Issue: What can we say systematically about linguistic expressions of ideological intervention in translated political text?
- .2 The Causality Problem: How do the different causes of the same that are supposed to cause a given discursive shift, such as editorial policy, audience expectation, personal bias, geopolitical tension, etc., have the same weight?
- .3 The Modeling Problems: How can the available models of translation and discourse be combined to form a powerful model that is able to capture the multivaried nature of propaganda translations?



.4 The Ethical-Agency Problem: To what extent is the translator aware of these shifts, and what does this imply for the ethics of translating politically charged discourse in conflict zones?

Proposed Translation Model:

The Recontextualization-Based Adaptation Model (RBAM)

For this analysis, we propose a model that moves beyond equivalence-based theories. It synthesizes:

- Christiane Nord's Function-plus-Loyalty: Acknowledging the primacy of the target text's intended function while considering accountability to the source text sender (Nord, 1997).
- Katharina Reiss's Text Type: Focusing on the operative, persuasive function of propaganda texts (Reiss, 1971/2000).
- The Central Concept of Recontextualization (Bernstein, 1990; Van Leeuwen, 2008): This is the core of the model. It posits that when a discourse moves from one context (Anglo-American political sphere) to another (Arab media sphere), its social meaning is inevitably transformed according to the new context's rules of selection (what is translated/omitted), arrangement (structure), and evaluation.

**Process in RBAM:**

1. Decontextualization: The text is extracted from its source cultural, political, and institutional setting.
2. Selective Representation: The translator/institution selects aspects for transfer, influenced by ideology, power, and perceived relevance.
3. Recontextualization: The selected material is re-embedded into the target context using linguistic and discursive strategies that make it resonate with (or challenge) target-culture norms. This stage is where discursive shifts occur strategically.

Proposed Linguistic-Analytical Model: An Integrated CDA Framework

The linguistic analysis employs an integrated CDA toolkit to dissect the recontextualization process.

**Integrated CDA Framework for Analysis**

Analytical Dimension Linguistic Features Analyzed Key Questions

1. Evaluation&Appraisal Lexical choice, modality, intensification, metaphor. Is the evaluative charge maintained, intensified, mitigated, or inverted?
2. Agency&Transitivity Voice, nominalization, ergative verbs, actor/patient positioning. Who is portrayed as the active agent? Is responsibility obscured or highlighted?



3. Framing&Presupposition Cultural keywords, conceptual metaphors, intertextual references, assumed knowledge. What conceptual framework is used to understand the event? What is presented as taken-for-granted truth?
4. Intertextuality&Discourse Representation Direct/indirect reported speech, attribution of discourse. How are other voices incorporated and positioned?
5. Modality, Deixis Modal verbs, adverbs, spatio-temporal deixis. What level of assurance, duty or closeness is conveyed?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present paper is based on an advanced synthesis of three theoretical traditions that are closely related to each other and offer the necessary perspective on the intricate phenomenon of translation of political propaganda. This holistic paradigm transcends the naive models of linguistic transfer, by assuming that translation is a contentious zone of ideological bargaining, cultural adversity and geopolitical game of power (Schäffner, 2004).

#### **.1 The Architecture of Power in Language: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).**

CDA offers the macro-political and linguistic paradigm of approach, in which language is regarded not as a transparent medium, but as a constitutive social practice that is fundamentally entrenched and reproductive of power (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak and Meyer, 2016). Three critical strands of CDA are operationalized used in this analysis:

#### **Fairclough, Dialectical-Relational Approach:**

This is the most central approach in which the three-dimensional model of discourse is (a) a text (linguistic features), (b) discursive practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption), and (c) a social practice (the wider ideological and institutional context). Translation is understood as a particular kind of discursive practice mediation between social practices. The ideas of intertextuality (in which a text alludes and modifies another text) and hegemony (the process of discursive domination) by Fairclough are essential in tracing the process of intertextual association and modification of the source-text propaganda in target-culture discourses (Fairclough, 1995).

#### **Van Dijk, Socio-Cognitive Approach:**

This strand is the one between the society and discourse mediated by cognition. It assumes that ideologies are collective belief systems of groups that govern the construction of the mental models, the individual, subjective knowledge of events (Van Dijk, 1998, 2006). Being the part of different discursive communities, translators act through their own mental models which are shaped by the professional norms and the general ideologies of the whole society. The decisions they make in re-articulating agency, evaluation, and framing are what will contribute directly to the possible mental models that the target audience will form.

#### **□ Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak):**



It also focuses on the historicity of discourse, which requires that a discourse be theoretically interpreted within a stratified temporal and political context (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). It offers instruments of argumentation strategy and topoi (patterns of reason recurrence) analysis in politics. When this is transferred to translation, one can see that historical resentments (e.g. colonialism, foreign intervention) and current geopolitical coalition in the Arab region can be viewed as a latent contextual storehouse, which is then mobilized or repressed by translators and institutions using particular lexical and rhetorical decisions (Wodak, 2001).

### **Translation Studies Sociocultural Translation Studies: Translation as Rewriting and Cultural Production**

This practice frees the analysis of the prescriptive paradigm of equivalence, reinterpreted as rewriting which is always constrained by extratextual forces (Lefevere, 1992). Key constructs include:

- Patronage, Poetics, and Ideology (Lefevere): The patronage (the forces, individuals, institutions, etc. that encourage or inhibit the process of translation) works through ideology (conceptual grid that dictates worldview) and poetics (preferred literary and stylistic standards). The patronage in media translation is institutional (i.e. editorial board of Al Jazeera vs. Al-Arabiya) and its ideology has a direct impact on what can be recontextualized and what cannot be recontextualized (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990).

- **Polysystem Theory (Even-Zohar):**

Interpreted literature as a system that worked under the larger literary and cultural polysystem of the target culture (Even-Zohar, 1990). An adapted here translated political discourse is regarded as having a place in the media and political polysystem of the target culture. Its characteristics, whether it is creative in introducing alien discursive forms, or conservative in stabilizing the domestic norms of that time, are dependent on its perceived centrality or peripherality to that time of political discourse.

- The Habitus and Agency of the Translator (Bourdieu, Simeoni): Relying on the notion of habitus of Bourdieu, which refers to the collection of long-term, internalized dispositions as a result of experience, translation scholars consider the translator to be an agent working in the field of cultural production (Simeoni, 1998). Habitus of the translator due to education, professional traditions, and personal philosophy is collided with the task requirements of the profession (media institution, political situation) to produce the translated text. This shifts analysis away to a deterministic ideology controls translation model towards a more complex sense of negotiated embodied practice.

### **Political Communication & Propaganda Studies: The Ecosystem of Strategic Persuasion**

This component provides the specific object-of-study lens, defining the nature, function, and mechanisms of propaganda as a communicative phenomenon.

- **The Propaganda Model (Herman&Chomsky):**



The “five filters” of the propaganda model—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and anti-communism/ideology—explain how systemic biases are embedded in mass media production in capitalist democracies (Herman&Chomsky, 1988). In translation, this model helps analyze the source-text production context. More importantly, it can be adapted to understand the target-side filters: the institutional ownership of Arab media, their funding sources and political allegiances, their reliance on specific news agencies, and the “flak” they might receive from political actors or publics for certain translations.

#### · **Framing Theory (Goffman, Entman):**

Framing involves selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). Propaganda is essentially strategic framing. Translation analysis, therefore, becomes an analysis of frame transfer and transformation. The study examines how source-text frames (e.g., “war on terror,” “humanitarian intervention”) are maintained, adapted, or substituted with competing frames (e.g., “war on Islam,” “foreign occupation”) in the target text.

· **Modern/Digital Propaganda, Hybrid Warfare theories:** Contemporary propaganda functions under intricate ecosystems of legacy media, social media and state-sponsored sources. The ideas of strategic narrative (the narratives being created in order to develop the perceptions of the past, present, and future) and cognitive security are combined (Åtland and Kjolberg, 2014). This recognizes the fact that translation is the node of transnational flow of competing texts where translation becomes a means of enhancing or generalizing strategic texts within the Arab informational space.

#### **Synthesis: Towards an Integrative Model of Discursive Recontextualization.**

The combination of these three traditions generates the central theoretical suggestion of the study The English-Arabic translation of political propaganda is a multi-layered discursive recontextualization (Bernstein, 1990; Van Leeuwen, 2008) in which texts are de- and re-embedded across deep ideological and cultural divides.

This visualizes is represented as a dynamic filter model which has two main interactive stages of filtration:

.1 **Primary Filtration (Source-Culture Encoding):** The source text is itself filtered by the institutions of its own production, already through the prisms of strategic frames, agendas, and hegemonic ideologies of the Anglo-American political system (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

.2 **Translational Re-Encoding (Secondary Filtration):** The pre-filtered text is re-filtered with a second, transformative filtration of the text by the recontextualization apparatus of the translator / institution. This apparatus consists of:



- **The Ideological Filter:** This, is made up of the editorial line of the target institution (patronage), the habitus of the translator, and the prevailing political discourses the recipient culture (Lefevere, 1992; Simeoni, 1998).
- **The Cultural-Semiotic Filter:** Tabooed by ingrained linguistic rules, religious sensibilities, historical echo, and culturally-related rhetorical customs.
- **Pragmatic-Strategic Filter:** This is based on immediate geopolitical calculations, positioning of audience and the desired perlocutionary effect (e.g., mobilizing sympathy, legitimizing or delegitimizing a given actor) (Baker, 2006).

The result is a discourse that is strategically modified carrying the imprints of the source and its recontextualization. This model does not consider the translator as an inactive channel and also not as an autonomous agent, but as a socio-culturally positioned actor whose micro-linguistic decision-making is the apparent enactment of macro-sociological and geopolitical powers (Hatim and Mason, 1997). Based on this combined prism, the analysis of the discursive changes in the study, in terms of evaluation, agency and framing, gains its entire explanatory force.

### Practical Sample Analysis

Corpus: A purpose-built corpus of 25 paired texts (ST English, TT Arabic) from political speeches, official statements, and op-eds (2010-2023) and their translations in major pan-Arab media.

### Analytical Procedure:

- Micro-Textual Analysis: ST-TT pair close reading through the integrated CDA model.
- Macro-Contextual Interpretation: Interpreting change in terms of institutional patronage and more general ideological battles.

### Detailed Analysis of Two Exemplary Shifts:

- Sample A: Shifting Agency and Responsibility
- ST (Official Statement): The amount of combatants neutralized during the operation was assessed as up to 12 combatants. Unlucky collateral damage is being researched upon.  
· TT (Outlet X): "قامت القوات بتصفية ما يصل إلى 12 مقاتلاً خلال العملية. وتحقق في مقتل مدنيين جراء الغارة."  
[The forces liquidated up to 12 combatants... an investigation is underway into the killing of civilians...]

- Analysis (1) Agency Shift: The impersonal passive (it was assessed) is turned into a clause that is active and agentic (The forces liquidated). (2) Lexical/Evaluative Shift: The euphemistic "neutralized" is replaced with "تصفية" (tasfiyya) which has the sense of eradication. The dead is made concrete through the term "Collateral damage" which is translated into the term "maqtal madaniyyin" (مقتل مدنيين). This turns an obscure report that had



been done in a bureaucratic way into a straightforward account of military action whose victims and agents were definite (Baker, 2006).

- Sample B: Re-Framing by means of Cultural-Religious Recontextualization.
- ST (Political Speech): we are going to fight this fight to the end, to the free world against the tyranny.

· TT (Outlet Y): "] يجب أن نتمسك بموقفنا في مواجهة سياسات الهيمنة والتسلط." [We must adhere to our position in confronting the policies of hegemony and domination.]

- Analysis: (1) Metaphorical Reframing: The civilizational metaphor of the ST is discarded, a battle that it won in order to free the world. (2) Ideological Reframing: It is substituted with the frame of ) تسلط (هيمنة haymana wa tasallut), which directly exploits an anti-imperialist post-colonial discourse, common in the target culture (Said, 1978). The change redefines the war as a moral crusade into a criticism of power politics.

## Findings

### The analysis of the corpus yields the following key findings:

- .1 Taxonomy of Shifts: It was found that there was a consistent pattern of shifts, which included, first of all, mitigating Western-centric evaluative language; explicating agency; replacing culturally objectionable metaphors with ideologically compatible frames.
- .2 Driving Forces: The main driving forces comprise, in descending order, (a) institutional editorial line, (b) the expectation of receiving the audience, (c) the necessity to stick to general cultural-national discourses.
- .3 Model Testing: The combination model of RBAM and CDA model was effective in determining shifts systematically and interpreting shifts, showing that they are inseparable questions of micro-linguistic decisions and macro-ideological backgrounds.
- .4 Translator Role: The translator becomes the co-author of the political meaning who swings between becoming a gatekeeper, advocate, and a diplomat (Hatim and Mason, 1997).
- .5 Geopolitical Function: These translations are used as a discursive battleground on the broader war of narratives, which has helped to either solidify Western soft power or build a counter-hegemonic narrative.

## Conclusion

- This study has methodically shown that interpretation of political propaganda is a serious ideological mediation exercise. The path between an English source text and an Arabic target text is covered with tactical discursive modifications that reevaluate, reassign, and reformulate political reality. These changes are the immediate result of recontextualization process, pushed by the potent forces of ideology, institutional patronage and cultural struggle. The offered Recontextualization-Based Adaptation Model (RBAM), which is accompanied by the elaborate Integrated CDA Framework, is



a powerful approach to be used in future studies. The implications of the findings are immense to the translation theory, pedagogy, and critical media literacy. It is imperative to know how the propaganda that is translated works in order to create a more discriminative public sphere. Future studies should use larger digital corpora to validate quantitatively and study the reception of the audience to fill the communicative circuit.

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