

The Translation of Emotive Expressions of Victor Hugo's Poems Between English and Arabic

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the translation of emotive expressions in two poems of the French novelist and poet Victor Hugo. The study will examine the rendition of the French emotive expressions found in these two poems into Arabic and English as well trying to investigate the ability of both languages (Arabic and English) to express the same emotional effect of the French texts. This paper presents a comparative study for the ability of Arabic and English to translate such expressions from French.

Keywords: Emotiveness, Victor Hugo, Poems, Connotation, Denotation, Literary Translation, English-Arabic.

About Victor Hugo

As a part of the romantic period that was dominant in Europe towards the end of the 18th century, Victor-Marie Hugo was born on February 26, 1802, at Besançon, in eastern France as the youngest son of Joseph Léopold Hugo who was an officer in Napoleon Bonaparte's army and Sophie Trébuchet. Through a period of about sixty years, he was a prolific poet, novelist, playwright, and dramatist. Hugo is considered one of the best- and well-known French writers all over the world. His most renowned works were his two novels *Les Misérables* (*The Miserables*) and *Notre-Dame de Paris* (*The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*). In addition to his novels, he was also known for his famous poetry collections *Les contemplations* (*The contemplations*) and *La Légende des siècles* (*The legend of the ages*).

Hugo lived a very unstable life due to his father's job as a general in the army with his tasks forcing him to go from one place to another. This affected Hugo's education and poetic skills as Hudson said: "His education was thus very irregular, and even at the Pension Cordier, to which he was presently sent, he devoted himself with more ardour to poetry than to his prescribed studies." (Hudson 1919:207).

Many events had remarkable consequences on him during his life both personally and emotionally. One of them is his exile to Belgium then to Channel Islands as a result of Napoléon Bonaparte taking authority in France. Hugo was a part in the opposition to Napoléon's power which faced three consequences, death, imprisonment, or exile. "According to the new government's own statistics, 380 people (many of them uninvolved civilians) were killed; 26,642 were imprisoned, and 9,769 of those were deported to the notorious penal colonies in Algeria and French Guiana". (Hugo and Blackmore 2004: xi). It is worth mentioning that Hugo returned back to Paris after the abduction of Napoléon the emperor then.

Another important event that influenced Hugo's life tremendously is his daughter's drowning at the Seine with her husband which was a great shock for him. This event will be highlighted in the discussion of the poem *Demain, dès l'aube (Tomorrow at Dawn)* later in this paper.

What is Emotiveness?

The concept of emotiveness and its relationship with translation is an important one especially when dealing with literary texts, poetry in particular which are believed to have emotive expressions more than do other types of texts such as the legal or the scientific texts.

According to *Mariam-Websters*, the meaning of *emotiveness* which comes from the word *emotive* means:

- “1. of or relating to the emotions
2. appealing to or expressing emotion”

And according to *Oxford Learners Dictionary*, Emotive means: “causing people to feel strong emotions.”.

Thus, the emotive meaning lies behind the literal or the conceptual meaning of a lexical item as it is related to the effect a word carries for the receiver. For example, when a man says, “A moon passed by my house last night”, he used the metaphor through which he made his beloved a beautiful lady similar to the moon with all the positive connotations this metaphor carries such as being beautiful and luminescent. Moreover, by using this, he wants everyone listening to him to feel the same way which is done in fact by the use of such metaphor. From this, we can say that” The emotive meaning of a lexical item pertains to the aura of the personal feeling it arouses in the text receiver.” (Farghal and Shunnaq 2011: 133).

Many translation theorists gave definitions for emotiveness each of them looks at it from a different angle. Nida said that “But we not only understand the reference of words; we also react to them emotionally, sometimes strongly, sometimes weakly, sometimes affirmatively, sometimes negatively. This aspect of the meaning which deals with our emotional reactions to words is called connotative meaning.” (Nida 1982:91). That way, what gives the expressive meaning its prominence from the receptor whether a listener or a reader. On the other hand, Newmark considered that the producer of the text whether speaker or writer is the important part saying that “The core of the expressive function is the mind of the speaker, the writer, the originator of the utterance. He uses the utterance to express his feelings irrespective of any response” (Newmark 1988:39).

In such cases, the role of the translator is to create congruency by preserving and conveying the same emotional effect and the same connotations that are found in the original text in order to achieve an authentic version of the ST. It is mentioning worthy that this is not an easy task, rather it is a thorny path that requires lots of attention, critical reading of the ST and a great knowledge of the TL and its culture.

An example to show the importance of translating the connotation of the lexical item and achieving congruency between the SL and the TL is the words (thin, skinny, slim). Those three lexical items are similar in their denotation (conceptual meaning) but they are different in their connotations, and this difference must be conveyed when they are translated into Arabic.

She is a **thin** girl. هي فتاة **نحيفة**
She is a **slim** girl. هي فتاة **نحيلة** / **ممشوقة القوام**
She is a **skinny** girl. هي فتاة **هزيلة**

If we look at the translation of the three lexical items, we find that different equivalent is used for each item to express the accurate meaning and the proper connotation. Thus, the word (thin) is translated into **نحيفة** which is a neutral item expressing neutral meaning. While the word (slim) is rendered into **نحيلة** / **ممشوقة القوام** which expresses a positive connotation. On the other hand, (skinny) which contains a negative connotation is translated into **هزيلة** the word the gives the same negative meaning in Arabic. From this example, we can see how important it is to choose the right emotive equivalent that suits the connotation expressed as these equivalents are not always interchangeable.

The Discussion

As stated earlier, the study aims at investigating how emotive expressions are translated into both Arabic and English to discover conveys the same effect as that of the French text. To achieve this goal, emotive expressions in five poems for the French famous writer and poet

Victor Hugo, were studied and analyzed in order to make a comparison between the Arabic and the English renditions. The five poems and their English translations were taken from the site <https://thefrenchroomhome.wordpress.com/2020/05/07/victor-hugo-famous-poems/>. The Arabic translations were done by رضى القاعوري in his collection.

لنحب دائماً ... لنحب أيضاً (مختارات من الشعر الفرنسي)

1. Demain, dès l'aube (Tomorrow at Dawn)

This poem is Hugo's most famous poem written in 1847 and included in his collection *Les contemplations* (contemplations). Hugo wrote this poem four years after the death of his daughter Léopoldine and her husband who drowned in the Seine.

In this poem, Hugo is declaring that he is going in a journey the next day at early morning (dès l'aube) and at a very early time as he said: à l'heure où blanchit la campagne (at the time when the countryside becomes white as a result of morning dew). Thus, he is planning in advance to do so; the fact that justifies the use of le future simple (the simple future tense) like:

- Je partirai (I will depart)
- J'irai (I will go)
- Je marcherai (I will walk)

In French, this tense is used with future arrangements "le future simple indique en generale une programmation." (Grégoire and Thievenaz 2013:226). This idea should be conveyed when translating the poem to reflect the same effect that Hugo expressed. If we have a look at the two translations of the verb (je partirai) in the second line, we can see that the English rendition is (I will depart) and the Arabic is سأنطلق. The verb (I will depart) does not show the planning of the journey about which Hugo is enthusiastic which is indicated in the French verb. On the other hand, the Arabic verb سأنطلق conveys Hugo's intention of his predetermined journey, thus reflecting the same positive effect of the verb in the SL. To make the English translation more accurate, it should be (I will set out a journey). The verb (set out) expresses this idea of predetermination and the eagerness of the journey; this meaning is found in www.merriam-webster.com: "3: to begin with a definite purpose : INTEND, UNDERTAKE intransitive verb : to start out on a course, a journey, or a career set out across the country"

So, it is not only going out or departing but also having a purpose which is determined earlier.

Another example is the second stanza of the poem where Hugo is portraying his grief, sadness, and loneliness in his journey. The picture he depicted for himself is very gloomy and

sorrowful where he found himself depressed and helpless. In fact, the two target texts were successful in giving the same frame for this scene. In the first line he said:

Je marcherai les yeux fixés sur mes pensées,
Sans rien voir au dehors, sans entendre aucun bruit

These lines depict his status during the journey as detached from any surroundings, even any noise. The English translation of the above lines is:

I will walk, eyes set upon my thoughts
Seeing nothing around me and hearing no sound

The translator was successful in choosing the adjective (set upon) as an equivalent to the French adjective (fixés sur) which means to focus on something giving it all your attention which is the same as in English. According to www.merriam-webster.com, one of the meanings of (set upon) is: “e : to place as an estimate of worthset a high value on life”.

Hugo during his journey was detached, nothing matters and nothing clear to him but his thoughts (pensées) that made him see nothing outside his thoughts (Sans rien voir au dehors) or hear any noise (sans entendre aucun bruit), all of this because he is focusing on his thoughts.

The Arabic translation also conveys this feeling of detachment by also using strong lexical items expressing this. For the first line, the translation is:

سامشي و عيناى مسددتان على افكارى
من دون ان انظر خارجا من دون ان اسمع ضجة

Here, the translator used مسددتان على افكارى as an equivalent for (fixés sur) which was a very successful choice. The adjective مسدد is derived from the verb سدد which means according to المعجم الوسيط: "سدد السهم الى الصيد وجهه اليه" to aim your weapon at a prey which indicates that focusing on your target and putting all your attention on it without paying any to the surroundings.

This gloomy picture continues in the following pair of lines:

Seul, inconnu, le dos courbé, les mains croisées,
triste, et le jour pour moi sera comme la nuit.

Here, Hugo continues describing him by highly expressive words that reflect his emotionally and physically bad situation which is also expressed skillfully in both English and Arabic renditions. He started by the adjectives (seul , inconnu) which are translated into English as (alone, unknown) reflecting his being lonely and alone in this journey and unknown stranger in this place. The Arabic translation also conveyed the same effect as these adjective are translated into

وحيداً مجهولاً.

Hugo went on describing his miserable physical conditions as (le dos courb ,les mains croisées) which indicated that his body also is suffering like his soul. The English translation for this line is: le dos courbé (back bent) , les mains croisées (hands crossed). This rendition is successful in portraying the same picture found in the ST, thus giving a similar effect. When it comes to the Arabic version, also the same applied as the translator chose strong Arabic lexical items to create the same emotion inside the Arabic readers of the text. Le dos courbé is translated into الظهر منحني and les mains croisées و اليدين مكتوفتان which reflect how helpless he is with his bowed back and crossed hands that fact that made him unable to react to any thing around him (the concept of loneliness and detachment). In the last line of this stanza, he reiterated all this when he said:

Triste, et le jour pour moi sera come la nuit

which means that he is sad, day is similar to night for him as he is focusing just on his thought inside his mind. Moreover, in the first stanza he used a verb that exactly conveys his hard status which is:

j'irai par la forêt , j'irai par la montagne

Here he said that during his journey he will pass through the forest and the mountains, in the English TL, the translator translated the verb irai into(go through). The Arabic TL has a stronger verb that evokes more appropriately the emotions indicated by Hugo which is

سأشرد في الغابة ، في الجبل

The choice of the Arabic verb سأشرد was smart because it means to go from one place to another unaware of what is around you and not paying any attention to any sound or any view which is exactly the case with Hugo in his journey. According to المعجم الوسيط : ٤٧٨

- الشروء هو عدم الانتباه الى الظروف المحيطة.
- الشريد الطريد الذي لا مأوى له.

The first one is a noun which means paying no attention to the surrounding circumstances, and the other one is also a noun meaning the person who is wandering and having no shelter. As a result, the verb used which is derived from these nouns best fits the emotive meaning here.

2. **La tombe dit à la rose (The grave Said to the Rose)**

This poem was published in 1837 in Hugo's collection *les Voix Intérieures* (Inner Voices). It is based on a conversation between a grave and a rose in a way that makes it a poem typical to the romantic period to which Hugo belongs.

From the title, we can see that the poem will be full of figurative language as it shows that the protagonists the grave and the rose are given the characteristics of the humans or personification. By doing so, Hugo wanted to create a vivid picture for those two who in fact represent life and death.

The conversation was very simple and smooth but very deep and philosophical. This requires careful thinking when translating since it has many expressive words and expressions. For example, in the second line of the first stanza it is said:

Des pleurs dont l'aube t'arrose
Que fais – tu fleur des amours?

This is the beginning of the conversation where the grave is asking the flower about the (pleurs) drops of water/dew found on it. In the French text Hugo used the word (pleurs) which means according to <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires>: "Larmes de tristesse, d'affliction, de douleur". In the English TL, the translator translated it into (tears) with its connotations of sadness and sorrow. This rendition is not congruent with the connotation that Hugo intended which is positive. Hugo meant that the (pleurs) are a source of life and new starts as it is given to the rose by l'aube (dawn) which is the start of the day when almost all the living creatures wake up and go in their life. Moreover, he called this flower (fleur d'amours) or flower of love, which is also another evidence that Hugo portrayed the flower as a positive side representing life.

On the other hand, the Arabic translator reflects this meaning precisely and thus achieving congruence with the French SL. Translator chose the word ندى as an equivalent to (pleurs) to give the same positive connotations. According to المعجم الوسيط , the word ندى is: " ندى الشيء – ندى و نداوة : ابتل و الأرض أصابها الندى فهو ندو هي ندية" (المعجم الوسيط : ٩١٢) . This is the first meaning of this word which is to get wet, also in the same entry, there is another meaning for this word which is related to generosity and giving:

"أندى فلان : كثر عطاؤه و فضله". (المعجم الوسيط : ٩١٢).

Thus, the English rendition was more successful in conveying the same emotion of the SL.

Another example is in the last lines of the first stanza:

Que fais- tu de ce qui tombe
Dans tons gouffre ouvert toujours?

Here is the question posed by the flower asking about the dead that fall in the grave. Hugo used the word (gouffre) to refer to the grave. According to www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires, gouffre is:

“Cavité profonde et abrupte qui s'ouvre dans les régions calcaires, soit par dissolution, soit par effondrement de la voûte de cavités karstiques.”. Thus, a gouffre is not a mere hole dug in the ground but it is so deep, dark, gloomy, and dangerous. In fact both translations reflect this very same emotive meaning. The English translators opt for (abyss) as a congruent equivalent for (gouffre) as it shares the same connotations. According to <https://www.merriam-webster.com> it is: “an immeasurably deep gulf or great space”. In the same way, also the Arabic translator chose the word هوتك which also reflects the same meaning. In المعجم الوسيط the word هوة means: “الحفرة بعيدة القعر” “that is a hole whose base is very far away. As we can see, Hugo used this word (gouffre) to show a negative attitude towards the grave expressing how terrifying , gloomy, and deary it is. Both translators, were successful in conveying this very same emotions in their renditions.

In addition to this, Hugo used the adjective *sombre* to describe the grave which also expresses the idea of gloominess and sadness. According to <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires>, *sombre* means “Qui est empreint de tristesse, d'inquiétude, chargé de menaces” that is full of sadness , worries and threats. The English translator used the adjective (sombre) which also means deary and gloomy. When it comes to the Arabic text, the translator used the word مظلم which also shares the same connotation of darkness and dreariness.

Another adjective which Hugo loaded with emotions is the adjective (*plaintive*) used to describe the flower. According to <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires>: *plaintive* means: “Qui traduit une douleur, une peine” that is: expressing pain, sadness or complaining. Hugo describes the flower like this to express the grave’s attitudes towards the rose. The grave is annoyed by the rose’s opinion of it as being a gloomy and dreary abyss. This same emotion is reflected by the English equivalent adjective (wistful) which also means sad. the Arabic equivalent نائحة is even stronger in showing this emotive meaning. According to المعجم الوسيط it means: “تاحت المرأة على الميت : بكت عليه بجزع و عويل” (961) which is lamenting and wailing .

Conclusion

Emotive expressions which are abundantly available in literary texts namely poetry is a way to show and express emotions in an aesthetic and indirect way making them problematic in translation. The source of this problem is that in most cases they are culture bound requiring good knowledge of the target culture. Lack of cultural knowledge may lead to incongruent renditions that may give the readers a false impact different from what the source text wants to convey. After discussing these two French poems for the prominent French writer and poet Victor Hugo with their English and Arabic translations, we can say that in most cases the translators were successful in creating the same impact found in the SL especially the Arabic. This is not surprising as Arabic as a highly expressive language and “Emotiveness might be of a particular importance for Arabic readers, because words carry a great deal of emotional content either in themselves or in the context they are imbedded in” (Mahasneh:2016). Consequently, a translator must examine and study very well the words of the SL in order to choose the best congruent equivalent to achieve the goal of the task performed which is creating an ambiance equivalent to that of the SL in order to let the TT readers enjoy the same taste as that enjoyed by the ST readers.

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