

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 9 : 5 May 2009
ISSN 1930-2940

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**The Sociolinguistics and Cultural Considerations of
English-Arabic Translation of Political News**

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Abstract

This paper examines the quality of the message in the Arabic translation of English political news. Our data are 7 pairs of English political news ST and their corresponding Arabic TT.

It aims to find the answers to the research question in: *What are the cultural and sociolinguistics elements that control the English-Arabic political news translation?*

Towards that end, a comparative methodology of the ST and TT will be adopted by paying attention to examine the differences and similarities of the content of the message in the ST and their corresponding message in the TT.

The changes of the message in the Arabic translation could be attributable to many reasons.

In this paper, we are focusing our attention to the message changes in the process of translation that are attributable to the following only: a) stylistic changes, (b) to different sociolinguistic situations, in particular from the view propounded by Fishman (1972) that language is a reflection of the society using the language, and (c) the different perceptions and roles of cultural elements in communication across nations and across different cultures as propounded in Hatim (1997).

The data analyses have shown that cultural words do play important roles in communication among nations and in the process of translation. Hatim's ideas on artifacts, socio-facts and mantifacts have helped the analysis; that is, creating a better understanding of the translating processes in the Arabic translation of English news across different cultures and nations.

Key words: culture, sociolinguistics, translation, message, and political news

Hatim's Concepts on Communication Across Cultures

Hatim (1997: xiii) notes that a careful consideration to a given text means "...someone attempts to mediate in communicating its 'import' across both linguistic and cultural

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boundaries ...” and such an attempt is “... one way of making sure that we do not settle for a partial view of what goes on inside that text.” Hence, he suggests that cultural element plays an important role in communication among nations and in the process of translation.

Hatim has studied texts based on two main elements as follows: (a) the culture of Western and Islamic-Arab and the second, and (b) the socio-linguistic element in situation when they are in contact by using texts that people from different cultures can reach and understand the culture of one another properly (Hatim, 1997:157).

Hatim’s (1997:157) ideas are to view a text within and across a number of cultural boundaries so as to enable the language user from either of the two cultures in question to operate felicitously within the rhetorical conventions not only of the target culture but those of his or her own. Among other things, he makes the following observation:

In the regrettable but not common situation of cross-cultural misunderstandings, which often result in or from a breakdown in communication, what is at the root of the problem is invariably a set of misconceptions held by one party about how the other rhetorically visualize and linguistically realizes of a variety of communicative objectives. Such notions would then be paraded as truisms about the nature of the language of those on the other side, its textual norm and its rhetorical tradition. Hatim (1997:157).

Two Kinds of Audiences

With regards to English and Arabic texts, Hatim (1997:173) identifies two kinds of audiences that the procedures of the two texts assume: the *counter-arguments* which are typically addressed to the skeptical and the *through-arguments* which assume a supportive audience.

On the matter of the nature of the occurrence of audiences with respect to text, Hatim (1997:173) notes the following:

Some texts are going to be more oral than others. While this can certainly implicate text type, it does not necessarily make orality an exclusive property of Arabic, English or any other language. Furthermore, some languages would tend to display a particular preference for this or that strategy, but this does not make tendency in question. These are merely preferences, tendencies, trends. For example, Arabic prefers through-argumentation whereas English orients its rhetorical strategy the other way, towards counter-argumentation. Hatim (1997: 173).

Fishman Sociolinguistic Concept on Language Reflections

One of the major lines of social and behavioral science interest in language during the past century (as in the case of linguistic relativity known as Whorfian Hypothesis, Whorf (1940, 1941) as cited in Fishman (1972:286) has been claimed that the radically differing structures of the language of the world constrain the cognitive functioning of their speakers in different ways, (Fishman,1972:286).

Within the linguistic relativity view, Fishman (1972) notes the following claim:

... the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but it is part of a particular grammar and differs, from slightly to greatly, between grammars seem to be overstated and no one-to-one correspondence between grammatical structure either cognitive or socio-cultural structure measured independently of language has ever been obtained. Fishman (1972: 287).

To counter this view, Fishman (1972) opines that it is less likely that the entire language or entire societies are classified in such general way. Consequently, he offers an alternative sociolinguistic explanation and stresses that (a) languages primarily reflect rather than create socio-cultural regularities in values and orientations and (b) that languages throughout the world share a far larger number of structural universals than has heretofore been recognized. He argues and supports his contention by noting that,

The very concept of linguistic repertoire, role repertoire, repertoire range and repertoire compartmentalization argue against such neat classification once functional realities are brought into consideration. Any reasonably complex speech community contains various speech networks that vary in respect to the nature and ranges of their speech repertoires. Fishman (1972: 288).

Taken as a whole, Fishman's sociolinguistic views above holds that language is a reflection of the socio-cultural and the values and orientations of its speakers rather than it being regarded as a direct consequence or constraint of the cognition of its speakers. On this point Fishman observes that there are ways in which lexicons and languages as a whole are reflective of the speech communities that employ them and stresses further as follows:

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In a very real sense a language variety is an inventory of the concerns and interests of those who employ it at any given time. If any portion of this inventory reveals features not present in other portions this may be indicative of particular stresses or influences in certain interaction networks within the speech community as a whole or in certain role-relationships within the community's total role-repertoire. Fishman (1972: 296).

Fishman on Hebrew and Aramaic Terms

To support the above position, Fishman cites examples from Hebrew and Aramaic terms where they are retained not only for all traditional and sanctified objects but also with certain Germanic elements in order to provide contrastive emphases; for example, *bukh* 'book' versus. *seyfer* 'religious book', scholarly book'; *lerer* 'teacher' versus *melamed* or *rebi* 'teacher of religious subjects' (Fishman, 1972:297).

Language as *parole*

Relative to other theories on language such as generative grammar which is basically cognitive such as in Culicover (1997), and from the viewpoint of language behavior and social behavior, the language reflection view of Fishman is related to language as *parole* (i.e., language as it is actually used) as well as related to the cultural variation and social variation (Fishman, 1972:299).

Hence, it is quite obvious that Fishman favours the idea that language is a reflection of the social organization and he points out that lexicons in particular, and language as a whole, are reflective of the speech communities that employs them. He, however, acknowledges that there are areas in language where the linguistic relativity (i.e., the Whorfian Hypothesis) view may be observed such as in the structuring of verbal interaction and the structure of lexical components.

Our Focus in This Study

In summary, in weighing the sustenance or loss of the value of messages in the Arabic translation of English news as well as on style preferences, this study will take cognizance of Fishman's sociolinguistic view and shall invoke it in the appropriate places.

Data Analysis

Data 1

(1). (a). ST: ' **Bin Laden call falls on deaf ears**'

BBC Monday , 24 April 2006

US intelligence believes the audio tape aired by an Arab TV channel is genuine, making it the fugitive al-Qaeda leader's first message since January. US opposition politicians said it only showed up the Bush administration 's failure to capture Bin Laden.

(b). TT: " بن لادن " حرب صليبيه غريبه ضد لا سلام " قال اسامة بن لادن زعيم تنظيم القاعدة عدة في تسجيل صوتي منسوب اليه ان تحرك الغرب لعزل الحكومة الفلسطينية بقيادة حماس يعني انه "في حرب ضد الاسلام"

(c). Trs: (ben laden: hareb salebleebyah ded al eslam...)
(Qala osama ben laden z'eem tandeem al qa'eda fi tasjeel sawti mansub eleih
ena taharuk alghrb l 'zel al hukuma al filisteenyh biqeyadat hamas y'ni enahu fi harb ded al eslm.)

The underlined constituents of the ST in (1a), *the fugitive al-Qaeda leader's*, is given a syntactic structure in (a'), its corresponding Arabic translation, *زعيم تنظيم القاعدة* (*z'eem tandeem al qa'eda*), is given the structure in (b') below:

(a') ...the fugitive al Qaeda leader... (b') زعيم تنظيم القاعدة عدة
(...z'eem tandeem 'al qa'eda...)

In the above example, it is noticed that the Arabic term *القاعدة* (*al-Qaeda*) has been borrowed in the English political news in (1a). The translator has used the same determiner phrase in the TT in (1b) as evidenced from its transliteration in (1c). Syntactically, it is also noticed that the same determiner phrase is sandwiched between two constituents, *the fugitive* and *leader*. As *القاعدة* (*al-qa'eda*) is an Arabic determiner phrase, the translator has retained it in the Arabic news as in (1b').

As for the phrase *al-Qaeda leader's* which has the structure [D'-N'] as in (a') above has changed to *زعيم تنظيم القاعدة* (*z'eem tandeem al-qa'eda*) which stylistically is [N-N-D'] sequence as in (b') above. The structural difference is that the political terms *al-Qaeda* has been written after two nouns, namely *زعيم* (*z'eem*) 'leader' and *تنظيم* (*tandem*) 'organizing'. In addition, it is noticed that the translator has used the definite article *ال* (*al*) 'the' to make the noun definite in both the ST and the TT texts. In addition, it has been noticed that the lexical adjective word 'the fugitive' in the ST is changed into *تنظيم* (*tandem*) 'organizing'. These changes in the description of Bin Laden's attributes are partly due to the ideological perspectives the translator might have in his/her mind about Bin Laden.

Data 2

(2a') 'Our goal is not defending the khartum government but to defend Islam its land and its people',

It is noticed that the translator has respected most of the words when translating the ST into Arabic text. It is noticed also that there is some structural stylistic correspondence between the ST text and the TT text. That is, basically both are similar: one principal clause followed by a series of conjoined clauses. Hence it is in keeping with a literal translation discussed under this heading. The only difference is that the Arabic sentence is introduced by a complementizer ان (*ena*) 'that'. In addition, there is an obvious introduction of the definite article ال (*al*) 'the' in some of the Arabic words such as الخرطوم (*al-Khartum*) 'the Khartum', الدفاع (*al-defa*) 'the defence', الاسلام (*al eslam*) 'The Islam' when these definite articles do not exist in the corresponding ST text. This is in keeping with Hatim's (1997) view that it is culturally inherent in Arabic to begin a sentence with a clause introducer, 'a complementizer', and to use a definite article when the content discursively calls for the use of the definite article such as in the case of الخرطوم (*al Khartum*) 'The Khartum', الدفاع (*al defa*) 'the defence' to show the sharing of knowledge about entities. In addition, the translator has translated the whole direct statement in the way it should be in Arabic text. The full translation is to reflect Bin Laden's perspectives in terms of his ideological thinking towards Islamic nations all over the world, and to make the international Islamic communities support his ideological campaign against the West.

Data 3

(3) (a): ST: **Abbas moves to Gaza for pull out**

BBC: Monday, 25 July, 2005

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas has announced he is moving his office to Gaza until the completion of Israel's withdrawal from the territory.

(b) TT: عباس ينقل مقره الى غزة لمتابعة الانسحاب الاسرائيلي

اعلن الرئيس الفلسطيني محمود عباس انه سينقل مكتبه الى غزة حتى انتهاء الانسحاب الاسرائيلي من القطاع

(c) Trs: 'bas yanqul maqarahu ela ghaza li mutaba't al ensehab al esraeli

A'lana al raees al filistini mahmud abas enahu sayanqul maktabahu ela ghaza hata entiha al ensehab al esraeeli min al qata'.

It is noticed that in the (a'-b') above, the translator has changed the present continuous tense of the ST to a future simple tense س (*sa*) 'will' and ينقل (*yanqel*) 'move'. Besides, the translator has kept the sentence structure [Spec- I'-V'-N'] in both languages. While the basic structure remains similar, the shift in the tense is in keeping with the inherent style of the Arabic language which is in congruence with Hatim's (1997) view when translating across cultural boundaries.

Data 4

(4) ST (a): **Iraq poised to choose new premier**

BBC: Saturday, 22 April 2006

A close ally of Mr. Jaafri, he recently headed a committee that purged members of Saddam Hussein's Bath party from public life, raising fear his nomination might be rejected by Sunni factions. However, Sunni politicians indicated they would not oppose him.

(b) TT : الجمعية الوطنية العراقية تنضرب في ترشيح المالكي

يذكر ان المالكي قيادي في حزب الدعوة الذي يرأسه الجعفري، وقد ترأس في الاونة الاخيرة لجنة حضرت على اعضاء حزب البعث العراقي المشاركة في الحياة السياسية.

(c) Trs: *Yuthkar ana al maliki qeeyadi fi hezeb al da'wa al lathi yrasah al j'fari, wa qad taras fi al aweena al akheera lejna hadarat 'la a'da hezb al b'th al 'raqi al mushareeka fi al hayat al seyaseeyah*

The second example is about an adverb that is proximated to a verb, [v_{adv} [recently] headed]. Here, the translator has translated the English adverb *recently* as Arabic *في الاونة الاخيرة* (*fi al awena al akheera = fi 'in', al awena 'minute/period', al akheera 'last'*). The structures are noticeably different in that the [Subj-(ADV)-V-Object] word-order of the ST has changed to [Conj-I-V-P-ADV] structure in Arabic. The N' subject has been dropped and the sentence begins with a conjunction. It is a variation that the translator has used in the process of translating the English adverb into Arabic in congruence with Hatim's (1997) view of translating across different cultures.

Data 5

(5) (a) ST: Iraq poised to choose new premier.

BBC: Saturday, 22 April 2006

The main Sunni coalition, the Iraqi Accord Front, has shown initial agreement with Mr Maliki's nomination, a spokesman said.

(b) TT: الجمعية الوطنية العراقية تنضرب في ترشيح المالكي.

وكانت جبهة التوافق العراقي وهي ابرز الجماعات السننية قد ابدت يوم الجمعة موافقتها المبدئية على ترشيح جواد المالكي لمنصب رئيس الوزراء.

(c) Trs: *Wa kanat jabhat al tawafeq al 'raqeeyah wa heya abraza al jama'at al suneeyah fi al bilad qad abdat al youm al jum'a muwafaqateha al mabdaeyah 'la tarsheeh juad al maleke lemansab reasat al wizara.*

The noun phrase of the structure [D'-N'] in ...*the main Suni coalition*...of the ST has changed into a complex conjoined noun phrase [conj-N-A-D'D'] in the Arabic TT as in *و هي ابرز الجماعات السنية (wa heya abraz al jama'at al Suneeyah) 'and- she- main -the group- the Sunnis'*. Here, the translator has translated the above noun English phrase into Arabic with a different structural form as perceived by him and incongruence with his perception of the Arabic language. In particular, he begins his phrase with a conjunction *و (wa)* 'and' and added the necessary determiners *ال (al-)* 'the' for each of the nouns so that it becomes grammatically acceptable and easily understood by an Arabic reader . In terms of its content, the existence of the two Iraqi political parties, namely 'Shia group' and 'Sunni group' in the ST which have been translated or paraphrased into the TT, are pointers to indicate that the Iraqi government has been politically and ideologically divided into these parties.

Data 6

(6) (a) ST: **Iraq poised to choose new premier'**

BBC: Saturday, 22 April 2006

Members of Iraq's new parliament meet on Saturday to vote on a new prime minister and other posts after months of wrangling over candidates.

(b) TT: *الجمعية الوطنية العراقية تنضر في ترشيح المالكي*
تعقد الجمعية الوطنية العراقية (البرلمان) اجتماعا اليوم السبت للمصادقة على عدد من المناصب السيادية في الدولة بما فيها
اكثر هذه المناصب اثارا للجدل و هو منصب رئيس الحكومة .

(c) Trs: *T'aqed al jam'eyah al wataneeyah al 'raqeeyah (al barlaman) ejtema'an al*
youm al sabt lil musadaqa 'ala adad min al manaseb al seyadiyah fi al dawlah
bima fiha akthar hatheh al manaseb ethara lil jadal wa huwa manseb raees al
hukuma.

What used to be a verb phrase complement in the ST, ..*on Saturday v[to vote on a new Prime Minister]* has been translated into Arabic TT as a series of determiner phrases and prepositional phrases. There is no verb. So, the structure is completely changed. The verb *to vote* in the ST text has been translated into TT as a postposition determiner phrase *على للمصادقة على (lil musadaqa 'la)* 'the endorsement on' = [D-N-P]. Apparently, the translator has translated it in accordance with his perception of the Arabic language and hence making it appropriate to the Arabic readers which is congruent with Fishman's (1972) ideas that language is a reflection of the socio-cultural and the values and orientations of its speakers.

Data 7

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(7a) ST: **Maliki endorsed as new Iraqi PM**

BBC: Saturday, 22 April 2006

'Arms should be in the hands of the government. There is a law that calls for the merging of militias with the armed forces', Mr. Maliki was quoted as saying.

(b) TT: الما لكي : اريد تشكيل حكومة تمثل اطراف المجتمع العراق
قال الما لكي انه ينبغي وضع كافة الاسلحة تحت تصرف الحكومة

(c) Trs: *qala al-maleki enahu yanbaghi wada kafat al-asleha tahta tasaruf al hukuma.*

Data 8:

(8) (a) ST: **US troops on Iraq abuse charges**

BBC: Wednesday, 27 July

he said the abuses were allegedly carried out while the soldiers were on operations in Baghdad.

(b) TT: اتهم جنود امريكيين بسوء معاملة سجناء عراقيين
11 جنديا امريكييا في العراق بسوء معاملة المحتجزين خلال العمليات العسكرية في بغداد , حسبما قال الجيش الامريكي.

(c) Trs: *Bi sua mua'malat al muhtajazeen khelal al 'maleyat al-a'skareeyah fi Baghdad...*

Basically, the structures in both the ST and the TT are similar in that in both cases the prepositions are retained within the general structure of [P-D']. There is a difference, however, in the prepositions that are being used so as to suit the nature of the perception of the Arabic speakers which is in congruence with Fishman's (1972) views that the nature of language use especially in the repertoire range and network of interactions of linguistic elements within a society is to a large extent the sociolinguistic reflections of its speakers.

Conclusion

It has been found that translating from English news into Arabic has involved many linguistic forms (words, phrases, clauses, sentences, metaphorical expressions) that have cultural imports. As has been suggested by Hatim (1997), such cultural words do play important roles in communication among nations and in the process of translation. Hatim's ideas on artifacts, socio-facts and mantifacts have helped the analysis; that is, creating a better understanding of the translating processes in the Arabic translation of English news across different cultures and nations. In particular, we have been able to explain and to

attribute to cultural/ideological difference many translation phenomena and translation problems that are related to metaphors and other culturally/ideologically loaded linguistic forms.

The study also has noted that Fishman's (1972) sociolinguistic views and concepts have been useful in our study. In particular, his views that language is a reflection of the socio-cultural and the values and orientations of its speakers rather than it being regarded as a direct consequence or constraint of the cognition of its speakers have helped us provide an explanation for many translation phenomena that otherwise would have been difficult to explain. . In terms of Fishman's (1972) sociolinguistic view, the seemingly awkward Arabic translation will become not awkward if the Arabic translation is seen from the socio-cultural and ideological perspectives of the Arab speakers. That is, since it is a reflection of the Arab society and its speakers, what seems awkward and incorrect (from the outside world) has to be accepted as a correct translation in that language which is a reflection of the speakers of that society.

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