

Translating Poetry: Possibility or Impossibility?

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Abstract

Translating poetry is considered one of the most complicated types of translations. It encounters many difficulties, the most important of which is the question of possibility or impossibility of translating poetry. So, it is better to start by asking the following question: is the translation of poetry possible? Or is it impossible? It is definitely a rhetorical question because translation is as old as the presence of translated texts, which fills the shelves of libraries. One can ask despite these difficulties, who would discourage people of the world from translating poetry merely because it is fundamentally impossible? (Mann, 1970: 211) The present paper will elaborate, in more detail, upon the necessary traits of translation and poetry, and will seek the intellectual attitudes that deal with the issue of the possibility or impossibility of translating poetry by representing the views with or against the translation of poetry, as well as shedding some light on the problematic issues to be tackled in this arena. Finally, it will adopt a certain assessment model of a selection of texts that show the impossibility of translating poetry. It is worth mentioning that the idea of writing a paper on this theme is the outcome of the researcher's work with poets. The researcher have edited and translated a book from English into Arabic entitled **On Poetry and Translating Poetry** (2012, Beirut: Al-Jamal Publishing House). She faced many problems that urged her to write this paper, among which, for instance, are the phonological, linguistic and cultural ones. The paper will adopt translations taken from this book to show these difficulties.

ترجمة الشعر: ممكنة أم مستحيلة؟

خالدة حامد تسكام

كلية التربية للبنات - قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

المخلص

تعد ترجمة الشعر واحدة من أعقد أنواع الترجمات؛ فهي تلاقي صعوبات جمة لعل أهمها مسألة إمكانية الترجمة أو استحالتها. وعليه، من الأفضل البدء بطرح السؤال الآتي: هل ترجمة الشعر ممكنة؟ أم أنها مستحيلة؟ إنه بالتأكيد سؤال لا يستدعي أية إجابة لأن الترجمة موهبة في القدم بقدر قدم النصوص المترجمة التي تملأ رفوف المكتبات. لكن بمقدورنا أن نردد ما قاله توماس مان (١٩٧٠: ٢١١) أنه على الرغم من هذه الصعوبات فمن يستطيع تثبيط عزيمة أي شخص في العالم على ترجمة الشعر فقط لأن هذه المهمة مستحيلة أصلاً؟ يتناول البحث الراهن، وبشي من التفصيل، السمات اللازمة لترجمة الشعر، كما يسعى إلى عرض الاتجاهات الفكرية التي تخوض في مسألة إمكانية ترجمة الشعر أو استحالتها من خلال طرح الآراء المؤيدة والمناهضة لذلك، فضلاً عن تسليط الضوء على الإشكالات التي تصاحب هذا الحقل. كما سنتبنى أنموذج تقويم معين لمجموعة مختارة من النصوص التي تعدّ شاهداً على استحالة ترجمة الشعر. وجدير بالذكر أن فكرة كتابة بحث عن موضوع كهذا هي حصيلة عمل الباحثة مع الشعراء؛ إذ قامت بتحرير وترجمة كتاب من الإنكليزية إلى العربية عنوانه "في الشعر وترجمته" (٢٠١٢، دار الجمل للنشر، بيروت) واجهت فيه عقبات كثيرة كانت سبباً في كتابة هذا البحث، منها، على سبيل المثال، الصوتية واللسانية والثقافية. وسيتمتع البحث بترجمات من هذا الكتاب تبين تلك الصعوبات.

Introduction

Translation is a highly complicated process. It is defined as a transfer of meaning from one language to another. But sometimes we hear people who do not speak or read a foreign language often have mistaken points of view on the nature of translation. Many of them consider it merely a mechanical process which is similar to decoding (Hopkins, 1976: 114). As for Roman Ingarden (cited in Volmer, 1986: 203), he states that the translation of a work

is never completely adequate; it is a problem in itself. Besides, it is, as Quirk (cited in Bassnet, 1980: 5) claims, "one of the most difficult tasks that a writer can take upon himself," while Richards (cited in Nida, 1993: 1) claims that it "is probably the most complex type of event in the history of the cosmos."

Any step on the way of translation encounters many problems and challenges. One can say that the translation of poetry may be the most challenging than other types of translation because of the peculiarity of poetry. Accordingly, two notions are of relevance, here, to understand this paper, i.e., translation' and poetry.

What Is Translation?

It is possible to start with Brislin (1976: 1) who notes that

The general term referring to the transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language (source) to another (target), whether the languages are in written or oral form; whether the languages have established orthographies or do not have such standardization or whether one or both languages is based on signs, as with sign languages of the deaf.

It is also defined as "rendering the meaning of a text into another language" (Newmark 1988:5). Accordingly, this process requires the source language (henceforth SL) translator to find a functional equivalent in the target language (henceforth TL).

Some theorists talk about the importance of translation to the extent that they do not consider a certain text as truly existed only after it has been translated.

"Translation comes into being inside change itself, at times it seems to confuse itself with change while still remaining active. To translate is to take something beyond itself. To transform something into something else. One translates a book from one language into another and to the person who knew not the language of the original, the book, while still the same book, begins to truly exist only after it has been translated."(Murena 1973: 83-84)

Consequently, one may compare writing with translation; the former opens a window within oneself and within one's own language, while the latter offers the double advantage of being "an instrument for exploring the world outside, while bringing that same world in, and making it exist only after it has undergone a substantial transformation." (Broeck, 1990: 97)

It can also be regarded as a bridge between different worlds, as well as being a vital means of communication among peoples who speak different languages, so they use translation to cope with the diversity of languages. In other words, it plays a vital role in building bridges connecting disconnected peoples.

What is Poetry?

When turning to poetry, one finds that:

"Language is the medium of literature as marble, bronze or clay that are the materials of the sculptor. Since every language has its distinctive peculiarities, the innate formal limitations and possibilities of one literature are never quite the same as those of another. When one uses language in an unusual way that arouses our feelings, it is possible then to call it poetry."(Sapir, 2000: 285)

The language of poetry, thanks to its standards, which knows no boundaries, can give rise to feelings of taste, touch and smell (Sartre, 1988: 49). The reason behind this fact is that poets select words echoing their feelings, thought and the response they wish to evoke in their readers in an imaginative way.

So, to give a simple definition of poetry, one can say that it is a word of an ancient Greek origin: ποιέω (poieo). It means “to make, to create” (Moody, 1979: 39). Hence, a poem is “something made or created”, the poet is the creator who uses the language to create his/her work of art through the language.

One can say that the clearest characteristic of poetry is that its unwillingness to be defined, or labeled, but Emily Dickinson (cited in Bartlett, 1955: 649) once mentioned that:

"If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?"

Plato states that “the poet is the light and winged holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and reason is no longer in him” (Raffel, 2010:Vii). That's why many critics argue that it is the poet who must tackle this job, i.e., translating poetry.

Aristotle considers poetry analogous to philosophy, by arguing that:

"A poet differs from a historian, not because one writes verse and the other prose, but because the historian relates what happened, the poet what might happen. That's why poetry is more akin to philosophy and better than history. It deals with truths, while history with specific events." (Yanal, 1982:499)

Accordingly, the translator of poetry must be totally aware of these things and absorb them keenly in order to do his job creatively. To Raffel (2010: vii) ‘the translator of poetry must be himself a poet’. This fact is also focused on by Rose (1981:136) who stresses that the translator of poetry should be excellent in his/her own language and be immersed in its cultural and poetic depths. S/he must try to be identical with the original poet on all levels. He must decipher the original text and let himself/herself be absorbed in its uniqueness. In order to make his translation of the SL poem seem a TL poem, the translator must also go in line with the poetic atmosphere of the TL. That's why the most successful translators of poetry to the target language are those who are poets themselves.

As for the poem, Cudden (1976: 678) defines it as "a work of art, a composition, a work of verse, which may be in rhyme or may be blank verse or a combination of the two. Or it may depend on having a fixed number of syllables."

Hence, the translation of poetic texts, as Newmark (1988: 162) states, is "the most testing type of translation." It is known that it is harder than the translation of other types of texts because the literary work is not only an idea or mobile news, but is a basic experience that is laden with the sensations and different perceptions of literature. It is a product designed to achieve aesthetic pleasure. It is therefore obligatory for the translator to be as keen as possible to revive the spirit of the original text without distorting its beauty.

Moreover, “poetic language does not seek to describe reality, but to recreate it – it deals more directly with man’s immediate lived experience in the world and thus “opens new possibilities for him”(Ravindran, 1982:83).

It is possible to claim that the aesthetic value or poetic truth of a literary work depends on creative elements such as structure, the internal music and metaphor (Newmark, 1982: 65).

Prevailing Views on Translating Poetry

One may start here with Wilss (1982: 114) who argues that:

"What seems undeniable is that some texts are more easily translatable than others. In general, it can be asserted that a text with an aesthetic function will contain elements which will make its reproduction in a different language difficult, whereas a text with a merely informative

function will be easier to translate. Since the question of translatability versus untranslatability began to be considered, the need has been felt by some scholars to produce taxonomy of text types according to their degree of translatability."

Accordingly, the following section will review the attitudes concerning the translation of poetry.

Arguments against the Translation of Poetry

One may start here with Burnshaw (1995: 56) who asserts that "no one believes that the poetic effect of a certain arrangement of words in one language can be the same as the poetic effect of words in another language."

Translatability of poetry has long been seen as an important issue among scholars. Some believe that poetry will inevitably be lost in translation, while others state that everything, particularly poetry, is translatable but "the final test of a translated poem must be: does it speak, does it sing?" (Mathews, 1966: 68). In reality poetry has been translated in the past, and will continue to be translated in the future.

The translation of poetry is blocked by certain problems to the extent that Arberry (1957: 246) argues that "the attempt does not worth the effort; disaster is inevitable".

Here, it is possible to start by postulating, as Jakobson (1966: 238) argued, that poetry is untranslatable and "only creative transposition is possible."

But one may trace the origins of this opinion by turning to Sapir (2000: 285) who denies the possibility of translating literary works, and distinguishes a level in translation that lies in a generalized language to express scientific facts "because the thought is nothing but the language stripped of its external clothes." Besides, he stresses that it is impossible to find two languages identical in their vision to the same social reality (ibid: 36).

Moreover, most of the scholars and translators believe that poetry is untranslatable. For Dante (cited in Brower, 1966: 271), all poetry is untranslatable.

According to Catford (1965: 94), untranslatability is caused by two sources: linguistic and cultural. He argues that linguistic untranslatability is due to the difference in the SL and the TL, whereas cultural untranslatability is due to the absence in the TL of relevant situational features.

As for Longfellow and Martindale (cited in Brower, 1966: 271), they stress that the translation of poetry will definitely lead to the loss of its basic qualities.

Newmark (1988: 70) believes "the translation of poetry is the field where most emphasis is normally put on the creation of a new independent poem, and where literal translation is usually condemned."

Robert Frost (cited in Bassnet & Lefèvre, 1998: 57) describes poetry as "what gets lost in translation". He means that it is impossible to transfer qualities of a poem from one language into another. While Landers (2000:97) argues that translating poetry is so difficult to the extent that it is called impossible by most experts.

Venuti (2004: 154) argues that "only rarely can one reproduce both content and form in a translation, and hence in general the form is usually sacrificed for the sake of the content".

Concerning the Arab scholar Jahiz (2003: 79), he says that " the translator cannot do what the poet says because of the characteristics of latter's meanings, realities of his doctrines, minutes of his precise briefs, and the secrets of his limitations. Hence, he cannot be faithful at all." He adds that poetry "cannot be translated and should not be transferred because when rendered, it lacks rhyme, beauty, and exclamation, contrary to prose." (Ibid: 75)

Arguments for the Translation of poetry

Dryden (cited in Frost, 1969: 72) emphasized that poetry is translatable but the one who should translate poetry must be a poet.

Benjamin (1968:76) argues that there is nothing "lost" in translation, but, on the contrary, there is something "gained" by birth of a text which will not be mere a replica of the original but will have the ability to achieve a sort of equivalence to the SL. Accordingly, the "task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original." (ibid: 77)

Nida (1984:104) argues that "anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential element of the message".

Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (cited in Robinson, 2010: 58) says that poetry is translatable, like everything else. He argues that translating from one language into another is a mathematical task, and the translation of a lyrical poem, for example, into a foreign language is quite analogous to a mathematical problem.

Strategies of Translating Poetry

One may start with the following statement by Wilss (1982: 35) which seems very applicable to the translation of poetry:

"All translation seems to me simply an attempt to solve an impossible task. Every translator is doomed to be done in by one of two stumbling blocks: he will either stay too close to the original, at the cost of taste and the language of his nation, or he will adhere too closely to the characteristics peculiar to his nation, at the cost of the original. The medium between the two is not only difficult, but downright impossible."

Lefevere (1975: 20) suggests that there are seven strategies for translating poetry. They are as follows:

1. Phonemic translation. It attempts to reproduce the SL sound in the TL while at the same time attempting to render the meaning accurately.
2. Literal translation. Here, the translator concentrates on word-for-word translation in a way that distorts the meaning and the syntax of the original.
3. Metrical translation, where the dominant criterion is the reproduction of the SL meter.
4. Poetry into prose. Lefevere asserts that this strategy totally distorts the SL verse by turning it into prose.
5. Rhymed translation. Here, the translator pays a great attention to meter and rhyme.
6. Blank verse translation. The translator here is also besieged by many strict rules.
7. Interpretation. Here, the translator keeps the core of the poem while sacrificing form in a way that may lead to the birth of a new poem that keeps nothing of the original poem but the title.

Accordingly, the translator is the one who decides which strategy to adopt when facing the problems of translating poetry. In this paper, the last strategy will be adopted.

Difficulties of Translating Poetry

When talking about translating poetry one may risk to enter a hazardous area. The main difficulty lies in how to understand the original text in its own home and not how to re-draft to the target one. If the difficulties of re-drafting are mainly rhetorical, the problems of understanding lead to displacements and distortions in the transferred expression in a way that may lead to the total destruction of the translated meaning.

Yet, the translated poetry remains the medium of contact with other cultures. Such a process will open a wide window through which one can look at the foreign creations.

The difficulties of translating poetry are so hard to the extent that Shelley (cited in Bassnet & Lefevere, 2001:58) once declared that:

"It were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its color and odor, as to seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower."

Nida and Taber (1969:205) stress that the main goal of translating poetry is to cause the same, or at least, a similar effect as the original by saying that:

"The message is conveyed by means of dynamic translation, conveying the total meaning or content of a discourse; the concepts and feelings which the author intends the reader to understand and perceive."

But is it possible to do this job as safely as possible? In other words, can the translator render the SL poetry into the TL without a risk? This is of course impossible, since every language is in itself a collective art of expression in which one can find a deeply hidden set of aesthetic factors—phonetic, rhythmic, symbolic and morphological—that it does not completely share with any other language (Sapir: 2000: 285).

According to Raffel (2010:12) the impossibility of translating poetry appears on many levels. This is the model which will be adopted for the rest of the paper, supported from translations from the researcher's translated book. They are as follows:

1. The Phonological Level

It is well-known that no two languages share the same pattern of sounds. This means that there is no correspondence between the SL and the TL. This is represented in an important phonological feature, which is called rhyme. It is an indispensable element in most metric poetry for which it is very difficult to find an equivalent.

Poetry has always been in an intimate relationship to music. It "is an art of rhythm but is not primarily an effective means of communication like music" (Milosz, 1983: 25).

Jakobson (1966: 39) shows the uniqueness of poetry by arguing that in poetry there is a sort of equivalence in the design of the poem; every single syllable is equalised with any other syllable in order to create the emotive function.

Consequently, one can rarely find terms in the SL and the TL having the same phonological values. So, the translator has no choice but to get alternatives with sounds different from those in the original.

The American poet Robert Bly is an example of a poet whose terms are odd in that they seem easily apprehended, but as one looks closely at them, they become more indescribable. In other words, there is a sense of a real playfulness in them. As for sound, it is totally lost in translation. Here's a short prose poem called "A Hollow Tree", by Robert Bly (Nelson, 1984: 224):

I bend over an old hollow cottonwood stump, still standing, waist high, and look inside early spring. Its Siamese temple walls are all brown and ancient. The walls have been worked on by the intricate ones. Inside the hollow walls there is privacy and secrecy, dim light. And yet some creature has died there.

On the temple floor feathers, grey feathers, many of them with a fluted white tip. Many feathers. In the silence many feathers.

The poet says that in "I bend over an old hollow cottonwood stump," one can hear three (ohs) in a short space and how the (ay) comes in strongly. With "high," the first (ai) sound establishes itself, returning again with "inside" and "Siamese." Then the awl sound comes in three times. When one says "the temple walls are all brown and ancient," the (ay) comes in once more, and the (ow) sound becomes linked with n's, and soon the (n) sounds begin to flood the poem with their (n) energy:

**"The temple walls are all brown and ancient.
The walls have been worked on by the intricate ones."**

Moreover, because the (ai's) are coming along, "privacy" is self-identified as an important word. And so it's the (ai) sound that is really doing the emotional function here; and it comes again with "died." In the next paragraph the word "temple" takes the (m) sound from "stump" and the (m) in Siamese and then "many." It seems that the poet thinks about all of this when writing his poem.

But when we look at the translation of this poem, we find out that everything the poet concentrated on, as regards the sound, is totally lost. So, a poem which is created according to English phonological patterns that make it read well is considered here as untranslatable because of its phonological bases.

شجرة جوفاء

انحنيت على جذع شجرة حور قطني، ما يزال شاخصاً، بارتفاع خصر، نظرت بداخله. بداية الربيع . جدران
هيكله السيامي كلها بنية وعتيقة. الجدران أبلتها جدرانها المتشابكة. داخل الجدران الجوفاء ثمة خلوة وسرية، ضوء
باهت. ومع ذلك ثمة مخلوق مات هناك.
على أرضية الهيكل ريش ، ريش رمادي، معظمه بطرف أبيض محرز . ريش كثير .
في الصمت ريش كثير .

2. The Linguistic Level

This level can be represented by two sublevels; the words and meaning which are shown through images, similes, metaphors,...etc., that may lead to a very sensitive relationship among the words and the redistribution of their places in the poetic line. Mallarme (cited in Burnshaw,1995: 56) asserts that "poetry is made with words", so it is impossible to transfer the charge of words from one language into another since the words in any piece of poetry are unique.

In addition, Blanchot (cited in Gelpi,1990: 517), says that words are "monsters with two faces, one being reality, physical presence, and the other meaning, ideal absence."

Hence, the task of the translator is very difficult. S/he must understand the exact meaning the author has intended among the numerous meanings of the word. On the other hand, s/he will be confused when trying to get the correct equivalent.

That is why Emily Dickinson argues that "the words must be under close examination of a translator in order to discover the original writer's denotative meaning (i.e., the dictionary meaning) or the connotative meaning, "which is the associated meanings that have built up around the word, or what the word connotes" (Charters, 1987: 837)

Jahiz (2003: 368) says that "every industry had got words for its people after testing other words that were not attached to it only after having problems between them and the industry"

Benjamin (1968: 77) believes that words have "emotional connotations" and that "a literal rendering of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility" (ibid: 78).

It is possible, here, to look at the poem entitled *I and the* by the American poet Bernstein (Gelpi, 1990: 517):

I and the
to that you
it of a
know was uh
in but is

this me about

just don't my
what I'm like
or have so

it's neat think
be with he
well do for

Such kinds of poems represent a major challenge to the translator's linguistic judgment and word selection when translating. In "*I and the*" Bernstein simply writes a list of words compiled by a researcher in a descending order of frequency of usage from a data base consisting of the transcripts of 225 psychoanalytic sessions. Though it depersonalizes the patients into faceless and voiceless speakers, it tells the reader something about their pathological history.

When the translator is faced with words and expressions which are absent in the TL, s/he has to convey the original meaning by adding a footnote, for example, to explain its meaning because if it is translated literally, there is no similarity between the intended meaning and the translated one. Moreover, the aesthetic presentation in the SL reflects features of the SL but the TL reader may find it illogical. In this particular example there is no equivalent to these deleted words. Accordingly, it is possible to say that translation, here, is totally impossible.

3. *The vocabulary Level*

No two languages share the same words. Any word can express a totally unexpected meaning when used in a particular context. Any word can vary in meaning depending on context, its relation to other words, time, place, intention of its creator, topic, etc. For example, the use of the polysemy; one word may be used in more than one meaning, such as the word "مكتبة"; there is a 'library' المكتبة العامة, a 'book collection' المكتبة الخاصة بشخص ما, and 'bookshop' or 'bookstore' المكتبة التي تباع الكتب .

Here, one may take the word 'rail' in the American poet Robert Bly's poem *Melancholy* (Nelson, 1984: 236):

*And the years he moved .
A wreath of dark fir and shiny laurel Slips off the hand.*

When we check the meaning of 'rail' in the dictionary, we find the following different meanings:

سكة حديدية

Rail (railway, railroad)

حاجز

Barrier (partition, bar, rail, fence, barricade)

فضيب

Bar (rod, rail, stick, shaft)

سياج

Fence (fencing, enclosure, rail, hedgerow, paling)

درايزين الدرج

Rail

درازين في السفينة

Rail

طائر الماء

Rail

نُمة رجل عرفته وأحببته .
وبينما نئصت لتاريخ زواجه
والسنوات التي تنقل بها،
Uḡāḡ Ūḡā 5 Ūḡāḡ Dḡāḡ 5 ḡāḡ

Hence, one may say that these semantic differences demand different treatments depending on the TL translation. If the translator does not succeed in recognizing the specific meaning of a particular context, s/he will certainly fail to translate the text correctly.

4. The Literary or Aesthetic Level

Aesthetic values, or poetic truth, in a poem are, according to Newmark (1982: 65), dependent on the structure (or poetic structure), metaphor, and sound. These values have no independent meaning, but they are important in the text. If the translator destroys the word order, and the sounds, s/he distorts the beauty of the original poem. So, the problem in translating a verse is how to retain the aesthetic values in the TL text, which are dependent on the structure and sound.

Schleirmacher (cited in Vollmer, 1986: 78) stresses that the literary meaning always involves a second meaning. If the translator does not apprehend the second meaning along with the first one, s/he will miss the intended meaning even though s/he may be able to get the literal meaning. Literary meaning or metaphorical meaning is considered a "deviation from what speakers of a language apprehend as ordinary, or standard, significance or sequence of words in order to achieve some special meaning or effect." (Abrams, 1971: 63)

Besides, Bloomfield (1933: 139) underpins the difficulty of rendering literary works by saying that:

"We can define the names of minerals, for example, in terms of chemistry and mineralogy; as when we say that the ordinary meaning of the English word salt is "sodium chloride (NaCl)",...but we have no precise way of defining words like love or hate, which have not been accurately classified and these latter are in the great majority."

Here, the translator must endeavor to preserve the emotions, the hidden message of the poet as well as the distinctiveness of the style when translating poetry in order to get the closest effect in the TL as it is in the SL.

This can be explained by the following example in Eliot's poem 'Mr. Apollinax' (Murphy, 2007: 316):

He laughed like an irresponsible foetus.

His laughter was submarine and profound

When we check the meaning of 'submarine' in the dictionary, we find that it is "غواصة" but it means here 'عميق'. So, this line is translated as:

ضحكك مثل جنين لا مسؤول
و كانت ضحكته عميقة لا تُسبَر

5. The Syntactic Level

No two languages share the same syntax. It is well known that syntax plays a major role in determining the possibility or impossibility of translating poetry (Raffel, 2010:6).

English and Arabic belong to different language families and cultural systems. This difference is directly reflected in the way people think and use their language.

Arabic has its own system of arranging concepts into different parts of speech. It may use the verb form instead of a noun form. For example, in Robert Bly's poem "**November Day at McClure's**," one can notice that the noun phrase in the SL is replaced by a verb phrase in the TL (Nelson, 1984: 294).

*The sky comes down closer,
the unobserved water rushes out to the horizon,
horses galloping in a mountain valley at night.*

يزداد اقتراب السماء أكثر،
ويضطرب الماء الذي لا يراقبه أحد مندفعاً نحو الأفق،
بينما تعدو الخيل مسرعة في وادي جبلي ليلاً.

Besides, differences in word order between the SL and the TL are often regarded as a necessary element. When the thematic meaning, as Leech (1983: 19) calls it, is dependent on the order, the change in that order will lead to the loss of that meaning. Hence, a line expressed in a particular theme arrangement has a specific value and plays a distinct role in the poem. So, if one shifts the order by replacing "the initial position in a sentence, paragraph, or section with the final position being second in importance" (Nida, 1993: 83) this may distort the thematic significance. Howe's poem "wicket-Gate" is a good example here (Gelpi, 1990: 517).

wicket-gate
cherubim golden swallow
amulet instruction tribulation
winged joy parent sackcloth ash
den sealed ascent flee
chariot interpret flame
hot arc chaff meridian
in the extant manuscript **SOMEONE**
has lightly scored a pen over
diadem dagger a voyage gibbet
sheaf
weeds shiver and my clothes spread wide

This text here is of special design. It differs from prose because it is written in lines whose length is decided by the poet herself. How the poem looks on the page, its visual layout, is as important as its sound quality.

With the advent of printing, poets had greater control over the visual representation of their work. Consequently, the use of these forms, and of the white space on the page itself, became an important part of the poet's theme.

In this poem, the poet tries to show her isolation by separating the words at the centre of the page-space in order to reveal her absorption into the physical universe. As for the capitalized "**SOMEONE**", it denotes consciousness, constellating her own page from the manuscript and the book of nature with the light touch of her pen. The language here records the intense pressure of a personal consciousness shaping itself into words.

			مدخل البوابة
	جميل	ذهبي	سنونو
	بلية	إرشادات	تعويذة
رماد	قماش الخيش	أب	فرح
	درجاته	مهجورة	عرين
		الذهب	عجلة
	منحن	لنقش	هجيرة
		في المخطوطة البعيدة ثمة شخص	
		برقة يחדش بالقلم فوق	
		ملكي لرحلة شفق	هامش
			حزمة من
			الأعشاب ترتجف وتطير ملابسي

But when we compare the translated poem with the original one, it is possible to infer that the thematic meaning achieved by spaces among words, as well as the importance of the capitalized word, in SL poem, are completely lost in the TL one.

6. The Cultural Level

Culture and language are basically interwoven and indivisible that meaning transference is impossible without transference of cultural concepts. Accordingly, any type of translation involves at least two cultures through which peoples will be acquainted with other nations' cultures (Larson, 1984:95).

Sapir (2000: 285) claims that no two languages are similar in representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are dissimilar worlds indeed. In addition, "no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture" (Bassnet, & Lefevere, 1990: 14). Accordingly, she (ibid) likens language to "the heart within the body of culture," shedding some light on the fact that "the surgeon, operating on the heart, cannot neglect the body that surrounds it, so the translator who treats the text in isolation from the culture is at his peril." Hence, one can say that the translator is a sort of a chemist who brings two languages, two minds and two cultures into interaction (Lado, 1957: 111).

When the cultures are similar the translator will not face any difficulty in translation. This is because both languages will have equivalents for the various aspects of the culture, but when the cultures are different, s/he will find it very difficult to get a satisfactory equivalent (Larson, 1984:96). Therefore, the exit from this dilemma is to translate cultural concepts literally, supported by explanatory notes.

This can be explained by Eliot's poem 'Hysteria' (Bush, 1990: 28). One finds that this disease, 'hysteria', was traditionally considered a woman's disease, a disease of the floating womb (Showalter, 1987: 171-172). So, Eliot introduces an unusual but telling twist, the effect of the disease on men. This is a cultural difference here, since we do not attach this disease to women in particular, and the reader will not get the intended meaning of this poem when translated into Arabic. Accordingly, it is obligatory to use a footnote to explain it.

'Hysteria' (Bush, 1990: 28)

As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill.

حينما ضحكك أدركت أنني صرت متورطاً في ضحكها وجزء منها،
إلى أن صارت أسناتها محض طالع عارض له موهبة المارش العسكري..

Hence, the difficulties of translation are represented by the fact that the translator must understand the first draft of the translated text before attempting to re-draft it. If the difficulties of re-drafting are mainly rhetorical, the problems of understanding lead to displacements and shifts in the transferred expression that may lead to the destruction of the translated meaning.

Besides, reviewing the above levels that influence the process of translating demonstrates just how complex a translation task is. Each of these levels can seriously interfere with the translator's judgement and selection, and ultimately materialize in one form or another in the final translation

Conclusion

The translation of literary works is more difficult than the translation of other types of texts because of its peculiar nature. The reason why the translation of poetry shows more difficulty than the translation of prose is that poetry concentrates more on its musical quality and poetic essence while prose concentrates more on meaning. Yet, the translated poetry remains the medium of contact with other cultures. The need to the translator will persist. Such a poetic text will open up new language worlds.

In translating poetry, one can stress that preserving and reproducing the poetic effects is considered a major challenge to translators because the written word appeals not only to the eye, but to the ear as well. In other words, the dictionary can offer little help; the translator must work by intuition and try to be creative.

Guided by the definition of Robert Frost, "poetry is what gets lost in translation," this paper concluded that this statement could be considered truthful to a certain extent because there is no one-to-one equivalent when trying to translate from one language into another, even if the translators are so competent in the source language (SL).

As a result, the task of the translator is not to express what is to be conveyed but to find the intended effect upon the language into which s/he is translating in a way that leads to produce the echo of the original, even though it is impossible to be able to create a replica of the original text. In other words, what should be preserved are the emotions, the invisible message of the poet and the uniqueness of the style in order to obtain the same effect in the TL as it is in the SL.

Findings of the present paper display that though the translation of literary texts in general and that of poetry in particular represents a real challenge, it is in many cases totally impossible, even though there are other cases in which translation is possible only with certain semantic and stylistic loss.

Accordingly, the question posed by the title of this paper is not answered since there is no conclusive evidence to demonstrate that the translation of poetry is completely impossible or absolutely possible. But to sum up, it seems that absolute untranslatability, whether linguistic or cultural, is possible.

By summarizing all these problems which are just a sample of the obstacles that the translators face, one may realize how hard and difficult the process of translation is, and how gifted and creative the translator should be.

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