



Linguistic Analysis of Translating The Iraqi novel "The Corpse Washer" from Arabic to English

Asst. Lecturer. Shireen Abdul-Monim Saeed

*Department of Theoretical Sciences, College of Physical Education
and Sports Sciences, University of Baghdad
Baghdad, Iraq*

SUBMISSION
15/08/2023

ACCEPTED
17/09/2023

PUBLISHED
26/11/2023

P-ISSN: 2074-9554 | **E-ISSN:** 8118-2663 | **doi** <https://doi.org/10.51990/jaa.conf.8th.1.33> (8th) Conference | **No** (01) **November** (2023) **P** (470-477)

ABSTRACT

This research aims to conduct a linguistic analysis of the translation of the novel "The Corpse Washer" by the Iraqi author Sinan Antoon. The main objective is to explore the challenges and strategies involved in translating this literary work, particularly the difficulties in translating the Baghdadi dialect and the obstacles it poses for non-native speakers.

Employing a descriptive research methodology, the study examines the linguistic aspects of the translation, specifically selected conversational texts in the novel. It identifies the difficulties faced by translators in preserving the essence of the original novel and presents instances where errors occurred in translating vocabulary, conversational expressions, proverbs, and idiomatic phrases, leading to confusion for non-native readers.

The research analyzes both the original and translated texts and explains the choices made during the translation process. The expected outcomes include valuable insights into the linguistic challenges and translation strategies unique to the Baghdadi dialect. By highlighting the translator's shortcomings in certain instances, the study sheds light on expressions causing confusion in the meaning of the translated expressions.

Overall, this research contributes significantly to the field of translation studies, providing valuable guidance for future translators. Through a comprehensive analysis of the translation quality, this study intends to enhance the understanding of the challenges involved in translating literary works with cultural and dialectical elements.

KEYWORDS

Source Language, Target Language, Linguistic Analysis, Baghdadi Dialect, Cultural Equivalent, The Iraqi Novel



1. Introduction:

Translation plays an essential role in our daily lives as it serves as a highly versatile form of human communication. With the ongoing process of globalization and the growing phenomenon of immigration, the demand for translation has significantly risen. This is mainly attributed to the continuous expansion of trade, science, culture, technology, and various other fields. As a field of contrastive linguistics, translation involves at least two languages and their respective cultures. It encompasses the process of transferring and conveying messages from one language system to another. In other words, translation is a method employed to convey and alter the meaning of a written term or text from the source language into the target language. This is achieved by utilizing words that possess direct equivalence, introducing new words or terms, incorporating foreign words written in the target language, or adapting foreign words to match the pronunciation of the target language.

According to Bassnett (1980:21), translation entails transferring the "meaning" contained within one set of language signs to another set of language signs through skillful utilization of dictionaries and grammar. The process also involves considering a range of extra-linguistic factors.

2. Translation and Equivalence:

The concept of equivalence holds significant importance in the translation process. It is widely recognized that neglecting to adequately consider equivalence while undertaking a translation task would be entirely unsuitable.

According to Obeidat (1998:1), the concept of equivalence holds significant significance in the study of translation and the translation of diverse types of texts. Equivalence has been examined and evaluated from various viewpoints and perspectives. For instance, Catford (1965:27) perceives equivalence as an empirical phenomenon that can be identified through a comparison between the source language (SL) text and the target language (TL) text. He distinguishes between two types of equivalence: textual equivalence and formal equivalence.

On the other hand, Nida (1964: 159) proposes the existence of two types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence primarily focuses on preserving the message's form and content, whereas dynamic equivalence aims to produce an equivalent impact or effect in the target language. Nida (1964:166-167) affirms that the principle of equivalent effect, which is receiver-oriented, seeks to generate a similar impact on the target language (TL) receiver as that experienced by the source language (SL) receiver. In other words, it strives to establish a comparable relationship between the SL receiver and the message in the TL.

According to Catford (1965: 27), sets that formal equivalence is "any TL category which can be said to occupy the same place in the economy of the TL, as the given SL category occupies in the SL". Conversely, textual equivalence is "any TL form (text or portion of a text) which is observed to be the equivalent of a given SL form (text or portion of a text)."

"Equivalence in translation should not be defined in terms of sameness and identity but should rather be viewed as being an approximate rendering of a text from SL to TL." (Boushaba, 1988; 91)

Toury (1995) underscores that translation involves not only linguistic aspects but also cultural aspects. When the source language contains ideas that are entirely unfamiliar to the target language speakers because they are linked to religious beliefs, social customs, or specific culinary practices, such ideas can be described as culture-specific (Baker, 1992). Also, she discusses two additional factors contributing to the challenge of non-equivalence: the absence of lexicalized terms in the target language and the lack of a superordinate or specific term. For instance, English does not possess a single word that conveys the meaning of the "opposite of loneliness." however, On the other hand, in Arabic, the term (أنس) is used to describe the sensation of happiness that arises from being in the company of others. Regarding the second factor, Baker clarifies that the

target language might possess specific words (hyponyms) for certain concepts but lack a general term (superordinate) to encompass them all.

Furthermore, Translators face the challenge of creating an "equivalent effect" in their translations. Newmark (1988:48) explains that achieving equivalent effect means producing a similar or as close as possible impact on the readers of the translation as the original text had on its readership.

3. The Relation Between Translation and Culture:

The definition of "culture" varies among scholars, suggesting that this concept possesses intricate and multifaceted dimensions. Taylor (1871) "culture includes beliefs, arts, skills, moralities, laws, traditions and behaviors that an individual gets from his own society (1.1871)".

Translating culture is a more challenging task compared to translating articles. It often requires considerable time and effort to accurately convey the meaning of even a single word or phrase. The translation of words and phrases must adhere to specific criteria such as faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance. These standards play a crucial role in effectively translating cultural elements. But some time these criteria are not enough to convey the intended meaning of the word and phrase (Geng,2013,982). So, we must not overcome the significant influence of culture on the translation of words and phrases. Various translation methods, including literal translation and semantic translation, exist. However, it is crucial to incorporate cultural factors into the translation process. Therefore, cultural integration should be considered when translating(ibid).

Bing defines culture as "the knowledge and traditions possessed by a certain group of people including language, music, habits, religion, arts, foods and different types of clothes and fashion prevalent in that community (2006: 95)".

Nord (2001:34) points out that "translating means comparing cultures". Thus, Translators face significant challenges due to the cultural disparities between the source language and the target language.

However, the relationship between translation and culture is intertwined to such an extent that translators cannot disregard cultural elements within a text. Therefore, it is crucial, prior to examining various translation theories associated with cultural studies, to define what culture entails and address the challenges that arise when it is transferred to a different community (Durdureanu,2011,51).

4. Translation of The Dialect:

4.1. Dialect:

A dialect is a distinct manner of speech that differs in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar from other regional dialects nearby (Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999).

Finch supposes that "dialect is geographically based language variety with distinct syntactic forms and vocabulary items". He adds that many dialects are regional in origin and belong to particular area (2005: 211)".

According to Yule (2006:195), he suggests that dialects serve to describe fundamental elements of language, including grammar, vocabulary, and various aspects related to pronunciation.

Furthermore, Preston mentions that dialect refers to a particular form of language that differs from the standard variety in terms of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. This nonstandard language variation is spoken by a specific group of individuals residing in a particular region or belonging to a specific speech community. Additionally, the term can also be employed to describe a specific manner of language usage that distinguishes it from other recognized standard varieties of the same language (Preston, 1993).

4.2. Baghdadi Dialect:

Baghdadi dialect is one of the most popular one of Iraqi dialects which it spoken by the residents of Baghdad city in Iraq. Modern Baghdadi dialect is characterized by simplicity, slow speech, and clarity. However, it significantly differs from the old Baghdadi dialect, which started to decline in the early 20th century due to the influence of various dialects from different regions of Iraq. Moreover, it is considered the intermediary dialect where various Iraqi dialects converge. It is prevalent and recognized among all Iraqis and widespread in Baghdad, its surrounding areas, as well as some parts of central and southern Iraq, and the outskirts of Tikrit, Anbar, and Diyala provinces. This has made it a well-known dialect abroad as the Iraqi dialect that poets and writers sing in their literary works. Sinan Antwan, who is the writer and translator of the tackled novel "The Corpse Washer" is Iraqi who use the Baghdadi dialect in the dialogue between the persons of the novel.

4.3. Problems of Translating Dialect:

Generally speaking, Translation is not an easy process, especially when it comes to translating dialects of the languages, as they are closely tied to the culture of both the source and target languages. Antoine Berman, a prominent translation theorist known for his primary focus on literary translation, states the following: "Unfortunately, a dialect clings tightly to its soil and completely resists any direct translating. It is by its very nature more physical, more iconic than standard languages (1994: 286)".

Salih (2023:496) mentions that "we can readily confirm that translating dialects might poses certain challenges for translators especially those who are not well acquainted with the related dialect or even those who are not initially native speakers of such dialects."

To ensure accurate translation, a translator must carefully observe the dialects used in both the target and source languages. Dialectal differences can potentially lead to confusion in conveying the intended meaning. Therefore, keen observation of dialects is essential for translators.

5. Translation Techniques:

To address translation challenges effectively, it is crucial to have a comprehensive grasp of various translation techniques (Molina & Albir, 2002):

1. Adaptation involves modifying cultural elements present in the original language to convey a similar meaning in the target language .
2. Amplification entails paraphrasing and adding information from the original text to ensure that readers can easily grasp the intended meaning.
3. Borrowing is a translation technique that involves borrowing words or expressions directly from the source language into the target language.
4. Calque refers to the literal translation of a word or phrase, either at the lexical or structural level.
5. Compensation is a translation technique used when a stylistic element in the source language cannot be directly replicated in the target language.
6. Description involves replacing a term or expression in the source language by providing a description or explanation in the target language.
7. Discursive creation is employed to present an equivalent meaning that goes beyond the original context, aiming to captivate the readers' attention.
8. Established equivalent is a translation technique that relies on commonly used terms or expressions found in dictionaries and everyday conversations.
9. Generalization involves using a general term to translate a specific term in the source language .
10. Linguistic amplification refers to adding linguistic elements in the target language to enhance the translation.
11. Linguistic compression involves combining linguistic elements in the target language to condense the translation.

12. Literal translation is a technique where words are translated word-for-word based on the dictionary without considering the context.
13. Modulation is applied to modify the readers' viewpoint, focusing on the cognitive or lexical aspects linked to the source text.
14. Particularization entails using a specific and concrete term to translate a general term in the target language.
15. Reduction is the process of condensing the information in the source text into the target text.
16. Substitution involves replacing linguistic elements with paralinguistic elements such as intonations and gestures.
17. Transposition is the act of changing the grammatical category of a word or phrase. It involves shifting categories, units, and structures.
18. Variation is a technique that modifies linguistic or paralinguistic elements to reflect changes in social dialect, style, and tone. (ibid).

Dancette (1997) emphasizes that translation strategies can be illustrated as a series of structured steps employed by translators when faced with specific challenges.

Cohen (1998: 4) confirms that "the element of consciousness is what distinguishes strategies from these processes that are not strategic".

4. Methodology:

This study, the researcher clarifies linguistic analysis of the translation of some selected Baghdadi dialect conversational expressions of the novel "The Corpse Washer" which it's written and translated by the Iraqi writer Sinan Antoon. This literary work was translated from Arabic to English to convey the state of life, death, and the tragic situation that Iraqis were experiencing during decades of wars to the foreigners. accordingly, the translator should be aware of the culture of the target language to avoid the ambiguities in meaning that face the non- native speaker(readers).

The linguistic analysis of translated conversational expressions which contain proverbs, collocation, and daily dialogue expressions selected from the novel describes the translator's style in terms of where he succeeded or failed in conveying the meaning to the target language and the extent to which they conveyed the impact or message to the audience. Translating the Baghdad dialect itself poses a challenge in the field of translation, as it requires sufficient knowledge of the target language's culture.

This study will employ some translating strategies that the translator used, especially named literal translation, and adaptation strategies, as they are the most utilized approaches in translating expressions from the Baghdadi dialect.

5. Practical Part:

The linguistic analysis that used to analyze the selected.

Data analysis:

حجي ... سوده عليه"، ص ٩٥
 "Hajji ... Ohhh, God", P: 63

During the moment of Jawad's father death, his mother said "حجي ... سودة عليه" which mean she is so sorry and sad about this trauma. The word "Hajji" here has no equivalent in target language so the translator render it literally but in fact he should mention the expression about this word as a footnote. Furthermore, The intended meaning of the word "سوده عليه" in Baghdadi dialect means in some cases of sympathy and compassion in sorrow. Here, Lexical challenges pose significant obstacles for translators of the source language as in Baghdadi dialect. One such challenge is the difficulty in finding equivalent terms in the target language. the word "سودة عليه" lacks a direct equivalent in English. Additionally, through the events of the novel context here is so

important to consider which the translator isn't aware about. So that, The most common equivalent word in target language is "I'm sorry."

"سلمته مفاتيح المغيسل"، ص ٢٤٠

"I gave him the keys of Mghesil", p: 172

The intended meaning of the word "مغيسل" means the place which the dead persons washed as a part of the religious Islamic rituals in burying the deceased. Here, the translator use the strategy of transliteration but in fact this strategy of translating is not accepted because it has no cultural equivalence in target language. Thus, it cause ambiguity in meaning and misunderstanding. The translation between two languages from distant cultures leads to an ambiguity, because there are certain cultural aspects that are inevitably lost. These losses appear to retain the characteristics described by Newmark in his book "About Translation" (1991) regarding texts where translation strategies focus more on transferring the content and message rather than the cultural elements of the source text. In this case, the translator should give a definition of the word "مغيسل" as a footnote for clarifying meaning of this word like "the place which the dead people washed before burying.

"جودي... أنه رايحة للكازم ... اليوم الذكرى والملا باسم الكربلائي جاي راح ينشد" ص ٢٣٤

"Jawad, I'm going to the shrine of Al-Kazim. Today is the anniversary of his death, and Basim al-Karbala'i is coming to chant" P:167

In this dialogue of the novel, the mother of Jawad want to go to the anniversary of the death of al-Kazim. The translator here should give a clarify to the personality of al- Kazim and Basim al-Karbala'i, because the reader of the target language has no information or any background knowledge about the two personalities that mentioned above, the translator should use the strategy of description to give clarifying as afoot note about the names of the al-Kazim and Basim al-Karbala'l to avoid misunderstanding. since the two names has no cultural equivalence in the target language.

"لو تطلع نخلة براسك"، ص ٧٣

"A tree could grow on your head", P: 48

This expression is a proverb used commonly in Baghdadi dialect which means this matter is impossible to occur. In this novel, the hero "jawad" asked his lover "Reem" to paint her, but she refused and said "لو تطلع نخلة براسك" that's mean this matter is impossiable. Since the proverbs, collocations and other idiomatic expressions lead to a big obstacles to render, so the translation of the expression "لو تطلع نخلة براسك" wrongly translated literally to "a tree could grow on your head". In this case the translator should find the cultural equivalent of the target language like the expression of "on a cold day in Hell" " is so appropriate in this matter.

"يخلق من الشبه أربعين"، ص ٨٣

"God create forty identical faces", p: 55

This expression seems like the previous one. Also proverbs but it's an Egyptian origin and used commonly in other Arabic dialects like Baghdadi dialect. It is often used to describe someone who looks like a "twin" or a "double" of another person. The translator here render this proverb literally which make the sense of this expression ambiguous to the reader of the target language. To overcome the ambiguity that arises in translating proverbs, the translator should have a certain level of familiarity with the culture of the target language. This helps in finding the cultural equivalent of the intended text to be translated. Consequently, the appropriate translation for this proverb would be "two peas in a pod".

"معقولة هذا شارع الرشيد؟ جان دائما مليان. هسه منظره يكقطع القلب"، ص ١٣٤

"This is what al-Rashid street has become? It was always bustling with people. Look at it now", P:

Through the events of the novel, Uncle Sabri arrives after a long journey and wanders through the streets of Baghdad following his painful exile. During a conversation with his nephew Jawad, he expresses his opinion about Rashid Street and what has happened to it during the events of the war. The idiomatic expression "منظره يكطع القلب" means that the current scene is heartbreaking, as it is extremely painful to see it devoid of people and life compared to the usual days when the street used to be one of the central markets in Baghdad. The translator render this expression into "look at it now "The translation of this idiomatic expression was not competent enough to convey the deep sorrow that cuts to the heart or the evocative description of compassion. in this translation the meaning is lacking, or it did not convey the effect of the content's message to the reader. So the suggested translation of the "منظره يكطع القلب" might be "it looks so pathetic " or "it breaks my heart to see it so awful or so pathetic".

"ايدك قوية وعندك موهبة"، ص ٤٩

"You have a strong hand and are talented", P:33

Through the events of the novel, the art teacher, Mr. Ra'ed, conducts an exam for his students, including the protagonist of the story, Jawad, who has a passion for drawing and art. After reviewing the students' drawings, Mr. Ra'ed discovered Jawad's talent. The dialogue in Baghdadi Dialect was "ايدك قوية وعندك موهبة", This expression has a communicative meaning, so it would be incorrect to translate literally, as the phrase "ايدك قوية" implies that the person has a high level of skill and confidence in drawing. The translator here made a literal translation, which leads to confusion in understanding the expression. Therefore, it should be translated communicatively to suit the general context of the dialogue. So that, the suggested translation is, "You are skilled at drawing, and you have talent".

6. Conclusions and Main Findings:

Having studied the problems of the translation of Baghdadi dialect in the Iraqi novel "The Corpse Washer" the study concluded the following points:

1. The Baghdadi dialect stands out as a distinctive Arabic language variety with unique characteristics and features that distinguish it from all other Arabic language varieties.
2. When dealing with culture-specific elements like the Baghdadi Dialect in the text, the translator should grasp the fundamental meaning of each word or expression by seeking guidance from someone well-versed in Iraqi culture. In essence, to ensure a precise and acceptable translation.
3. When translating proper names from Arabic to English, the translation often lacks cultural equivalence. Therefore, it is essential for the translator to provide clarification in the form of a note or definition for a specific character or place.
4. The translator must not only be concerned with conveying the explicit meaning of words from the source language to the target language, but also with transmitting the sensory impact of that meaning to the reader of TL.
5. The translator faces significant challenges in achieving a complete equivalent translation in the target language's literary text.
6. In every form of translation, particularly literary translation, it is essential for the translator to possess adequate knowledge of the target language's culture to ensure the accurate transmission of meaning.
7. This study offers a distinctive contribution as it aids translators in discovering English equivalents for Iraqi cultural terms.

References:

- Antoon, S. (2012). "The corpse washer". London: Yale University Press.
- Baker, M. (1992). In Other Words: A Course Book of Translation. London: Routledge.
- Bassnett, S. (1980). Translation Studies. London and New York: Routledge.
- Berman, R. A. & Slobin, D. I. (1994). Relating Events in Narrative: A Crosslinguistic Developmental Study. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bing, H. X. (2006). "Translating Cultural-Specific Items: A Descriptive Study". Sino-US English Teaching 3/12, 82- 93.
- Boushaba, S. (1988). An Analytical Study of Some Problems of Literary Translation: A Study of Two Arabic Translations of K. Gibran's The Prophet. PhD Thesis. UK: The University of Salford.
- Catford, J. C. (1965). A Linguistic Theory of Translation. London: Oxford University
- Cohen, A. D. (1998). Strategies in Learning and Using a Second Language. Harlow, Essex: Longman
- Dancette, J. (1997). "Mapping Meaning and Comprehension in Translation: Theoretical and Experimental Issues". In: Cognitive Processes in Translation and Interpreting [Applied Psychology, Vol. 3.], J. Danks et al. (eds.), Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Durdureanu I. I. (2011). Translation of Cultural Terms: Possible or Impossible? Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania.
- Finch, G. (2005). Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics. 2nd Edition. Palgrave Macmillan .
- Geng, X. (2013). "Theory and Practice in Language Studies", Vol.3, No.6, pp.982-986, ACADEMY PUBLISHER Manufactured in Finland.
- Molina, L. Albir, A. H. (2002). "Translation Techniques Revisited: A Dynamic and Functionalist Approach. In: Meta: Translators' Journal. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal. Volume 47, Issue 4.
- Newmark, P. (1988). A Textbook of Translation. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall .
- Newmark, Peter. (1991). About Translation. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Nida, Eugene A. (1964). Toward a Science of Translating. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Nord, C. (2001). Translating as a Purposeful Activity – Functional Approaches Explained. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Obeidat, H. A. (1998). "Stylistic Aspects in Arabic and English Translated Literary Texts": A Contrastive Study". In: Meta. Vol. Xiii, No.3, PP. 1-9.
- Preston, D. R. (1993). "Folk Dialectology". In D. R. Preston (ed.), American Dialect Research (pp. 333-78). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Salih, N. Y. (2023). "Problems of Translating the Mosuli Dialect into English for Non-Native Speakers". Journal of Al-Farahidi's Arts, Tikrit University, Vol (15), Issue (52), Part I, pp.490-503.
- Toury, G. (1995). Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond. Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins .
- Tylor, E. (1871). Primitive Culture. New York: J. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Wolfram, W.; Adger, C. T. & Christian, D. (1999). Dialects in Schools and Communities. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Antoine, Sinan (2010). "Alone the pomegranate tree." Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, Sanayeh, Eid Bin Salem Building, first edition.