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# Maintaining Cultural Identity in Translated Literary Texts: Strategies of Translating Culture- Specific Items in two Arabic plays

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**Maintaining Cultural Identity in Translated Literary Texts:  
Strategies of Translating Culture-Specific Items in two Arabic plays**

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**Abstract**

This article focusses on the translator's task as a cultural mediator who has to transfer the nuances of the literary text faithfully. The translation of culture-specific items, such as proverbs, figurative language, reference to religion, mythology or literature, and stylistics, are at the core of the discussion. This paper discusses generally recommended strategies used in translating culture specific items (CSIs), and further analyses and evaluates such strategies as used in two translated Arabic plays; Sa'dallah Wannous's *The Glass Café* (1978/2004) and Mamdouh 'Udwan's *Reflections of a Garbage Collector* (1987/2006). The translation strategies used in these two plays are recognized and rationalized in terms of giving a domesticated or a foreignized effect. Besides transferring meaning, the cultural identity of the text is highlighted as a mainstay of the translation process

*Key words:* Translation of culture specific items, translating religious language, translation strategies, translating stylistics

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**Introduction: Translation as cross cultural activity:**

Translation is mainly an activity of transferring meaning and it requires cross linguistic skills. However, translation of literary texts requires, more importantly, cross cultural dexterity, in order to transfer the nuances of cultural identity. To describe culture is to explain how people, believe, feel, behave, and act in a society. Larson (1984) defines culture as a complex set of “beliefs, attitudes, values and rules which a group of people share” (p. 431). Thus to transfer culture means to implant a new set of values, beliefs, behaviors, folk temperament into another people’s realm of cognition. Abbasi et al (2012) refer to translation as “not just a literal recasting of a work from one language to another, but also as an adaptation of one culture’s values and biases into another” (p. 86). “To translate means to circulate, and this is what our world really needs: the freedom to find the right ways to express itself, to understand and to be understood out there, by the other” (Abbasi et al, 2012. P. 86). Acknowledging the importance of maintaining cultural identity in translated literary texts, this article will survey recommended strategies used in translating culture-specific items and will further analyze and evaluate such strategies as used in two translated Arabic plays; Sa’dallah Wannous’s *The Glass Café* (1978/2004) and Mamdouh ‘Udwan’s *Reflection of a Garbage Collector* (1987/2006).

**1- Translation of literature is challenging because of CSIs**

Translation of literary texts is the most challenging form of translation. Literature is full of expressions that, on the one hand, reflect the culture of the people and, on the other, the subjectivity of the writer himself/herself. Thus, it can be ambiguous and arbitrary at times. The linguistic style and figurative language give the text its peculiar character which in turn communicate a complex fusion of the culture that produced this language and the personality of the writer who wrote the text. Ideally speaking, none of these should be lost in translation. These peculiarities have to be faithfully communicated to the reader of the target text (TT). The closer the source and target cultures are the easier the translation is, as the translator has to work, with less particularities connected primarily to the subjectivity of the writer. Conversely, the more disparity between two cultures, the more likely communication is broken down.

The translation of literary texts requires special attention to the way culture specific items are transferred from one language to another. “Language and culture are closely related to and also inseparable from each other” (Daghoughi, March 21, 2016, p. 171). The cultural distance between the source text (ST) audience and the target text (TT) audience can produce a fundamental dissimilarity between the effects of the ST and those of the TT. Due to the plethora of culture – specific items (CSIs), specific values, aesthetic and expressive features, literary texts are more difficult to translate than other kinds of texts. The translation of which results more than often in

a cultural gap. The more the translator is aware of the complexities of the differences between cultures, the truer the TT to the cultural essence of the ST.

## 2- Culture Specific Items and ‘Culturemes’

Culture specific items (CSIs) are elements of the literary text that have exclusive associations with the source language culture that are unknown to the readers of the TT. According to Aixela (1996):

CSI does not exist of itself, but as the result of a conflict arising from any linguistically represented reference in a source text which, when transferred to a target language, poses a translation problem due to the nonexistence or to the different value (whether determent by ideology, usage, frequency, etc.) of the given item in the target language culture. (P. 57).

Newmark (1988) proposed five domains for classifying foreign cultural words (p. 95). These domains are:

- 1- Ecology (flora, fauna, winds, plains hills)
- 2- Material culture (food, clothes, houses and towns, transport)
- 3- Social culture (work and leisure)
- 4- Organization, customs, activities, procedures, concept (political and administrative, religion,
- 5- Gestures and habits.

The subject of this study; proverbs, figurative language, religious language, reference to mythology or literature, and stylistics, all fall under CSIs.

Proverbs, one form of CSIs, are “special, fixed, unchanged phrases which have special, fixed unchanged meanings” (Ghazala, 1995, p. 138). They are a cultural product of certain experiences and history. “The traditional function of them is didactic, as they contain wisdom, truth, moral and traditional views” (Mieder, 2004, p. 3). Perhaps Norrick’s (1985) definition of proverbs is suffice. It is a “self-contained, pithy, traditional expressions with didactic content and fixed, poetic form” (p.31). Mieder (2008) stresses that the use of figures of speech, mainly metaphor, is a key characteristic in most proverbs: “A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional view in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation”. (p.11) The stylistic characteristics of a proverb is its most important feature which should not be lost in translation. Arora (1984) argues for maintaining the “proverbiality”, which is “what gives a sentence the possibility of being a proverb (p. 13). This means its richness in stylistic devices. This includes structural markers such as parallelism or poetic markers such as rhyme or the use of figurative language such as metaphor. (Issa, 2017, p. 65). The stylistic property of the proverb is as important as its meaning, especially that its poetic quality is a cultural product which should be faithfully transferred in translation

Culture Specific items and cultural features have been also termed “Culturemes” They are “everything that we observe as being different from our own culture” (Nord, 1997, p. 34). Thus to translate them is to interpret the meaning in relation to comparable items in the TT culture. “The concepts of our own culture will thus be the touchstones for the perception of otherness (Nord, 1997, p. 34). Larson (1984) observes that all meaning is culturally conditioned and the response to a given text is, in turn, culturally conditioned (pp. 436-7). Therefore, the reader will interpret a text according to his/her own culture. The translated text will be perceived according to the culture and experience of the TT reader not that of the author. Thus, the translator must act as a cultural mediator in order to ensure that all meaning is communicated.

### 3- Translation of Arabic CSIs

The focus of this article is to study the specific nature of the Arabic CSI and strategies of translating them. This study will later analyze and evaluate such strategies as applied in the translation of two Arabic plays. As Arabic and English are wide apart, incompatibility of source and target cultures is to be encountered mainly in culture specific items (CSIs). The translation of lexis and grammatical structures from Arabic to English is fairly straightforward and problem free. However, the CSIs in Arabic language merit deeper thought and consideration. CSIs in Arabic culture include names, proverbs, figurative language, religious language, moral values, traditions, stylistics, phonic markers, and expressions of intense feelings. In this case, the translator’s task is to transfer optimal meaning and stylistic effects. At the same time, he/she should make up for the epistemological gaps and disparities between both cultures. Such gaps exist when there is simply no equivalent for a word in the TL, when the connotation of a word is completely different in the TL and when values and beliefs do not overlap in both cultures. It is best to aim for equivalence in the target culture (Al Timen, 2015, p. 14016). However, even if a linguistic equivalent exists, there may still be a cultural difference involved. A culturally communicative translation bypasses the linguistic structure of CSI and aims at transferring semantic content and cultural implications. Rendering the literary form and taste of the proverbs or figures of speech would be an ideal end-result, but is secondary in importance. The loss of certain elements in translation is inevitable sometimes, but such a loss is kept minimal in good translations.

Translating from Arabic, one encounters several culturemes related to religion, historical and literary traditions, expressions of intense feelings and language art. The translation of each of these culturemes requires a certain rationale and perfect knowledge of the culture

#### 3.1 Religious language

Religious language is native to Arabic, but it is by no means alien to English. *Quran* and the *Bible* have a great deal in common in terms of reference to God, devil, angels, heaven, hell and the stories of the prophets. Proverbs connected to God and religion in both languages may carry the same semantic content, but different lexical means. Examples are ‘Man proposes and God disposes’ (أنا أمرهم شورى) (أريد و أنت تريد و الله يفعل ما يشاء تقدر و تضحك الأقدار), ‘Two heads are better than one’ (اسع يا عبد و أنا أسع معاك) (بينهم. الدين نصيحة). (Al Timen, 2015, p. 14018). However, it is the frequency and intensity of reference to God, the sense of fatalism and the complete surrender of the human will that single out one culture from the other.

The translator has to make the choice of either keeping all of the instances where the name of God is used or mainly to translate the meaning and emotions.

### 3.2 Historical and literary tradition

History and literature include stories, names, titles, the reference to which may not be comprehended by a TT reader. For example, the story of the maddening love story of Qais and Layla will only start making sense in translation if the translator includes footnotes with enough explanation or replaces the Arabic names or story titles with equivalents in English literature such as Romeo and Juliet. The translator must be aware of the supremacy of the cultural significance over lexis and make use of the socio cultural similarities of the two languages (Al Timen, 2015, p. 14019)

### 3.3 Language art

Language art, including figurative language and stylistics are most challenging in the translation process. The translator may have to consider several ways to produce a TT with the same or similar artistic quality. Figures of speech and proverbs are known to all cultures. However, they differ in use and implication from one culture to another. For example, a simile in Arabic language in which a human being is compared to a Turkey bird (ديك حبش) communicates pompousness and can be rendered equally if a person is compared to a peacock in English. The reference to a shoe can be used disparagingly in Arabic but not in English. To designate a human being as a 'creature' (مخلوق) has the connotation of glorifying the creation of God. The same designation can be dehumanizing in English. A male dog (كلب) is a pejorative term that signifies the loss of dignity and integrity in Arabic, while it signifies loyalty and friendliness in English. An onion in Arabic connotes cheapness while no particular depreciating sense is associated with it in English. In such cases, the literal translation of lexis has to be avoided for benefit of a more accurate connotative meaning of the proverb or figure of speech. A proverb like مصائب قوم عند قوم فوائد can be translated literally as 'the catastrophes of some people are benefits to others'. However, once an existing proverb using a different linguistic structure indicates the same meaning, (One man's meat is another man's poison), it would be very fitting to replace one with the other, bypassing the lexis, linguistic structure and the style of the ST.

Furthermore, style and phonic markers such as melody, symmetry, rhythm, assonance, alliteration and rhyme are cultural products that contribute to the aesthetic quality of the source language. The challenge lies in keeping as much stylistics as possible in the TT. For example, "Practice makes perfect" has alliteration. "No pain, no gain" or "easy come easy go", both have asymmetry and rhythm. The literal translation الممارسة تؤدي إلى الكمال gives the same meaning but lacks the elegance and memorability of the ST. The translator should aim at reproducing some stylistics, even in varying degree, in order to create a similar proverbiality. Thus the following wording بتكرار ذات الفعل يأتي الكمال (Al Timen, 2015, p. 14021) is more satisfactory as it creates a rhythm, assonance and rhyme that matches those in the ST. The relationship between Arabic language art and cultural identity should be taken into consideration. Stylistics and figurative language are cultural products that should not be eliminated in the TT.

It is noteworthy that the taste of the TT reader should be taken into account when producing a readable and enjoyable translation of a major Arabic literary work. The aforementioned stylistics,

together with the extensive use of figurative language in Arabic prose, suits the SL reader's taste, but sounds too poetic and contrived in English. Similarly, hyperbole is more used in Arabic than English, due to the fact that Arabic culture allows for more heightened expressions of feelings. The use of repetition and symmetrical synonyms have aesthetic value in Arabic but sound redundant and verbose in English. Thus language art becomes a culture specific item that needs to be upheld in translation. The translator should be well versed in both the SL and TL cultures and should weigh the possibilities, whether to communicate all SCIs for perfect portrayal of the ST cultural identity, or to tone them down for smooth and easy reception by the TT reader. The translator should not solely focus on transferring all CSIs to English but also functioning as a real cultural mediator.

#### 4- Domesticated and foreignized translations

The TT is expected to communicate the meaning as well as the cultural identity of the ST. If the translation is weighted more heavily towards the TT, it is a "domesticated translation that makes perfect sense to the TT reader, who feels as if it is primarily composed in the target language and culture. The shortcoming of a domesticated translation is that it may not be faithful to the source text culture. Some features of the source language art and culture may be lost. Thus domesticated translation may not be conducive to cross cultural competency (Lopez, 2015, p. 558). The reader of domesticated translation is less likely to appreciate or respect the source language culture. On the other hand, if the translation is weighted more heavily towards the ST, the end-result may sound foreignized. It may be very faithful to all the nuances and culture specific items of the source text culture, but it may not be well received by the TT reader, who may endure either misunderstanding or distaste. A foreignized translation may prove too alienating and non-communicative. The translator has to aim at a happy medium through which the TT reader enjoys a good read and is simultaneously well informed about ST as a cultural product.

#### 5- Strategies for translating CSIs and proverbs

There is no single recommended strategy for translating CSIs, nor a certain measure to tip the scale of a domesticated translation over a foreignized one. Literary translation is a complex process that this study attempts to measure and evaluate. The translation strategies proposed here are eclectic from previous studies done by Newmark (1998), Al Timen (2015), and Issa (2017). Namely, such strategies are literal translation, literary translation, substitution, and deletion.

**5.1- Literal translation** is the easiest and most basic where the translator sticks to one-to-one correspondence of words. The goal of a literal translation is to reproduce the form of the source text as much as possible into the target text since no translation is "ever too literal or too close to the original" (Newmark, 1998, p.137). This straightforward lexical translation of the culture specific item works effectively only when cultures overlap and the same proverb or figure of speech exist in both languages. Examples are 'to kill two birds with one stone' (يضرب عصفورين بحجر واحد), 'A bird in the hand worthies two in the bush' (عصفور في اليد خير من اثنين عشرة على الشجرة), and 'Out of sight out of mind' (بعيد عن العين). (Al Timen, 2015 p. 14021). In these examples all aspects of lexis, connotative content and stylistics overlap to form a straightforward impeccable translation experience.

- 5.2- Literary translation** is free translation that takes the liberty to change the lexis of figurative language. It is mainly informed with the view that the aim of translation is “not to render what the SL author writes but what he/she meant” (Al Timen, 2015, p. 14022). When the proverb cannot be rendered literally the translator should have the figurative meaning and stylistics in mind

Literary translation of CSIs is often superior to literal translation as the translator interferes to restore missing cultural and stylistic components. For example, ‘Time flies’ can have ‘الوقت يطير’ as a literal translation, while a literary translation would be ‘الوقت كالسيف ان لم تقطعه قطعك’. In the latter, the metaphor is replaced by a simile in which time is compared to a sharp sword. Both content and proverbiality, are maintained. Another example is ‘Patience is virtue’. A literal translation is ‘الصبر فضيلة’, whereas a literary translation is ‘الصبر مفتاح الفرج’. In the latter, the metaphor is replaced with another double metaphor and imagery. Proverbiality and the cultural content are intact. A third example is ‘Better to be safe than sorry’. The literal translation (الافضل ان تكون سالما من ان تندم) sounds verbose, while the literary translation (في التأني السلامة و في العجلة الندامة) restores the proverbiality in keeping the symmetry and rhythm. In all of these and plethora of other expressions, literary translation is recommended in order to transfer meaning and stylistics and cater for the TT reader taste.

This kind of translation can be divided into sub types where a translator can paraphrase the meaning or borrow from the TL an expression that is equivalent in meaning to that of the SL and/or that corresponds to the stylistics of formal structure of the SL.

- 5.3- Substitution (Equivalence)** “This method can be considered a subdivision of the free translation method. It is frequently adopted when the content of the proverb or expression is related to a SL cultural or lexical reference and has no equivalent in another language, yet can be substituted with a cultural or lexical items that have, as close as possible, the same meaning as that found in the source proverb” (Al Timen, 2015, p. 14024) . When the TL has no lexical equivalence, the best method to be followed is to resort to a non-corresponding equivalent function in the TL culture: e.g. ‘As wise as an owl’ (حكيم كلقمان), ‘To sell coals to Newcastle’ (بييع الماء في حارة السقايين) (Al Timen, 2015, p. 14024). In these two examples cultural associations of animals and places are substituted with corresponding association in the target cultures.
- 5.4- Deletion or Omission.** (Issa, 2017, p. 65) in cases of social or theological taboos. Although not faithful to the source text, this strategy is practically used especially when the translator judges that the TT reader has certain sensibilities that should not be offended or shocked.

## 6- Strategies used in translating *The Glass Café (1978-2004)* and *Reflections of a Garbage Collector (1987-2006)*: Discussion



For the intent of this study, two translations of the said plays, published in Jayyusi (Ed.) (2003), are analyzed herein in order to showcase strategies used, and weigh the possibilities for a better culturally communicative approach. The problem areas of translation will be highlighted and solutions are suggested.

### 6.1- Religious language in the Glass Café (1978-2004)

In Sa'dallah Wannous's *The Glass Café*, the reference to God abounds as a cultural trait. Although the writer was not a particularly religious person himself, his plays use plethora of religious references as a genuine cultural product. Feelings and status of minds are expressed via utterance of the Divine's name. For example, in the case of grief, a statement such as *الله يرحمه* (God have mercy on Khartabil's soul") is used. (Wannous, 2003, p. 419). For exclamation *يا فاطر السموات و الأرض* ("Oh God in heaven and on earth") (Wannous, 2003, p. 420). For affirmation *والله* ("By god") (Wannous, 2003, p. 420). For sorrow and helplessness *لا اله إلا الله* ("There is no God but God") (Wannous, 2003, p. 423). For submission to the will of God *الله أكبر الله أكبر* ("The Lord on High, the Almighty") (Wannous, 2003, p. 424), and *كل من عليها فان، ويبقى وجه ربك ذو الإجلال و الإكرام* ("Everything's mortal on this earth. The only constant thing is the face of your Almighty and Venerable Lord") (Wannous, 2003, p. 423). For excessive sorrow at the burial of someone, *يا حسرتي من التراب و إليه* ("Ashes to ashes dust to dust"). (Wannous, 2003, p. 424) This specific example is translated with substitution or equivalence". The literary translation would be 'from sand and back to it'

Religious lexis is a salient feature of Arabic culture, the plethora of which may mystify the TT reader. They are culturemes that mark the discourse of Muslims who communicate their belief and submission to God in every turn of the phrase. To transfer all of the instances where God is mentioned is a successful way of communicating the religiosity of the Arab culture. However, it has two shortcomings. First, such a translation may not communicate the feelings embedded in the ST interjections such as surprise, or admiration or sorrow or helplessness. In this case further description of the speaker's state of mind should be added by the translator. Second, such foreignized translation may over-emphasize a theological content and move it to the forefront of the text. Whereas in the SL such uses may have been often relegated to clichéd use that has lost its fresh impact.

To avoid the plethora of reference to God and suffice with transmitting the meanings of sorrow or helplessness would result in a domesticated text that reads well but is unfaithful to the nuances of the culture. To weigh the balance in this regard, a less foreignized text would be more culturally communicative. Religious language should be partly kept with a calculated amount of omission. Some free translation and some substitution in this regard may produce a better balance.

### 6.2- Passion, anger and swear words

The translation of swear words, and expressions of intense feelings need a combination of strategies and special consideration. The priority in translation is to express the same intensity of

feelings, and perhaps, insult. Some swear words do not make sense in English, such as the commonly used neutral swear word العمى (blindness). In translation, this can be omitted and replaced with a lexis that communicates the feeling of repulsion such as ‘damn it’. Abu Adnan in the *Reflections of a garbage collector* is deeply hurt that his daughter in law feels stigmatized by his profession. In his reflections on his hurt pride, he puts her down by such an insult: يا بنت الستين كلب. The literal translation (“daughter of a sixty dogs”) (‘Udwan, 2003, p. 387) is an unfortunate choice here. The literary translation (‘bitch’) would be a more equivalent choice. His excessive anger that is communicated with the hyperbolic number “sixty” could have been communicated through an added adjective (bloody bitch or an obscene English swear word. Thus omission and substitution are highly recommended to render a translation that is equivalent in function. As a ‘dog’ is a swear word in Arabic, connected to slavishness and meanness, a literal translation of such a word is misleading: The garbage collector’s dismissal of his son: "اذهب و ابق كلب امرأتك" (‘Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 522) is translated literally as (“be your wife’s dog.”) (‘Udwan, 2003, p. 389). The insult embedded in the foregoing phrase is not properly communicated. In this case, a free translation such as ‘slavish follower’ would have interpreted the meaning and transferred sentiment more faithfully. On the whole, the intensity of feelings and anger should be communicated in a way that is well felt by the TT reader.

### 6.3 - Cultural values, biases and traditions

As values do not necessarily overlap across cultures, the translator should be aware of cultural discrepancies and be prepared to highlight them or downplay them according to the requirement of the literary text. For example, the culture of the Middle East associates certain values of honesty, courage and integrity to masculinity. In a reminiscent recollection of the solidarity of the by-gone days, the garbage collector exhorts of the need to restore dignity to his alley and calls out for ‘men’: "الم يعد في الحارة رجال؟" (‘Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 512) (“Aren’t there men around anymore?”) (‘Udwan, 2003, p. 380) This literal translation is the perfect option here. The translator should maintain the sexist feature of the language even if it shocks the TT reader, as it informs the discourse of the protagonist and his identity crisis. This is a salient feature of the culture in the play and should be imported to the TT.

Neighborly solidarity is an upheld value that is communicated with zeal. The protagonist uses the word يغضب “anger” in order to express ardor to keep up allegiance to his neighbors. To transfer such intense passion, the translator should avoid the hostility connoted in the English lexis ‘anger’. The literal translation of "أي شخص يغضب لكرامة الحارة كلها" (‘Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 512), (“Any person gets angry for the dignity of the whole ally), would not have been culturally communicative. While anger for a noble cause has positive connotation in Arabic, it may have adverse effect in English. Thus the translator adeptly used the strategies of omission and paraphrasing thus: “The alley used to be like a family. Everyone wanted to keep up the dignity of the place” (‘Udwan, 2003, p. 380).

Omission and interpretation are necessary especially in case the meaning is completely lost or the culture is erroneously presented. For example, When the daughter in law is ashamed of having the lowly garbage collector for a father in law, her face turns black. "الاسود وجهها" (‘Udwan,

1987/2006, p. 390) No racist implication is intended on the part of the dramatist as this is a dead metaphor which is used without any reference to race. In fact it is borrowed from the Quranic text (Quran, 3: 106) (On the Day [some] faces will turn white and [some] faces will turn black. As for those whose faces turn black, [to them it will be said], "Did you disbelieve after your belief? Then taste the punishment for what you used to reject.") The binary opposites of white and black, connoting pride and shame on doomsday, are expressions that are culturally used with no racist reference. The translator is right in avoiding the reference to black color and replacing it with a description of the sentiment of 'embarrassment' ("When she turned and saw me coming in, you would believe how embarrassed she was.") (Udwan, 2003, p. 390). Thus it would be a grave mistake to use literal translation here. An omission and interpretation are the ideal strategies here.

Communication of meaning may sometimes conflict with conveying the cultural nuances. In this case the translator has to sacrifice one in favor of the other, meaning being the top priority. For example, another characteristic cultural value in the Arab world is family solidarity and social interdependence. Rights and duties among fathers and son are so intertwined in a way that do not overlap with western cultures. Reference to such relation may be confusing to TT reader. For example, fighting over the possession of garbage, one garbage collector contests with the other: *دفعت ثمن الزبالة من مال أبيك* (The literal translation would be "Did you pay for the garbage from your father's money?") The wrong message in this literal translation is caused by the cultural-specific social feature of Middle Eastern families. While sons may presume rights over the father's property even before his death, sons and fathers have separate entities and rights to property in western cultures. Thus, it would be confusing if one refers to one's own property as the property of one's father. In order to make this CSI comprehensible the translator may intervene with an explanation in the text or footnote. Had he done this, it would be an unneeded digression from the context of fending for his own right. A loss of cultural information is inevitable here. The viable solution that the translator of the play has resorted to is simply omission of the term "father" and paraphrasing of meaning thus "You did not pay for the garbage from your own pocket, did you" (Udwan, 2003, p. 375). The translator here has weighed the balance, used omission and opted not to convey a cultural specific item for a feasibility of the dramatic text.

Missing out on cultural nuances is unavoidable sometimes. In cases of literary allusions and pastiche, the translator has to tip the scale towards the priority of meaning and sacrificing some subtleties of cultural specific items. For example, the garbage collector sees the bones in people's garbage as a source of envy, the same way as the sick crave the well-being of healthy people. The reference is to a famous saying by Imam Shafii: "health is a crown over the heads of the healthy that only the sick can see". This is ironically parodied in Abu Ahmed's commentary: *العظام تاج* (Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 517), (Bones are crown on top of the garbage, which only the unlucky see). As the context does not allow for more explanation or footnotes, such a literal translation communicates the full meaning but misses on the irony and the sense of humor.

When the cultural specific item sounds unfamiliar or foreign in the culture of the TT reader, the translator of *Reflection of a Garbage Collector* used various strategies of omission, substitution and literal translation, for varying effects. For example, the protagonist is unwilling to get mixed up in shady deals even if he won the money of “Qaroon”. Being an epitome of wealth, the name of Qaroon is well known in Quranic stories (Quran 28: 76-82), but unrecognizable in English. In this case, such a translation: “even if you make a fortune from them”) (‘Udwan, 2003, p. 389) which features omission and paraphrasing, is a fitting one. Such a translation bypasses the culture specific item and prioritizes meaning. On a contradictory note, the translator opts to use a literal strategy related to culture-specific food. The simile “حلو كالقطايف” (“Sweet as Katayef”) (Wannous in translation, p. 414) is a foreignized literal translation, but is one that is true to the cultural identity. To use a substitution such as, ‘sweet as a donut’, would rob the text from its local identity. Thus there is no one-fits-all strategy for the translation of CSIs. The translator should always negotiate meaning of the ST, cultural nuances and his/her perception of the TT reader’s taste and should decide which strategy to choose at his/her own discretion.

#### 6.4- Language Art: Figures of speech, proverbs, stylistics

Arabic language is highly artistic. Figures of speech and stylistics are recurrent in high register literary texts as well as the language of everyday life. To observe and transfer all the multilayered figurative language would render a highly poetic text in the target language that may not reflect the social status of the characters. Moreover, to lose all stylistics and figurative language in translation would result in losing on the cultural identity of the source text. The translation process should be governed by a balance among the diverse features of the St and TT.

Many times translators opt to paraphrase literary expressions ignoring a great deal of stylistics. This results in losing a great part of the cultural element imbedded in the language art. Arabic prose abounds with poetic stylistics such as figures of speech and phonic effects. To omit them completely is to deny the literary taste of the ST reader. To include all of them would result in an intricate text that does not read well. A balanced approach where the plethora of figures of speech may be toned down and replaced partly by explanation may be the best way. This is practiced recurrently in Sa’dallah Wannous’s translation. For example *يطفر من ابتدال ملامحه قلق* (Wannous, 1978/2004, p. 488). This is translated as “His face betrays ambiguous anxiety that he has not yet brought himself to reveal or express”. (Wannous, 2003, p. 413). The meaning is well-communicated. However, the metaphor, by which the anxiety is compared to an unborn child that has not materialized yet, is completely lost, and gone with it the anticipation and the anxiety that accompanies the childbirth. Having multilayered figures of speech as a recurring feature, the translator is constantly divided between two options. The translator will either produce a domesticated text that gives accurate meaning and an easy read for the TT reader, or he/she will keep as much stylistics as possible and produce a stilted foreignized text that reveals the features of Arabic language but may hinder the enjoyment of the reader. The translator herein has tipped the scale towards a domesticated text for a satisfactory effect.

Omission and interpretation of figures of speech in proverbs are practiced often to a satisfactory effect, but on the expense of some losses. For example in an attempt of Abu Adnan to

fend off the envious eye, he used two proverbs: "العين الفارغة لا يملؤها إلا التراب، عين الحسود فيها عود" ('Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 518) The translator's product is thus: "The greedy eye can only be filled with mud or bones. Dirt and bones that's all that fills the eyes of jealous people." ('Udwan, 2003, p. 386). He opts to omit the image of empty eye and the metaphor that compares the eye to an empty stomach that is always hungry. He replaces it with interpretation; an envious eye. Dropping image of emptiness is unfortunate as the idea of filling it with dirt upon burial is totally lost and the images of bones and dirt remain redundant.

Metaphors can often be lost and replaced by interpretation if the translator judges that the literal translation may confuse the meaning. For example when the old fashioned grandfather requires more discipline from his grandson he says: صحيح أن العصا من الجنة ('Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 515). This is translated literally as "A Stick is an instrument from Heaven" ('Udwan, 2003, p. 383). However, in order maintain the link between a stick and discipline, and in order to water down the possible correspondence between disciplining kids and God's will, an explanatory sentence would have adequately clarified the meaning of the proverb such as (Children should be disciplined).

When the CSI uses a clichéd metaphor containing a culture specific item, substitution with a more familiar item gives a better effect. كانت النصيحة بجمل ('Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 505) ("That advice of mine was worth a camel") ('Udwan, 2003, p. 374). The issue with this literal translation is its foreignizing quality. As camels were the indispensable livestock in the desert, they were highly needed for milk and transportation. The metaphor has become clichéd as Arabs, in modern times do not depend on camel services any longer. To an English reader, the camel is an exotic animal that is connected with stereotypes about Arabs. It sends the TT reader into consideration of the metaphorical weight of the proverb that the ST reader does not stop to consider. It is recommended that such a translation is weighed towards the TT culture. Either a paraphrasing or substitution is recommended here, such as "My advice is valuable" which would have served the meaning better. However, what would be lost in the later is not only the cultural reference but also the stylistic feature of hyperbole. A better domesticated translation would be to borrow an already existing proverb: "Plans fail for lack of Council, but with many advisors succeed" (Bible, 15:22). The connotative meaning here is equivalent. Similarly, another proverb using camel is best to be substituted. "لا ترى من الجمل إلا أذنه" ('Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 509) is literally translated "You only see the camel's ear". As the reference to the camel has an unnecessary foreignizing effect, the content of not being able to see the whole magnitude of the problem can be transferred through a well-known English idiom which is 'To see only the tip of the iceberg' No stylistic effects are lost in such a domesticated translation. The metaphor of the camel compared to a grand issue is a trite cliché which is translated to another cliché in English. Thus, no real cultural nuance is to be lost substitution

Stylistic features that cannot be transferred in the TT, are, most often, the first to be sacrificed in favor of meaning and, perhaps, figures of speech. While Abu Adnan complains that his children made use of him in his prime and neglected him in old age, he says: "أكلوك لحماً ورموك عظاماً" ('Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 507) ("They ate your flesh, then flung away the bones") ('Udwan,

2003, p. 376) The translator is successful keeping the metaphor of productivity versus disability compared to meat and bones. However, the stylistic features of rhythm and rhyme are lost.

To substitute figurative language with meaning results in the loss of the imaginative aspect of language art in the SL. For example, one of the characters grew rich and started throwing his money around. He is described as “to have grown feathers” (literal translation) “أبو شاهر ريش و صار” (Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 517) In English, to grow feathers is to come of age, while in Arabic, the metaphor is linked to a pompous peacock. As this is a dead metaphor, there is no real loss if it is replaced with interpretation of meaning. Likewise, to play with the penny or money connotes gambling in English while in the SL idiom connotes having abundance. Both the figure of speech and the idiom have to be dropped here. What is further more lost in the translation is the assonance with the sound [sh]. Although none of these losses are grave, the TT eventually loses on the taste of the ST.

Paraphrasing is, sometimes, the least successful strategy in translating a proverb that has stylistic features. “إذا أردت أن تطاع فأطلب المستطاع” (Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 516). The Arabic proverb has two rhyming phrases of four syllables each. The rhyming words pun in a witty memorable way. This is translated as “If you want your orders to be carried out, sir, then do not ask the impossible” (Udwan, 2003, p. 384 This translation is equivalent in meaning only, but the elegance and precision of stylistics are lost. Interpretation here is the least successful of all strategies. It would be ideal if the translator substitutes the lost stylistics with other viable kind of stylistics such as ‘If you require obedience, aim at convenience’ or ‘For the task to be doable, it has to be possible’

On the whole, substitution of figures of speech with equivalent ones that already exist in the TL is the ideal practice, even if that entails a minor loss of stylistic features. For example, ‘Udwan’s protagonist expresses his confusion with the proverb: “لم أعرف ليلي من نهاري” (Udwan, 1987/2006, p. 507) (literal translation: ‘I did not know my night from my day’). This proverb means that I was so confused and unable make sense of things. The ideal translation is “I could not make heads or tails” (Udwan, 2003, p. 1307). In this translation, the Arabic proverb is substituted by a well-known English idiom that gives the same meaning and similar contrastive effect (head and tail), while the original proverb contains hyperbole in the sense that a person is excessively confused, to an extent that he cannot distinguish between light and darkness. Such a stylistic feature is mitigated in the head or tail idiom, but such a loss is easily overlooked, when compared with the foreignized effect of the literal translation. Another example of the viability of substitution is using the Arabic idiom “تقوم القيامة” (Udwan, 1987/2006, p 507) (Literal translation: doomsday occurs). As Abu Adnan’s daughter in law throws a tantrum, the rage is well communicated in the hyperbole and the imagery in the idiom that the literal translation does not quite capture. To communicate the true sentiment in English the reference to hell is more equivalent in such an English idiom as “Hell breaks loose”. In this case, substitution of an idiom with an already existing idiom in TL that depicts the same spectrum of meaning and sentiments is the recommended practice.

## Conclusion

The translators of both Wannous's and 'Udwan's texts are faced with the need to negotiate, meaning, cultural identity and reception of the TT. The challenge is clearest when it comes to culture specific items. In both translated plays, the target texts have varying degrees of foreignization and domestication, the first weighs the TT towards Arabic culture, while the other makes the dramatic text more accessible to English language readership and audience. The translation of Wannous's *The Glass Café* rightly uses literal translation when it comes to religious language. The benefit of this is to communicate the author's critique of the sense of fatalism among the characters who are unable to investigate the reasons of their troubles. At the same time, the translation tones down the poetic quality of the prose in the ST. This is done adeptly to serve a dramatic purpose. As Arabic prose has more poetic features than English prose, the translation prioritizes the reception of the text by the TT audience, thus less poetic prose in English would correspond better to the persona of the uneducated oppressed characters, in the play, that are unable to rise against their oppressor. Ornate language, if translated, would detract from the very theme of the incapacity of the oppressed classes. Thus the translation uses a combination of the strategies of literal, literary translation and omission with the aim of communicating well the author's purpose. It is a domesticated translation that would make reading or staging this play in the TL viable. On the other hand, the translator of 'Udwan's play creates a partly foreignized text where hyperbole, intense feelings, expressions of passions, cultural values and biases stand out in the text. *Reflections of a Garbage Collector* in translation manages to keep its original cultural identity on the expense of occasional alienation of the TT reader. It successfully communicates the outrage of a streetwise retired lowly man at the ills of the poor society. The translation of 'Udwan's play uses all of the strategies with particular focus on keeping to the cultural identity as a priority. Although, at times it sounds as a foreignized translation, but it is one that is extremely culturally informative; It accurately depicts the mood and psyche of a down-trodden citizen in Syria at the time of writing the play. Each one of these two translations has its advantages. The first is inclined to the side of domestication for the benefit of the TT reader, while the second is foreignized at times for the benefit of the ST cultural identity.

### About the Author

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