

## The Concept of Faithfulness in Poetic Translation

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### ---Abstract---

Language serves as a mediator between human beings. Inter communication between different communities that use different languages is difficult to ensure. Translating serves to make it possible. Translating which is asked to fulfil this communicative duty should be clear, exact, and faithful. Poetry represents the main human literary and aesthetic product; ensuring faithfulness when translating poetry needs to be clarified and limited

Translation is centred around the rendering of the exact meaning of a given message that takes the form of a written or a spoken text. The term translation is usually used to refer to the process of conveying the meaning of the source , or original , language into the target language ; it may be considered as a reformulation of a given text not only an inter-linguistic activity or process , but also an intra-linguistic rewording or reformulation, an explanation for a best comprehension. It aims at removing ambiguity for a better, clear and understandable communication. Jakobson points out that:

“Translation did not spring up over night, but was, we could suggest , the application to the passage from one language to another, of the techniques developed for the passage within the same language from one genre or level or style to another” (1)

It means at the same time interpretation, rewording or representation. Kurt Goldstein Adds:

“Translation is a representation of things of one world in another world, that they can be grasped in the latter, ... we can only translate properly after we have acquired a real conception of the structure of the new language in relation to the life of the people who spoke it. The words became representation of the particular approach with which the surrounding world is considered by the people who speak this language, and we begin genuinely to understand the new language” (2)

We no longer translate our language to the words of a new language but we translate our thoughts, visions, philosophies and convictions namely in types of texts where subjectivity prevails.

Goldstein makes clear the importance of being aware of the structure and the world and the specificities of both language (the source and the target) . Hence , mastering translation techniques is the qualification needed for each practitioner of translation ; these techniques prevent the translator from committing the error that may transform the meaning of a given message which reflects negatively on the content and makes it unfaithful.

- Translation rules are centred around guaranteeing the following .

1. The exactness of the translation .
2. Its correctness.
3. Its faithfulness.

These three dimensions have degrees and variations and differ from one field to another. Translation is not just a technical work separated from the text's environment it is also a creative task that aims at transplanting the texts values and levels.

Besides mastering languages the translator should have a good background and good mastery of the cultural aspects of both languages. Then s/he should have a good knowledge of what he translates and must be interested in the field of his translation.

The best translators are also specialists in the field in which they translate. Thus the translator of a psychological text is a psychologist , as well as for the translator of literary texts who should have a good background in literature and must possess special linguistic and poetic tastes

Translation should guarantee faithfulness of the meaning and form of the original text. The translation practitioner must respect the harmony between content and form taking into account the readability and receptability. Faithfulness in

translation is centred around exactness, respectability, equivalence, similarity and correctness. Then it should preserve cultural values and symbols that are reflected by language and the respect of the texts producer's intention. Total faithfulness leads to cause the same reaction and effects in the receptor compared to the same degree of effect on the reader of the original work. It should create an extreme combination and homogeneity between the form, the structure and the intention at a level that the translator renews and reproduces the dynamism and spirit of the original work. Faithfulness is not guaranteed only in content , but form is as important since a literary product represents equilibrium of form and content particularly in literary translation and translating poetry.

#### Aspects and manifestations of Poetic Translation

Poetry represents the apex, as it is said, in translating creative writing which include novels, drama, plays. Both form and content seem to be important in poetry. The form of the poem vehicles its rhythm, rhyme , intonation and sound effect . Finding equivalents for these poetic features in the target language is quite difficult to ensure when conveying the poetic verse into another language. Equivalence means ensuring the same effect; Ben Bennai points out that:

“The translator must be willing and able to bridge gaps not only between the source and the target languages, but also between elements and forces that constitute their respective cultures and societies.” (3)

It should be emphasized also that importations are acceptable, and constitute the translator's legitimate and necessary prerogatives, as well as his genuine to deal with language.

All poetry seems to be difficult to translate faithfully either in form or content, especially the good one. It is obvious that the translator of poetry must himself have poetic talent, must be fluent and sensitive to the source language likewise and must have a good knowledge of the cultural manifestation and representation. Hence , the translator must:

“...identify himself wholeheartedly with the original poet, moreover he must penetrate the exteriority of the original text and lose himself in its intertextuality” (4)

The poetry translator must not capture the theme and spirit of the original, the ebb and flow of idea and feeling , but also must create the rhythm with all its delicate vicissitude. The principal requirement for him is a sense of imagination without distortion and without loss of semantic aspect. Of course the rhythm in the target poem as well as the ability to recreate poetic imagery without distortion and without loss of semantic features. The rhythm of the second language is different from the source but similarly and equivalence should be preserved.

Bremen Kennedy emphasizes this by saying that “the finding of the right rhythm in translation is like the transplanting of a human heart however “the translator is free to emphasize one of many possible meanings of the printed poem. Regardless of what the poem might have meant. He may also be able to caten the ebb, flow and feeling of rhythm without the necessary use of the exact metric sheme of the original poem” (6)

Here, the rhythm of poetry is not rigidly prescribed ; it may contain deviation from the basic metrical pattern within the poem. Moreover, successive generations of readers have been known to effect changes in many texts rendering them less than perfectly immutable. (7)

It is admitted that translation of poetry usually solidifies their understanding of a given source poem in many ways. The poem produced should create an effect that is based on the notion of equivalence and similarity necessary for faithfulness in translation in general and literary translation particularly and in translating poetry essentially.

Calvin Brown sums it up saying that “the translation of any poem is necessarily a sort-cross puzzle because of the necessity of attempting to reproduce the form, the meaning and the feeling of a work which was concerned in different forms”(8)

To sum up we point out that the possibility of rendering the meaning of a given poem into a different linguistic form “a different language” , is essentially centred around the following

The competence of the translator and his capacity to use words and arrange them to express thoughts.

Language itself and its characteristics, expressivity and structure . Jakobson says “Languages differ in what they must convey not in what they can convey”. (9)

The combination between the two factors, i.e the capacity of the translator to deal with language.

The task of the translator is to make the author appear as charming as possible, provided he maintains his characters, and makes him not unlike himself. Translation is a type of drawing after life, where every one will acknowledge that there is a double sort of likeness, a good and a bad. (10)

Here are verses of Ahmed Chawki’s poem translated into English. The last word is given to the reader (the receptor) to judge in which way translating is faithful to the original style, rhythm, intonation and language genuine, namely to formal aspect of Arabic poetry.

خدعوا بها بقولهم حسناء	و الغوا نسي يغريهن الثناء
أتراها تتاست اسمي لما	كثرت في غرامها الأسماء
إن رأ تتسي تميل عني كان لم	تك بيني وبينها أشياء
نظرة فابتسامة، فسلام	فكلام فموعد فلقاء
ففرق يكون فسيه دواء	أو فرقا يكون منه الداء

Translation into English by E.M Naguib:

Duped by their saying: a beauty	And the pretty are duped by praise
Think you she forgot my name when,	Many others fell in love
When she sees me, she veers away,	As if there was nothing between us
A glance, a smile, a greeting,	A chat, a date, a meeting
Then a separation, in which will be cure	Or a separation in which will be ailment

Faithfulness in translation , particularly poetic translation , is hard to ensure since it is not centred around content only but also form , as well as the expressivity of each language that has specific rules of expressing thought, its genuine, likewise its rhythm and intonation.

The form is the vehicle of content , but this form loses its poetic features when translated to another linguistic sign , although the same content was preserved. In the sense Kelly adds that:

“Good translation must... consciously attempt the spirit of the original at the expense of the letter- now this is much the same as saying that the translator must be of original talent...”(11)

All in all , faithfulness in translation is a difficult task. It represents the prerequisite of any true translation , a total translation and an acceptable translation. Benjamin says:

“A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not black its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original more fully”(12)

A real translation is a neutral translation, a transparent translation and a faithful translation , not only to the meaning , but also to the form as well as to the poetic features of the original work .

### Notes

- 1-Eric Jakobson “Translation, a traditional craft”. Oxford University Press. Ed. (1958). P44
- 2-In. George E. Wellworth “Special Consideration in Drama” in Translation Spectrum (1981). P.143.
- 3-Ben Bennai “Translating Arabic Poetry” in Translation Spectrum. (1981). P135
- 4-OP Cit .P136
- 5-Ann E. Broda. “Translating for Music». In Translation Spectrum (1981). P149
- 6-OP Cit.P. 150
- 7-See Ben Bennai. Op.Cit. p.136
- 8-See Ann E. Broda. Op. Cit. p.150
- 9- In Eric Jakobson op cit. P 89
- 10-Translation Course. A Methodological Approach. [www.itec.edu](http://www.itec.edu)
- 11-in L.G Kelly “The True Interpreter”. Basil Blackwell (1979). P.197
- 12-in OP. Cit.p. 55

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