The Cultural Problems in Translating a Novel from Arabic to English Language
A Case Study: the Algerian Novel

Fatiha Guessabi
Faculté des lettres et science humaine
Département des langues – traduction
Université de Béchar. Algérie

Abstract
A lot of translations of many novels are resulting in books different from the original. We see a plot begins to go in a different direction, and the main character is developing into a whole different person. When we say translating, some people thought it is a word for word, others say it is a creative work done without following the original text; and this work gives the target text a life of its own. But to describe the same thought in a different language seems to give it a whole different life that is richer and more creative. How can we translate novels correctly? Word for word or meaning to meaning? How far can the translator go before we can call this translation an original? And can we? In this paper, we are going to investigate the translating of an Algerian Novel from Arabic language into English language. The focus of the study is twofold: What are the cultural problems the translator can face in his/her translation? How can he/she domesticate the target text? And is the foreignisation a solution in translation?

Keywords: Language, culture, cultural problems, translation, Algerian novel.
Introduction

In the beginning of the third millennium where the echoes of globalization resounds through the world, the needs to the translated matter have increased intensely. For example, in the Arab world especially in Algeria, the translation of literary or non literary works from Arabic language to the French and English languages has not ceased to augment more intense. This phenomenon can be explained by two facts: firstly, that the French and English languages appeared as official languages in the world. Secondly, the production of the pragmatic, scientific, and literary texts in English and French languages augmented significantly. In Algeria and in the Arab world in general, millions of literary works need to be translated from Arabic to the French and English languages.

In this context, we are questioning the cultural problems in translation and how can the translators solve these problems especially when we have two languages extremely different such as Arabic and English.

Language, Culture, and Translation:

Language is a culture and culture is a language

This statement implies that language and culture have a complex homologous relationship. Language is so complexly intertwined with culture, i.e., language and culture have evolved together and influencing one another in the process and ultimately shaping what it means to be human. In this meaning, A. L. Krober (1923), said "culture, then, began when speech was present, and from then on, the enrichment of either means the further development of the other."

If the culture is a product of human interaction, so the cultural manifestations are acts of communication that assume particular speech communities. According to Rossi Landi (1973)" the totality of the messages we exchange with one another while speaking a given language constitutes a speech community, that is, the whole society understood from the point of view of speaking". He also said that all the children learn their language from their societies, and during the process of learning a language also learn their culture and develop their cognitive abilities.

Language communicates through culture and culture communicates through language. The linguist Michael Silverstein (1985) proposed that the communication force of culture works not only in representing aspects of reality, but also in connecting one context with another. That is communication is not only the use of symbols that "stand for" beliefs, feelings, identities, events, it is also a way of pointing to or presupposing or bringing into the present context beliefs, feelings, identities. According to the linguistic relativity principle, the way in which we think about the world is directly influenced by the language we use to talk about it.

As Edward Sapir (1929) put it "….the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same with different label attached". (p69)
Therefore, to speak is to assume a culture, and to know a culture is like knowing a language. Language and culture are homologous mental realities. Cultural products are representations and interpretations of the world that must be communicated in order to be lived.

**Translation and cultural problems:**
The problem is what happens when cross-culture contacts and interaction take place, i.e., when the message producer and the message receiver are from different cultures. The contact among culture increased and makes the intercultural communication imperative for people to make a concerted effort to get along with and understand those whose believes and backgrounds may be vastly different from their own.

Language can mark the cultural identity, it is also used to refer to other phenomena and refer beyond itself especially when a particular speaker used it for his intentions. A particular language points to the culture of a particular social group. We can conclude that language is a culture consequently translating a language is translating a culture. Therefore, to translate you should know the both language and culture.

Culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral conventions, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people and that influence each member's behavior and each member's interpretations of the meanings of other people's behavior. Language is the medium for expressing and embodying other phenomena. It expresses the values, beliefs and meanings which members of a given society share by virtue of their socialization into it. Language also refers to object peculiar to a given culture and that is so evident in proper names which embodied those objects. The linguist Byran(1989) said that "a loaf of bread" evokes a specific culture objects in British usage unless a conscious effort is made to empty it of that reference and introduce a new one. Therefore we can draw on that language is a part of culture and through it we can express the cultural beliefs and values, that the specific collocations of a given word are peculiar to a language and its relationship with culture.

In fact, translation means to produce an equivalent message in the target language. In this context, Nida notes that the production of equivalent message is a process of matching different parts of speech, but also reproducing the total dynamic character of the communication. In other words, the text and the context have to be considered. Language and context are based on the culture and its sign systems in which the language is created.

Language, as a sign system, is a cultural vehicle that reflects the society and its values in which communications take place. Non-linguistic signs which form part of the context determine the cultural framework in which linguistic signs function. The task of the translator is to find a translation theory to deal with cultural aspects in the transference of sign meaning into a target language.

Nida (1975) suggests five important phases of communication that have to be considered when translating. They are:
1. The subject matter, i.e., the referents that are talked about.
2. The participants who take part in the communication.
3. The process of writing.
4. The code used that is language, including all its symbols and arrangements.
5. The message that is the particular way in which the subject matter is encoded into specific symbols and arrangements.

According to Nida (1975) the translator may have problems in decoding the message in the case of translating texts between different cultures which are not closely related. The translator in this case will find rare form of words, unusual syntax, strange combinations of words and unfamiliar themes. As a result, he will face problems in decoding the original message. He added that certain aspects of culture are universal and are not culturally bound. He said that human experience is so much alike throughout the world. Everyone eats, sleeps, works, is related to families’ experiences, love, hates, is/has jealousy, is capable of altruism, loyalty, and friendship, and employs many facial gestures which are almost universal. In fact, what people of various cultures have in common is far greater than what separates them from one another.

Language is embedded in a cultural context and has to be transferred to the target language to solve the cultural challenges and problems in translation (Nida, 1975). Nida (1975) proposed cultural dynamic equivalence. The dynamic equivalent translation is the closest natural equivalent to the source language message. This definition contains three essential terms: equivalent, which refers to the source language message, natural which refers to the receptor language, and closest which binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of approximation. The translation should bear no obvious trace of a foreign origin; it should fit the whole receptor language and culture. However, when source and receptor languages represent very different cultures there should be many basic themes and accounts which cannot be naturalized by the process of translating.

In this case, Nida (1975) said that no translation that attempts to bridge a wide cultural gap can hope to eliminate all traces of the foreign setting. Thus, the translator could not always domesticate the Target text but sometimes he will foreignise certain terms or words. Domestication means changing the SL values and making them readable for the TL audience. However Foreignisation is keeping the values of the SL and exposing audience to them.

**A Case Study: the Algerian novel**

**Literary translation:**

We mean by literary texts all the different written literature genres like novels, novellas, poetry and theater. We can distinguish the literary language from the scientific or the technologic language which has a universal character, by the subjective expression of emotions of the author. Wellek and Warren (1971) mention, the scientific language tends to be logic, and easy to understand it; unlike the literary language which is highly connotative and not referential because it has an expressive side which expresses the tone and the attitude of the writer, they said (1971). Therefore, the literary works are so different than the scientific works they said” fortément connotatif, est loin d’être uniquement referential. Il a une cote expressive ; il exprime le ton et l’attitude de celui qui parle ou écrit. Et ce langage ne se contente pas d’énoncer et d’exprimer ce qu’il dit ; il prétend aussi influer sur l’attitude du lecteur, le persuader, et en définitive le modifier […]. Des œuvres littéraires diverses s’écartent a des degrés différents du langage scientifique (Wellek et Warren 1971 : 32).
Flamand (1983: 119) has also spoken about the same idea and brings out the freedom of the writer: “Unlike scientific language or pragmatic language, the expressivity and the subjectivity of the literary language related to the freedom of the artistic expression which the writer plays.” Moreover, Jauss insists on the relation between literature and society and when we say society we mean cultures, values, traditions and religions. He said That in French language:

<< ...la littérature n’est pas un simple produit, mais aussi un facteur de production de la société. Elle véhicule des valeurs esthétiques, éthiques, sociales, qui peuvent contribuer aussi bien a transformer la société qu’a la perpétuer telle qu’elle est >> (Jauss 1978 : 78).

Thus, translating a literary text means translating the culture and the Imagination. And in order to do that the translator should be free and faithful at the same time in his translating, in order to be faithful to the original text, the translator should respect the ‘vouloir dire’ of the author.

According to this St-Pierre said in French language: "Si pour certains, traduire fidèlement signifie rendre l’expression même du texte original, pour d’autres, une traduction fidele est celle qui se libéré de l’expression pour serrer de plus près l’intention de l’auteur, le message du texte "(St-Pierre 1990 : 124).

Therefore, the translation in English language is:” To be faithful to the meaning of the original message, the translator should know the linguistic and extra-linguistics signs, and culture of the target receivers. In this context Hurtado Albir said:

“In order to be faithful to the original meaning, the translator should be faithful to what the original author wants to say such as: preverbal origin, all the processes of thinking, expressing ideas, and meaning genesis). And then, in his rewritings he should be faithful to the proper means which help the target language to express these thoughts –what the author wants to say- and help the receivers to understand the target text the same as the original text’s receivers understand it. These three principles of faithful are necessary and inseparable if we want to be faithful to the original meaning” (Hurtado Albir 1990: 79).

A Case Study: Dhâkirat al-Jassad » “Mémoires de la chair” “the memories of the flesh” Ahlam Mosteghanemi.

This story occurred in Algeria exactly in Constantine during the French colonial rule. This town is located in the east of Algeria. It has three names: Ksantina, Cirta, and Town of Bridges.

This story narrates the life of an old martyr (moujahid) his name is Khaled, who had exiled to France where he fell in love with a girl her name is Hayat. Hayat was the daughter of his head in the Maquis.

In this novel the author used the Algerian dialect and the Algerian culture, so it is very difficult for a translator who has never seen or lived in Algeria to translate it.

In this work, we are going to list some cultural problems that can face the translator during his translating process and how can he solve these problems.

Therefore, the first problem which can face the translator is the proper names Khaled and Hayat.

1- واش راك تعمل...(ص.402)
2- رائع ناصر... نستعرف بيه (ص.403)
3- واش بيك انت تاني... عيب...
4- الناس.. الناس.. يقولوا واش بيعيوا... خلينا بارجل يرحم والديك...(ص.404)
The Cultural Problems in Translating

Guessabi

The translation:
1. “What are you doing?”
2. “I'll take my hat off to you!, well done!, bravo!”.
3. “What’s the matter with you...shame on you or it would be a crying shame…
4. “Do not care what people say please”.
5. “You know”
6. “Oh my brother …what’s happen to you?..The country had troubles and one of you are busy with his prayer and the other with his bear…what am I going to do with you?
7. The town has troubles.
8. ” He answered me nervously and haughtily”
9. ”What’s happen?...I hope everything all right.”
10. “Mr. Cherif...”
11. "I count on you"
12. " What’s a surprise to meet you here!”
13. ‘Are you still collecting pictures?’
14. ’ Take care of yourself, khaled.’
15. ‘Please clear the way’

In the first sentence, if the translator does not know the Algerian culture, s/he cannot translate because the word “واش راك” does not exist in the dictionary. This word has two meanings in the Algerian dialect: “How are you” and “What?”. The translator here should have an idea about the Algerian culture in order to translate this sentence.

In the second sentence the translator can face a problem in translating the word “اعلش فاك؟” from the word “استعرف” which means to remember for example he remembers his childhood friend”, but the meaning in this sentence is completely different in the Algerian dialect it means “I'll take my hat off to you!, well done!, bravo!”.
In the third sentence, in this case we should know the context of the sentence how the Algerian people think; we should live a time in the Algerian society to know more about their culture. Therefore, we can translate this sentence “What’s the matter with you...shame on you or it would be a crying shame…”

The repetition of the word "الناس” in sentence four has a meaning; it means that the author is angry and nervous. The first translation will be “People..People..They said what they like.. let us guy… may God forgive your parents.” However, the corrected translation is “Do not care what people say please”.

The sentence "على بالك” should be translated “You know” not “In your mind.”

The words “لاقتى، مستخدمة” in the sixth sentence do not exist in the dictionary, so the translator will face a cultural problem here “Oh my brother …what’s happen to you?. The country had troubles and one of you are busy with his prayer and the other with his bear…what am I going to do with you?

The words "قائمة وقاعدة” do not have the meaning of “Standing up and sitting down” because the town is not a person, so the translator should understand the meaning here which means that the town has troubles. The word "بتشناف" does not exist in the dictionary, it means “Come on strong”, so the translation is:” He answered me nervously and haughtily”.

The word "عليه” in sentence eleven does not exist in the dictionary; it is an Algerian’s word. Therefore, the translation will be:”What’s happen?...I hope everything all right.”

The letter "مه” means Mr. in the Algerian dialect but it has no meaning in Arabic language. The translator in this case should know the meaning of this word and he should say “Mr. Cherif…” in sentence twelve.

In sentence thirteen the meaning of "رأئي” is «I » and the corrected translation is: “I count on you”.

In sentence fourteen the letter "أي” has a meaning in the Algerian dialect which means surprise. Therefore, the translation should be «What’s a surprise to meet you here! ». The word "الميلويات” is a French word from the word « tableau » which means picture. Therefore, we can say ‘Are you still collecting pictures?’.

In sentence sixteen the translation should be: ‘Take care of yourself, khaled.’

In the last sentence, the two words ‘street..Street’ means a sign the translator should know and understand it .This sign was given to a woman by her husband to clear the way to a foreign man or a guest to enter the home, because in Algeria exactly in Constantine it is a shame if the foreign man sees his wife. Therefore the translation is ‘please clear the way’.

**Conclusion:**

Since translation is simultaneously a theory and a practice, the translators must think about the artistic features of the novel, its exquisiteness and approach, as well as its marks (lexical, or grammatical). They should not forget that the stylistic marks of one language can be immensely different from another. As far as the whole text is concerned, it is simply impossible to transfer all the message of the original text into the target text, especially when source and receptor languages represent very different cultures. There should be many basic themes and accounts which cannot be naturalized by the process of translating. In this case, Nida(1975) said that no translation that attempts to bridge a wide cultural gap can hope to eliminate all traces of the
foreign setting. Thus, the translator could not always domesticate the Target text but sometimes he will foreignise certain terms or words. Domestication means changing the SL values and making them readable for the TL audience. However, Foreignisation is keeping the values of the SL and exposing the audience to them.

Thus, translation is not only translating the words, the meaning, the rules grammar and the arrangement of words, but it is also translating the behavior of the society and cultural customs. Language is a product of the thought and behavior of a society. According to that the translator should understand the original culture and interpret it through the receiver language. No culture no language and no meaning.

We can conclude that to translate a novel you should respect the “vouloir dire” of the author, reading more about him, his subject, his style in writing and the time when he wrote his novel.

To translate a novel you should think and feel as the author did, and this can be achieved only by contacting the author if he is still alive and visiting the place where he wrote his novel (Algeria). Therefore, to translate an Algerian Novel should the translator be a novelist or Algerian translator?

Since we cannot transfer all the message of the original text into the target text, and we find the original proper names in the translated novel (Khaled and Hayat). Is the novel original or translated one?

Some theorists said the translation should bear no obvious trace of a foreign origin; it should fit the whole receptor language and culture. Can translators do that in translating a novel where many cultural problems will face them?

About the Author:
FATIHA GUESSABI is a teacher of English language at the University of Bechar in Algeria. She holds an MA in translation, and she is preparing a PhD in Translation. Her areas of interest include translation theory, teaching the English language for Arab students, culture and language.

References
Guessabi, fatiha (2010). (eds n4). Language is culture on intercultural communication, colloque international langues, cultures et méditerranéite, EDOLAS. University of Oran. Algeria.


