

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN TRANSLATING ISLAMIC-RELATED TEXTS FROM ENGLISH INTO ARABIC

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the problems that experienced translators in Jordan face when translating ideological Islamic-related texts from English into Arabic. To achieve this purpose, the researchers have designed a translation test consisting of 10 extracts with ideological content written by Muslim and non-Muslim writers. A purposive sample of 16 translators was selected to perform the test. The researchers have analyzed the results of the test qualitatively. The study reveals that the translators have faced the following six problems when rendering the texts; inability to deal with the ideological implications; the ambiguity of some words; the differences between source language (SL) and target language (TL) cultures; the translators' semantic and syntactic mediation; lack of knowledge and the inadequacy of dictionaries.

Keywords: Ideology, Translation, Islamic-related text, Problems

INTRODUCTION

Recent technology advancement has reduced the world to be a small place. People of different cultural backgrounds are involved in an inter-cultural interaction. Ideas, beliefs, and norms of a certain community constitute its ideology and differentiate it from other communities. History, traditions, language and religion are different manifestations of culture. In the course of inter-cultural interaction, cultural differences are supposed to be tolerated, understood and accepted.

Religion is the most sensitive area of culture. Religious beliefs are not negotiated because most people grow suspicious to opposing points of view. The peculiarity of religious language stems from its divine status, connotative meaning, and stability (Al-Harabsheh 2013). Being associated with God, religious language is supposed to be fixed and transmitted from a generation to another without any change. Changing or introducing new terms in religion might denote different implied meanings and different ideologies. Thus, religious language is considered ideologically –a bounded language. This is why people don't accept coining religious-related terms. For example, "Mohammedism" a term which was coined by (Sale, 1891) as a synonym of "Islam" was rejected by Muslims who considered it offensive since it suggests that the source of Islam is Mohammad (peace be upon him) rather than God.

Currently, many Islamic-related terms are coined to describe different Islamic issues by non-Muslims such as "fundamentalists, radicalism, Islamists...etc". These controversial terms are adopted by some Muslims and rejected by others which indicate the existence of different ideologies within Islam.

The current ideological conflict which prevails in the Islamic world internally and externally enhances the need for interfaith dialogue and intercultural communication with more understanding and acceptance and less misconception. Religious ideologies are used in the current conflict in the Islamic world. They shape the civil and political life of people. New

Islamic- related terms are coined by Muslims and non-Muslims. These terms are used in mass media, political and religious discourses to serve certain agendas. Getting familiar with such terms, people may use them without knowing their connotative meanings. Translators play an important role in rendering these terms. They should take into account their implied meanings, so as to avoid misconception. Translators, aware or not, may get involved in ideological interference in rendering such ideologically- loaded texts either to follow their own ideology or to satisfy their readership.

Statement of the Problem

In rendering a text with ideologically-loaded terms, translators encounter many obstacles that may encourage him / her to manipulate a text to make the target text cope with his own ideology or with the constraints of his/her readership. This might distort the meaning of the original text. The investigation of ideology in translating Islamic – related texts is worthy because it play an important role in Muslims' life, especially in this era. The study will hopefully enrich translators' awareness of the important role they play in translating such texts. Very few studies have been conducted in this area whether in Jordan or in other Arab countries. It may also benefit teachers, students and others who are interested in translation. Therefore, this study may fill a gap in the literature.

This study aims to investigate the problems which translators face in rendering ideological Islamic- related texts from English into Arabic. To achieve the above- mentioned goal, the study attempted to answer the following question: What problems do translators face in translating ideological Islamic- related texts from English into Arabic?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The term " ideology is " a set of beliefs, especially one held by a particular group, that influences the way people behave " Hornby (2004, p. 643). While the first definition refers to the relationship of ideology and policy, the second one highlights the impact of ideology on people's behavior.

Ideology can be seen from different points of view. Eagleton (1991, p. 1) defines it as "a text woven of a whole tissue of different conceptual strands". He also refers randomly to some definitions of ideology such as:-

- a. a body of social characteristics of a particular social group or class;
- b. ideas which help to legitimate, a dominant political power;
- c. False ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power;
- d. Identity thinking;
- e. the conjuncture of discourse and power ;
- f. action-oriented sets of beliefs .

Newmark (1981) highlights the peculiarity of words that convey or suggest connotative meanings apart from their explicit names. He indicates that "such words are based on the feelings and moral ideas they rouse in both the transmitter and receptor" (p,119). Moreover, Newmark draws the attention to "evaluative language" which denotes the author's assessment of values explicitly or implicitly. He states that some words such as "terrible, passable" have unsettled meaning unless they are based on " a scale" which copes with writers value judgments and then might be transformed according to the target culture. Words such as revolutionary, formalists...etc gain their evaluative fact from the culture they were derived from. In translating such words, Newmark states that the translator may support the reader with a footnote to sustain the " thought content" of the ST. Furthermore, the translator is

authorized to assess the subjectivity of the writer's evaluations. He also indicates that while some verbs are informative, others may denote positive or negative meaning which should be taken in account in translation.

Hatim and Mason (1990) state that ideological involvement in translation may be used as a device of power. They state that " behind the systematic linguistic choices we make, there is inevitably a prior classification of reality in ideological terms" (p, 161). Ideology is manifested in language at a lexical-semantic level and at the grammatical-syntactic level.

Simpson (1993) views ideology, from a critical linguistic angle, as "assumptions beliefs and value-system which are shared collectively by social groups" (p, 5). This definition suggests that ideology is the vital element of any social group. He states that the dominance of a certain ideology stems from the powerful and authoritative political, religious and social institutions which circulate their ideologies by using specific linguistic practices. He indicates that the idea that " language reproduces ideology" (p, 6) is an essential element of critical linguistic principles. So language expresses ideologies and constitutes them.

Van Dijk (2001, p. 12) defines ideology as " a special form of social cognition shared by social groups.". He argues that ideologies form the grounds of social conventions that are practiced by members of a certain social group."

Holt (2004) investigated the theoretical and practical problems of translating Islamist discourse. He conducted a case study in which he employed Sayyid Qutb's Ma'aalim fi T-Tariiq and its English translation Milestones (1997) by Bobby Sayyid. The study revealed that theoretically, Islamist discourse tries to develop an ideology that is outside the course of the West and it also confronts the concept of universality which led the translator to reserve a lot of Arabicness to keep Islam as the master signifier; practically ideological Islamic texts are accompanied with explicit problems such as inter-textuality, figurative devices uncommon to English readership and the issue of polysemy in which one signifier refers to more than one signified which the translated version also failed to address.

Al-Mohannadi (2008) investigated ideology in translation. The study aimed to find out the effect of the translator's ideology on his/her style and the way he/she chooses words which lead to form the world views of receivers. He relied on the comparative analysis of three texts: the original is Bin Laden's speech on 7 October 2001 in Arabic and two translated versions of BBC and CNN in English. The analysis evaluated the likelihood of the translators' mediation based on Hatim and Mason (1990 &1997). The study revealed that the BBC's version was to a degree better than the CCN's, i.e. it rendered the message of Bin Laden's communicatively; intended or not, CNN's version had many mistakes, omissions, additions and discrepancies and on re-reading CNN's translation the researcher came to a conclusion that the mistakes didn't reflect the translator ideology but they were attributed to his/her linguistic inadequacy and the stress and the haste under which the translation was done.

Al- Harahsheh (2013) investigated the effect of the translators' ideology on rendering Islamic texts written by non-Muslim and translated by Muslim students. For this purpose, three Islamic texts written by non-Muslim were selected to be translated by 49 undergraduate students (48 Muslim students and one Christian student). The students were not informed of the exact aim of the study to avoid interference in their translation. The researcher employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore the investment of ideology in translating religious texts. The study revealed that ideology has a significant impact on the translation of Muslim students when rendering Islamic texts written by non-Muslims; they were predisposed to add honorific expression after the name of prophets and names of sacred places; they omitted and replaced words that imply negative connotations to lessen their

impacts so as to cope the Target Text (TT) with their religious and cultural ideology; and the study indicates that CDA is an important tool in investigating the social, cultural and ideological practices in translation.

Alghamdi (2014) investigated the notion of ideology transference through the translated texts. The study aimed to explore the effect of the social-cultural and ideological restraints on the translator's strategies used in translation. It also aimed to identify the ideological presumptions implied in both the Source Text (ST) and TT. To achieve this purposes the researcher selected two different Arabic translated version of Chomsky's book " Media Control". The data analysis was based on CDA theory, especially the framework stated by Van Dijk (1999). The three texts were examined at two levels:- Macro-level analysis to investigate when, how, where and what the text is and Micro-level analysis to investigate: lexicalization which inspects the use of biased words and ideologically hidden terms and dominate syntactic choices which inspect the deviation among verbs, adjectives, pronouns , proper noun and adverbs in both TTS. It also investigates the important differences in terms of modalisation, nominalization, passivization and addition versus omission in translation and foreignization versus domestication. The study revealed that there are cogent differences between the two TTS in choosing the lexical items and other syntactic structure in comparison with ST; the cogent difference denotes some ideological transference through translation process; and to a degree, these differences were also affected by the translator's socio-cultural and ideological restraints.

METHODOLOGY

The sample, which was chosen purposively, comprised 16 translators. The demographic data of the participating translators and their general background include gender, age, nationality, work experience, educational background and the major in college or university. The sample included 8 males and 8 females whose age ranged between 23 and more than 40 years. All of them were Jordanians except one Iraqi translator. Their work experience ranged from one to more than 40 years in translation. All of them were Muslims; twelve of them held M.A degrees, two were holders of Ph.D., and two were B.A holders. Most of them majored in English, literature, linguistics, and translation. However one of them majored in English for specific purposes and another one majored in Islamic theology.

The researchers developed a test which embodied two parts. While the first comprised the demographic data of the participants, the second was dedicated to translating statements derived from books, articles and websites (written by Muslim or non-Muslim writers). Three of them were non-Muslim orientalist, known for their controversial and influential writings about Islam, namely George Sale, Bernared Lewis, and Daniel Pipes. The three Muslim ideologists whose ideas about Islam were influential and controversial for both Muslims and non-Muslims, were Abu Alaa Maududi, Sayyed Qutb, and Ali Shariati. The two other writers were Muslim American scholars and writers, namely Imam Zaid Shakir (a specialist in Islamic spirituality) and Laila Ahmed (a specialist in Islam and Islamic feminism).

To help the translators figure out the ideology in each extract, the researchers provided the names of the writers of each one. Newmark (1981) evaluative language is considered in designing the test which contains: controversial terms, vague adjectives, and verbs with negative connotations which might result in disparity in translation due to the ideologies of the translators.

After preparing the extracts of the test they were given to a panel of four university professors who have a teaching experience in translation and linguistics to assure the validity of the test.

They were asked to comment on the suitability of the extracts and to suggest any modifications if needed to achieve the objectives of the study

The reliability of the instruments was examined by means of a test-retest. The translation pretest was administered to a group of five professional translators who were not included in the sample but have the same characteristics. The test was repeated after one week. The results were stable. Their feedback provided helpful and valuable comments. They acknowledged that the texts were difficult and their translation required time and deep understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The problems that translators faced in rendering ideological Islamic-related texts from English into Arabic were manifested in different areas : Firstly, inability to deal with the ideological implications; Secondly, the ambiguity of some words; Thirdly, the differences between SL and TL cultures; Fourthly, the translators' Semantic and syntactic mediation; Fifthly, lack of knowledge; sixthly, inadequacy of dictionaries.

The first problem is the inability to deal with the ideological implications. Ideological Islamic-related texts are often replete with controversial terms with ideological, often pejorative, connotation. Translators rendered terms like "Mohammedism", "fundamentalism", "radicalism" either by transferring the meaning of the ST faithfully as in "المحمدية", "الاصولية" and "الراديكالية" or rendering them to their controversial and conflated connotation as in rendering "radicalism" and "fundamentalism" into "التطرف" disregarding the ideological implications and left it to the reader to figure out any ideological implication. This reduces the role of the translator to be merely a transmitter rather than interpreter or mediator. Translators also rendered them by domesticating the TT either by providing cultural equivalent such as in rendering "Mohammedism" into "الاسلام" or omitting the controversial terms as in omitting "radicalism" and "fundamentalism" or providing glossing that clarify the ideological implications of the terms. This way is an attempt to bring the TT to the target culture which might be interpreted as an ideological intervention. This result agrees with Newmark (1988) who highlights the peculiarity of words that carry or suggest connotative meaning other than the explicit meaning. He also indicates that translating words such as "radicalism" literally can be misleading because its connotation may differ from one culture to another.

The second problem is the ambiguity of some words which can be attributed to different factors: First: words with devious meaning as in "The preemptive fundamentalism of the Saudi establishment". It is not obvious what the word "preemptive" means. Translators failed to provide a clear meaning of the word. They either rendered it into the direct dictionary meaning "أستباقي", "وقائي", omitting it or provided wrong answers. This agrees with Newmark (1981) who states that in "evaluative language" some adjectives would be "vague" until they are interpreted according to a scale that depends on the writer's value judgments and then transformed to the target culture. The second factor that leads to ambiguity is words that have more than one meaning. The word "to veil" was translated into three Arabic equivalents "يرتدين الحجاب / النقاب / الخمار" which have different meanings. The word "hijab" is not used in the Holy Quran to refer to a piece of clothes. It is rather used to refer to a screen, partition, or a thing used to cover. This "hijab" was required exclusively for the prophet's wives.

"وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ" الآية 53 من سورة الأحزاب

And when you ask [the prophet's wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition". (Al-Ahzab-53) Today the word "hijab" is used inexplicitly for different kinds of clothes

which leads to jurisprudential debate. The equivalent words " veil " and " hijab " lead to ambiguity in both ST and TTs. This agrees with Holt (2004) who states that the issue of polysemy - in which one signifier refers to more than one signified, is one of the problems that are associated with ideological Islamist texts.

The third problem is the differences between SL and TL cultures. In each culture, there are social and religious constraints. In Islam and Islamic culture, it is indecent to mention the name of the God or the name of the prophet without using honorific words. Some translators added honorific words to their translation as follows:

" God " was rendered into

" الله سبحانه وتعالى "

" Muhammad's life was rendered into

" حياة النبي محمد ﷺ "

" Standard Islamic practice " was rendered into

" الممارسات الاسلامية السمة " أو " الدين الاسلامي الحنيف "

They do that either to satisfy their readership or because they used to do that for religious and cultural reasons. However, using honorific words while translating texts written by Muslims seems plausible and does not necessarily denote ideological implications. On the other hand using honorific words in texts written by non-Muslim writers seems odd, especially in rendering " Mohammedism " as:

" دين النبي محمد ﷺ "

Because it contradicts the ideological message that Islam is an invention of Muhammad. This agrees with Al-Harashseh (2013) who states that Muslim students were inclined to add honorific expressions after the name of the prophets and names of sacred places.

The fourth problem is the translators' semantic and syntactic mediation. Intended or not, semantic and syntactic shift might be interpreted as mediation. On the semantic level, there were variations in lexical choices used by translators to modify words that imply negative meaning or misinform Islam. They attempt to moderate words like " submit to the faith of Islam " as follows:

" تسلم " أو " تعتنق الاسلام " أو " اخضاع الارض لسلطه الاسلام و دعوة الناس الى دين الحق "

"The Muslim conquest " is also moderated by rendering it into

" الفتوحات الاسلامية "

On the syntactic level, some translators have shifted from singular into plural which might indicate generalization, as in rendering " recruit an assassin " into:

" تجنيد القتلة "

A shift from indefinite to definite is used to indicate specification in rendering " Islamist state " into:

" الدولة الاسلامية "

A shift from adjective to noun was used to specify the meaning as in rendering "... Islamic extremism current in the present time " into:

" التيارات الاسلامية المتطرفة "

This agrees with Hatim and Mason (1990) who state that ideology is disclosed in language at lexical-semantic and grammatical-syntactic level. It also agrees with Al Harashseh (2013) who indicates that the translators tend to replace words that denote pejorative connotations to lessen their effect. It is also in line with Alghamdi (2014) who indicates that the differences between ST and TT in lexical choices and syntactic structures reflect ideological transference.

The fifth problem is lack of knowledge. Ideological Islamic-related texts enclose a wide range of information. It encompasses religious, political, ideological and historical terms which require deep understanding. The translator's lack of information is reflected by using literal translation as in rendering literally the political term "rogue state" into:

" دولة خبيثة أو شريرة أو قاسية "

It might also be the reason behind omitting some words. Furthermore, it is manifested by providing wrong translation out of context which distorts the meaning as rendering "Mohammedism" into:

" لم يكن المحمديون مخترعون جيدون "

Or rendering "ruling Iranian hierarchy" into:

" السلالة الحاكمة " أو " العائلة المالكة "

Or in rendering "God's guidance" into:

" توجيهات الاله "

These mistakes reduce the probability of ideological implications of the translation and consider other reasons such as lack of information or linguistic incompetency. This agrees with Al-Muhannadi (2008) who indicates that disparity in translation does not necessarily reflect the translator's ideology. It rather can be attributed to linguistic inadequacy.

The sixth problem is the inadequacy of dictionaries. Some terms need further sources to figure out their connotative meaning such as religious, historical and political sources. Terms such as "rogue state", "jahyyliah", "Dar-ul-Islam" have connotative meanings which are not found in dictionaries. Furthermore, some English-Arabic dictionaries provide the prevailing meaning of some terms such as associating "radicalism" with "extremism" or rendering the term "Muhammadanism" which is a variety of "Mohammedism" into "الإسلام" without any reference to its offensive connotation.

CONCLUSION

The data obtained by means of the test indicated that experienced translators of ideological Islamic-related texts in Jordan have faced the following problems :- inability to deal with the ideological implications; ambiguity of some words; differences between the SL and TL cultures; the translators' semantic and syntactic mediation, lack of knowledge, and the inadequacy of dictionaries.

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