



Translating Contextualized Arabic Euphemisms Into English: Socio-Cultural Perspective

Ekrema Shehab^{[a].*}; Abdul-Rahman Qadan^{[a].}; Manar Hussein^[a]

^[a]Department of English, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Occupied Palestinian Territories.

*Corresponding author.

Received 1 April 2014; accepted 16 July 2014
 Published online 31 August 2014

Abstract

This study examines the role context plays in determining the translation strategies pursued by translators of Arabic euphemisms into English. Due to different cultural backgrounds, adherence to the employment of euphemism in a social context may differ in both Arabic and English. While some situations call for the use of euphemism in one culture, the other culture finds no point in using such euphemisms for such situations; preserving the original Arabic euphemisms when rendered into English in this case could lead to misunderstanding and may deprive the Source Language (SL) from a cultural trait. The study derives evidence from 11 Arabic euphemistic expressions taken from five literary masterpieces written by the Egyptian novelist and Noble Prize winner Najib Mahfouz, and it looks into the English translation of these euphemisms. The present study attempts to advance the proposition that Arabic euphemisms in their context exhibit fluctuating, unstable meaning, which emanates from various contextual factors such as speakers, addressees, shared knowledge and background information, and hence these factors combined dictate on translators the chosen translation strategy.

Key words: Euphemism; Translation; Translation strategies; Arabic; Context

Shehab, E., Abdul-Rahman, Q., & Hussein, M. (2014). Translating Contextualized Arabic Euphemisms into English: Socio-Cultural Perspective. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 10(5), 189-198. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/4546>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4546>

INTRODUCTION

Translating from Arabic into English abounds in problematic areas. This study touches upon euphemism as a cultural and linguistic gap and as one of the most problematic of these areas. In fact, calls such as that of Casagrande (1954, p.335) for the treatment of translation as a ‘primarily cultural act’ highlight so intrinsic a relationship between culture and translation. Culture poses a problem to the translation process because of a ‘cultural gap’ between the Orient and the Occident, a gap to which a number of theorists attribute the processes of manipulation, subversion, and violence the Arabic source text undergoes. Venuti (1996, p.196) succinctly argues that the violence of translation “resides in its very purpose and activity: the reconstruction of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs, and representations that pre-exist in the target language.” Venuti’s notion underpins the hypothesis with which this study is mainly concerned: processes such as manipulation, domestication, appropriation, and, more severely, substitution and subversion could create a demeaned, distorted stereotypical image of the Arabs’ social, cultural values and beliefs.

This study is mainly concerned with the translatability of contextualized Arabic euphemisms into English, and shows how this translation activity could be seen as a source of stereotyping in Arabic/ English translation. It identifies and discusses cultural-gap-related problems associating translating Arabic euphemisms into English, taking into account their prospective sequels. This study does not only pinpoint and attempt to demonstrate the fact that processes such as manipulation, domestication and appropriation wreak havoc on the Arabic original, causing it to lose its cultural values in favor of the English text, but it also provides room for the subjective translator to replace and substitute with too malevolent an intention that would influence the target (Western) readers with denigrated views of the Arab culture and its people. In

his article “The Cultural Encounters in Translating from Arabic”, Faiq (2004, p.5) makes it clear that an attitude as such “stems from the one-sided still current stereotypical ideology based on universalism, unitarism, and the homogeneity of human nature.” In fact, this politicized translation ideology also serves to marginalize, if not to vicariously exclude, the unique traits of the Arab societies and their “discursive traditions expressed in their literature”, as Faiq adds. Therefore, this study could also be viewed as an attempt to bridge the cultural gap and to lessen culture-related stereotypical exchanges between the Western community and the Arab/Muslim one; it promotes a true, objective, rather than stereotypical, image of the other.

As regards the importance of this study, two major aspects lend significance to it. The first is the fact that it could be regarded as a unique contribution to the field of translation, exploring the effect of culture in a combination of both theory and practice, on translating from Arabic into English. In fact, profuse is the literature that theoretically investigates unsituated, out-of-context euphemism as an excrescent problem in translation; very rare, however, are the studies that practically pinpoint the cultural turn in the process of translating Arabic euphemisms into English. This study also derives importance from the fact that its practical part could not only be of interest to people in translation, but it might also be of didactic impact on those in the field of language learning and teaching.

It is highly interesting to consider how certain expressions, euphemistically originated or represented in the Arabic original, are dysphemistically rendered into English with a view to denigrate the image of the Arab/Muslim and exacerbate antipathy between the East and the West. To render things clearer with an exemplary model of such expressions, let's consider the following Arabic excerpt, taken from Salih's (1969, p.8) *Season of Migration to the North* and its English rendition by Davies (1969, p.4):

Source Text (ST)

وقالت بنت مجذوب ضاحكة: (خفنا ان تعود الينا
بنصرانية غلفاء).

Target Text (TT)

Bint Majzoub laughed. 'We were afraid,' she said, 'you'd bring back with you an uncircumcised infidel for a wife.'

The Arabic word ‘نصرانية’ (female Christian) is rendered into English as ‘infidel’ to endorse Islam with fanaticism. In fact, this subversive replacement is very offensive to Christians; it aggravates antipathy between the Muslim community and the Christian one as it consolidates a pre-existing stereotypical belief within the Christian reader that Muslims view any non-Muslim as an atheist (who could possibly be targeted). This interpretation seems highly credible taking into

consideration the assessment of the Arab/Muslim character by the Victorian Orientalist Richard Burton who provided the images he grew up with before he ever met an Arab or Muslim person:

Our Arab at his worst is a mere barbarian who has not forgotten the savage. His crass and self-satisfied ignorance makes him glorify the most ignoble superstitions, while acts of revolting savagery are the natural results of a malignant fanaticism and a furious hatred of every creed beyond the pale of Al-Islam. (Karim 1997, p.159)

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Exactly as human beings, language has its means to ornament itself. Language through all ages has always reflected the various cultures of people and bore their ideas to the world. It also made it possible to communicate easily and share feelings, ideas, thoughts...etc. And since culture is transmitted through language, language had to invent techniques and methods to express culture and cultural ideas even those that can not be expressed freely or directly due to several various reasons. But how can language overcome this obstacle? If a certain culture forbids or restrains talks about certain subjects (e.g., sex, death), shall we not approach these subjects in our conversation at all? Here, language again proves capable of dealing with and reflecting culture perfectly, and euphemism is probably the best device to use in certain cultures when talking about such topics, as it is one of the language's ornaments.

Euphemism, as Leech (1983) defines, is “the practice of referring to something offensive or delicate in terms that make it sound more pleasant or becoming than it really is.” Euphemism, thus, is an avoidance linguistic strategy which is used to substitute an expression with inoffensive, pleasant, or exalted connotations for an expression with offensive, unpleasant, or harsh ones. In this respect, Larson (1984, p.116) notes that “euphemism is used to avoid an offensive expression or one that is socially unacceptable.” For example, in the death euphemism *pass away*, the unpleasant idea of death is not highlighted but simply indirectly implied. More comprehensively, Allan and Burridge (1991, p.14) offer this definition:

Euphemisms are alternatives to dispreferred expressions, and are used to avoid possible loss of face. The dispreferred expression may be taboo, fearsome, distasteful, or for some other reason has too many negative connotations to felicitously execute speaker's communicative intention on a given occasion.

The above definition, it should be noted, takes an explicit account of ‘loss of face’, which is basic to euphemism. Concerning this point, Farghal (1995b, p.2) maintains that the notion of ‘face’ is “a key factor to understand the speaker's intentions and subsequently the lexical correlates in his/her utterances.” Hence, “face” is

not only important in choosing our utterances, but also in understanding the intentions of these utterances. As Allan and Burridge (1991, p.5) point out, “what we say is likely to maintain, enhance, or damage our own face.”

The speaker’s option for euphemism is apparently meant to enhance their own face, that of the audience or of some third party by softening negative connotations or including positive ones, as Allan and Burridge (1991) indicate. It should be emphasized that the use of euphemistic language reveals much about the relationship between the speaker and the addressee or some third party. This is true mainly because the speaker’s option for euphemism is absolutely deliberate. For instance, a speaker may intentionally resort to using emotive euphemistic expressions in order to highlight the intended meaning to be conveyed through language, since euphemism is generally associated with positive emotiveness.

The system of euphemism, however, differs from one language to another. This difference is resulting from the different cultural backgrounds. With reference to Arab culture, for example, many red lines are drawn on certain topics such as sex. To talk about sex, one either conveys the idea implicitly, or uses euphemism. Here euphemism is a necessity for this culture. Also in Arabic, one can speak of the devil freely, and thus the Arabic word الشيطان, which is equivalent to (devil/Satan), is frequent. In English, however, the situation is different: euphemistic expressions such as *Old Nick* and *lord of the flies* are recommended in the case of talking about the devil, especially to children, in order to possibly lighten fears aroused when it is mentioned.

Despite the peculiarities of different cultures, one must admit the existence of an overlapping area among cultures thanks to the universality of some values and ethics such as those concerned with death occasions, for example. All cultures find it difficult to express the death of a beloved person directly. English, for instance, would preferably use *passed away* than *died*; quite similarly, Arabic would rather use *انتقل إلى رحمة الله* (lit. *transferred to the mercy of God*) than *مات* (lit. *died*). In other words, euphemism makes it easier for the one-culture members to converse about certain taboo topics among each other. However, a problem pertaining to cross-cultural communication shows up here. When considerations related to a certain topic differ from one culture to another, and when a certain culture considers some subjects as taboos and, therefore, uses euphemistic expressions to express them, other cultures may not impose any restraints on those same subjects. Arabic and English are representative of such considerations due to the fact that they are linguistically and culturally different; Sofer (2002, pp.65-6) explains:

The conscientious Arabic translator is aware of the generic difficulties in working with two languages as different from each other as English and Arabic. [...], there are vast cultural differences between a Western language such as English and

a Semitic language like Arabic. One cannot translate these languages without paying attention to these cultural differences.

With the exception of Thawabteh (2012) who examined the translation of euphemisms and dysphemisms in their context in relation to Audio Visual translation, most scholars (e.g., Farghal 1995a; 1995b; Al-Qadi 2009) looked into the translation of decontextualized Arabic euphemisms into English. The present study may, therefore, be considered significant as it handles Arabic euphemisms in their real, social context to show how context, articulated in its speakers and their addressees, and how the relationship between the former and the latter, may affect and/or reshape Arabic euphemisms when rendered into English. Needless to say that an erroneous choice of the strategy followed in translating euphemism is very likely to convey a distorted message.

In this regard, Abu Zeid (2007) provides four examples of euphemistic expressions from the Holy Qur’an along with their translations. He argues against sacrificing meaning in order to retain the euphemistic thrust of the original, or sacrificing a euphemism in order to render its manifest meaning because a rendered euphemism might be misunderstood by the target language audience who are unfamiliar with the source language culture, and thus they get a distorted message. Abu Zeid (ibid) concludes that “the best translators are those who mention the euphemistic expression followed by a paraphrase to make it easy for the target receivers to understand what is intended to be relayed to their language.” Thawabteh (2012) mentions three strategies of translating Arabic euphemisms into English: A translator can omit source language (SL) euphemistic or dysphemistic expressions in the target culture, retain SL euphemistic or dysphemistic expressions by means of formal-based translation strategies, or add euphemistic or dysphemistic expressions in the target culture. In the same vein, Larson (1984, p.116) posits:

Euphemisms will often need to be translated by a comparable euphemism in the receptor language. The important thing is for the translator to recognize the euphemistic nature of the source language expression and then translate with an appropriate and acceptable expression of the receptor language whether euphemistic or not.

Allan and Burridge (1991, p. 16) argue in favor of omission as an alternative strategy for euphemizing in English. They mention two types of omission: quasi-omissions and full omissions. In the former, a non-lexical expression (asterisks (***) , dashes (---), suspension points (...), inarticulated sounds (er, mhm, er-mm), a silence, a muffled cough, a meaningful look, etc. is substituted for the non-preferred term. This example illustrates this point:

Would you like to go to the, er..., before dinner?” When the pause is filled by perhaps a glance upstairs or a cough, it can be interpreted as an invitation to visit the lavatory. In quasi-omissions, however, nothing is substituted for the deleted term.

For example, the utterance "I need to go" can be said to mean "to the lavatory (ibid, p.17).

2. METHODOLOGY

To bring the problem under discussion into focus, a sample, identified by the researchers as problematic, is selected. It consists of 11 Arabic euphemistic expressions in their original, literary context of use, taken from five Arabic literary masterpieces written by the Egyptian novelist and Noble Prize winner Najib Mahfouz and translated by professional Western translators. These expressions are categorized into social, death, and sex euphemisms. Throughout the text, the wider context in which an Arabic euphemism is used is provided (see Appendix), followed by its English translation. Euphemisms in both Arabic and English texts are underlined for ease of reference.

Two important factors underlie the choice of these five novels. First, they represent translations in different decades by different Western translators, a fact which could be of significant indication of the evolvement or the decline of stereotypicality in Arabic/English Translation. Second, these novels are representative of Arab culture in its social values, norms, and traditions. In other words, the revolutionary nature of these novels serves as the antidote where the subjective translators' manipulations, subversions and substitutions can unquestionably run wild in order to demean the Arab values, customs and traditions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Social Euphemisms

Social euphemisms are mainly polite words or expressions used in social encounters. Among all aspects of the human life, society and social life might be the most complicated. All societies in the world have set up a number of rules/norms for their members to follow, and these rules differ from one society to another. In terms of translation, an extra attention should be paid to society and social life, especially if the SL and TL societal and cultural backgrounds are different.

According to face-saving theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), a person who takes part in a conversation will try to save both their face, and the hearer's. In the Arab culture, people pay enormous attention to their social roles while interacting and communicating with each other and by using euphemism, they protect their faces. When it comes to translation, some euphemisms lend themselves very easily to literal

Text 2
ST

"وهو لا يتحرى إلا الأخلاق الطيبة ولولا هذا لتزوج من عهد طويل، ولكنه يزدرى بنات اليوم وينقم عليهن
قلّة الحياء." (Ziqaq al-Midaq.p.119)

translation due to their simplicity and clarity; in contrast, others might be more sophisticated. To illustrate, the Arabic euphemistic word غير إنساني (lit. inhuman) (see Appendix for the larger context) in Mahfouz's (1977, p.116) *Respected Sir* can be successfully translated into *inhumanly* as El-Enany (1986, p.113) puts it in the following example:

Text 1

ST إنك تجرح كرامتي بأسلوب غير إنساني..

TT You insult me **inhumanly**.

The speaker in the above extract is a headmistress who finds herself dealing with a man who suggests for her the idea of having an amour (illegitimate sexual relationship) rather than a real marriage as she expected. Reacting seemingly calmly, she uses the politest words possible. In fact, her being a headmistress plays a role in her both politely refusing this offer and trying to save the face of the addressee who occupies an important position in the local government. Whether this translation is read by an Arab reader, in its original version, or by an English one, in its translated version, both of them will get the idea that the woman opted for غير إنساني (*inhumanly*) to hide her inner feelings toward this hideously rude offer. Stereotypically speaking, a typical Arab woman would act aggressively to show her disgust over this impudent conduct, but the fact that the offeror is a high ranking official in a local government, whilst the offeree is a mere school headmistress, defused the situation. Thus, it could be safe to argue that the Arabic expression غير إنساني (*inhumanly*) acquired its non-inherent euphemistic thrust from its use in this particular social encounter. In other words, this Arabic expression is not always euphemistic in all contexts, and hence it exhibits a fluctuating meaning depending on the context of situation. Both speakers choose to be polite because this particular context demands this. Put in different situations, they might behave differently or possibly explicitly aggressively, however. This implies that some speakers seem to be polite but they are not really polite; rather, they are obliged to act and react in this way thanks to the social context. This, in fact, is emphasized by the beginning of the conversation (p.116) between the man and the woman:

ST "فقال بلهجة مؤدبة وهو يمعن في قسوته."

TT "He answered politely, but persisting in his cruelty." (ibid, p.113)

His speech is polite, but he himself is not so, indeed. To illustrate this point further, consider the following example:

TT "He is a man who associates only with the best

people. If it weren't for that, he would have got married long ago. Any way, he doesn't approve of modern girls and says they have **too little modesty**." (Midaq Alley, p.123)

The speaker above, Um Hamida, is a woman who is very impolite, sharp, and rude, but in this situation, she is conversing with a woman whose house Um Hamida is renting, and from whom she will get some money to arrange a marriage for her. Um Hamida, then, substitutes her impolite character for a polite one as the context requires. This justifies the use of *قلة الحياء* (lit. *lack of shyness*) as a euphemism instead of any other impolite word. The translator, in turn, renders this phrase as "*too little modesty*," which keeps the euphemism and Um Hamida's attempt to be polite. However, the reader of the story will get the point and understand that the woman's real character does not reveal itself here and that this politeness is just artificial, momentary, and only prompted by the social encounter.

The foregoing discussion includes examples with which both cultures (Arab and English) are familiar. Yet, when the two cultures diverge with regard to a certain social aspect, problems arise. Mahfouz (1959), in his *Awlad Haritna* (lit. Children of the Alley), introduces a group of people the local authorities use and hire to accomplish certain unlawful tasks. The members of this group often behave and act as protectors to people, so they practise their work under the name of protecting people, spreading order and maintaining discipline, but their real job is to protect local government authorities and suppress the opposition. In their doing so, they euphemize their actions of hitting, pillage, robbery, and killing in order to cover their real, ill-intentions and retain people's satisfaction. The euphemisms they use, despite having nothing to do with politeness, work as preservers for the authorities' positive image/face in front of people. Taking into consideration the idea that those groups may be so common in the Arab culture/society, unlike the English one, the translator would find it difficult to render into English the seemingly euphemistic expressions used by the group members because the chosen euphemisms cannot be substituted in their context for English counterparts. Those men will never express their inner intentions directly and hence it would be difficult for a translator to reveal the implicit meaning of the euphemisms they employ in the context at hand. To illustrate, let us consider this example:

Text 4
ST

جاءه صوت أجشّ من الطريق يصيح غاضباً: "الله يخرب بيتك ويحرق قلبك يا بن...!"

(Khan al-Khalili, p.13)

TT He heard a gruff voice coming up from the street below. "God destroy your house and damn your eyes, **you son of a ...!**" (Khan al-Khalili, p.9).

Text 3

ST *وعلينا نحن تأديب الصراصير* (Awlad Haritna, p.134)

TT We can **discipline** these cockroaches. (referring to people) (Children of the Alley, p.130)

In this example, the Arabic word *تأديب* (*discipline*) seems euphemistic in context but is used by a gangster who is affiliated with the local government authorities to mean exactly the opposite. The gangster does not really want to discipline, but, in fact, to severely punish the cockroaches i.e., the opposition. The word *discipline* implies a positive meaning of maintaining order, but the real intention of the speaker is to suppress people and kill their spirit of opposition; the means of doing so are too violent and severe. The euphemism-free word *punish* could be used to render the word *تأديب* and give a closer meaning though this meaning is not so accurate and congruent; it implies that some people have committed a crime or a wrongdoing and they deserve punishment, but context reveals that those people (the opposition) are innocent, in fact. Literally and euphemistically, translating *تأديب* as *discipline* is successful, but socially and culturally, it is not. The stereotypes held in the Egyptian society at that time with regard to the opposition which defies gangs working for the government would dictate on translators to provide an explanation; the translator might resort to using footnotes, end notes, or even in-text notes. Also, using punctuation and italicization can be another successful way; the translator can use inverted commas ' ' around the word *discipline*, or just italicize it to alert the reader that the gang's *disciplining* of people (the opposition) is not really *disciplining*.

Stewart (1981, p.86), on the other hand, uses the word *'deal'* for *تأديب*. This translation is more congruent because it leaves the impression that they will *deal* with people in their own ways. The use of the word *deal* below is successful though the use of italics or inverted commas can make it more congruent.

We [italicized by the translator] must "deal" with these beetles.

Another confusing case might be using ellipsis as a strategy of euphemizing. Arab writers sometimes opt for omission to euphemize; they leave the reader with a space to infer the word omitted rather than expressing it explicitly. Arab readers, indeed, will understand the meaning very well because this technique is common in their culture. By way of illustration, consider the following example:

One might find himself/herself translating this literally as "you son of a ...", without knowing the fact that this technique is even more commonly used in English

language; literal translation is thus the best choice in this case. In brief, familiarity with both SL and TL cultures gives the translator the advantage of avoiding unaccepted words as well as sliding into obscurity or giving the meaning improperly; this familiarity is doubly needed in social contexts and culture-related topics.

3.2 Sex Euphemisms

Unlike social matters, sex could be an easier topic when translation is considered because there is a somehow clear cut distinction in its use between the two cultures. While

Arabic finds it rude and offensive to talk about sex freely, English perceives it as an untaboo subject in most cases. The translator then might find himself stripping Arabic sex expressions of their euphemism and rendering them directly into English and his translation is still congruent. Two examples are examined in this section in relation to translating Arabic sex-related words/expressions.

First, in his *Hadith al-Sabah Wal-Masa'*, (lit. Morning and Evening Talk), Mahfouz (1987, p.74) uses the phrase بنات الليل (lit. girls of the night) below to mean prostitutes:

Text 5

وقد اختار لنفسه شقة في عمارة بشارع النيل [...] وشهدت من بنات الليل والفنانات أشكالا وألوانا

TT He chose an apartment for himself in a building on Nile Street [...]. It bore witness to all manner of **prostitutes** and artistes. (Morning and Evening Talk, p.60)

The author, being aware of his people's culture, euphemizes words related to sex in order to save himself and others from the embarrassment originating from the explicit use of such words. The conservative culture of the source language (Arabic) makes the idea of prostitution very much detested, let alone the illegality of the act, which is also religiously strictly prohibited. But in a culture that is less conservative and more open like the target language culture, the word *prostitutes* in its real sense, can be referred to freely and without exposing

oneself to embarrassment. Apparently, translating the phrase بنات الليل literally as *girls of the night* may sound comic, awkward, and less natural in English. In other words, the English reader will find no justification for the use of euphemism in this context for the English language culture refers to such matters explicitly without employing euphemism; this could not damage the speaker's and hearer's faces. So it could be justified to render the intended meaning lying behind the euphemistic expression which deprives the Arab culture from a cultural aspect but it may provide the most congruent translation for sex-related words in such contexts.

Again, here in the following example, an attempt is made by the author to use euphemism for sex-related words:

Text 6

وكان يقول لنفسه: "عجيب أنني لم **أمارس الحب** مع امرأة عادية إلا مرة واحدة رغم هذا التقدم في العمر!

(Hadrat al Muhtaram, p.142)

TT "Strange," he would say to himself, "that in all my years I haven't **made love** to an ordinary woman except once!" (Respected Sir, p.108).

Love making in the above example means *having sex*, which is illegitimate in this case. The Arab language culture finds it offensive to refer directly to this act; this is resulting originally from the Islamic laws, which strongly prohibit the illegitimate sexual relations, and from the conservative culture as well. In the Holy Quran, for example, intercourse is referred to by the use of the word *touching*. However, the English language culture uses both *making love* and *having sex* to refer to the same act, which means that the translation here is successful, though the TL reader might think that it is a literal translation of the Arabic euphemistic phrase. In fact, this might be misleading. The TL audience may think that there is no need for employing a euphemism in the translation in this context, but the phrase *to make love*, along with the phrase *to have sex* is commonly used in English without an intention to use the former as a euphemism for the latter.

Thus, either way will give a congruent translation, though the first has the advantage of preserving the cultural aspect of using euphemism in both Arabic and Arab culture in this context.

It is, however, worth noting that the target language culture does not find it convenient to refer directly to sex in all contexts. In contexts about violence such as rape, English sometimes uses euphemistic expressions in order to alleviate the severity of the act in context. For example, the phrases *criminal sexual assault* and *a serious offence against a woman* are frequently cited as English euphemisms standing for *rape* (cf. Zaro, 1996).

3.3 Death Euphemisms

Cultures have always searched for methods to veil their referring to death because people have always found it difficult to express the idea of death directly to themselves or to others, especially, if the person concerned is so dear and near. Euphemism was one of the methods used in such situations. Both Arabic and English, along with both

Arab and English cultures, employ euphemism to refer to death, and each has its own expressions to do so.

The translator from Arabic to English will not be lacking euphemistic death expressions that serve as more congruent or optimal equivalents. Yet, context may require the translator to reinforce or strip death expressions of their euphemisms. Farghal and Shunnaq (1999, p.107) state that “a lexical item could be pleasant to a certain receiver but unpleasant to another”. For instance, the Arabic word *قبر* (grave) will usually have a “negative” connotation for a person who has lost his beloved one, while it may have a “positive” connotation for *حفار القبور* (grave digger), who makes a living from grave digging. By analogy, some death occasions might be wished in a certain context and the death of a certain person might be pleasant for another person. Thus, translating a euphemistic death word or expression dysphemistically (i.e., stripping it of its euphemism) should be tactfully performed after scrutinizing the context at hand. The following example should render things clearer.

In his *Morning and Evening Talk*, Mahfouz (1987) depicts the life story of a large number of people. One of them is a religious person called Sheikh (religious old man) Mu’awiya. This man, besides being religious, is one of the first fathers of his family. As a result, his death was such a sorrowful event. But to assuage its effect, Mahfouz uses an expressive euphemism for his death:

Text 7

ST في ذلك الوقت كان الشيخ معاوية قد انتقل إلى جوار ربه
(Hadith al-Sabah wal Masa’, p.32)

TT Around this time, Sheikh Mu’awiya **departed for the land of his Lord**. (Morning and Evening Talk, p.28)

The translator, in order to accommodate the context, has to keep the euphemism of the original expression. Phillips (2007, p.28), however, rendered the above euphemism literally. This literal translation, apart from having capital L for *Lord*, gives the reader the sense that the deceased is now with his Lord (Allah), who he had always longed for, thus lessening the effect of his death. This translation, successful as it stands, preserves both the cultural aspect and meaning.

Another occasion of sorrowful death in the story is the death of a young girl whose parents are very much sad for her death. Mahfouz (1987, p.30) uses the euphemistic expression *أسلمت الروح* (lit. the spirit gave up) (see Appendix, item 8, for the wider context) to express the event. Phillips (2007, p.22) renders it by using a common euphemism in English: ‘she passed away’. The translator’s optimal and successful choice does not only reinforce the euphemism of the original, but it also represents a commonly used English expression that communicatively conveys the intended meaning in a context where literal translation would seem awkward.

To go deeper in both SL and TL cultures with regard to death euphemisms, we need to consider the fact that their dealing with death and dead people differs, indeed. It is axiomatic that many death occasions are so sorrowful, but it has been seen that some cultures might place more emphasis on respecting the dead regardless of their (good or bad) deeds. Arabic, in fact, does this. In Arab culture, when a person dies, people should not speak negatively about them even if they were bad, and the common Arabic proverb *ما يتجوز عالميت إلا الرحمة* (i.e., never say anything bad about the deceased but wish them mercy) illustrates this. In fact, this social norm is originally derived from Islamic norms. In Islam, Muslims are instructed to always mention the good deeds of the dead, and never mention their bad deeds. This matter has, therefore, encouraged people in Arab and Muslim societies to introduce more euphemisms to express death. That is why a reader might find Arabic abounding in death euphemisms.

In terms of translation, a translator from English into Arabic might think of conforming to Arab-culture norms, thus euphemizing *all* death expressions, even if the deceased is an evil person. But to reverse the case, the translator from Arabic into English may not need to search for further euphemisms for death expressions in English. S/he can opt for the commonly used death expressions in English, which might be *pass away* or *die*. In other words, while the Arab speaker or writer always needs to euphemize their speech/ writing in death contexts, the translator from Arabic into English can skip this convention and interfere in the text by stripping some expressions of their euphemism as long as the context requires that, as it will be shown shortly.

In two different death occasions in the novel, while the translator reinforces the euphemism used for a man who abuses his wife and maltreats her and his children, he divests the death of a young man, who is a loving husband and a father, of its euphemistic thrust. In the first case, stripping the phrase *وأسلم الروح* (lit. and the spirit gave up) (see Appendix, item 9) of its euphemism and merely translating it as *died* could have been sufficient and suitable for the context. The background information about the novel reveals that the dead person is a bad husband who severely tortures his wife and daughters. In Arab and Muslim cultures, one has no option but to employ a euphemistic death term to refer to this person to abide by Islam teachings. However, keeping the same euphemism when rendering the term into English could be shocking to the English reader because using *die* or even *kick the bucket* when referring to the death of a bad, evil person could be the norm in English.

In the latter case, Mahfouz (1987, p.62) used the euphemistic expression *ومضى قبل الأوان* (lit. he went on before it was too late) (see Appendix, item 10) for the

deceased, who is a loving husband and father. Where the translator should have used a euphemism such as *passed away* or *gave up the ghost* to consolidate compatibility with the context, he infelicitously rendered it into *died*.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the use of Arabic euphemisms in their social context of use and has revealed the role context plays in determining the translation strategy pursued by translators of Arabic euphemisms into English. The paper maintains that since the main reason behind using a euphemism in a certain context is to save one's face and others' faces; i.e., to save oneself and others from embarrassment that might originate from the use of a certain word or expression, translators should exert every possible effort to familiarize themselves with the euphemizing system of their working languages to avoid embarrassing and offensive situations.

When a common euphemistic expression is used in a non-culture bound situation, translators could opt for literal translation. We have seen the felicitous rendering of غير انساني into *inhumanly* while the real meaning of this expression in its particular context is *rude*. It is also worth noting here that speakers and addressees are not necessarily polite, but they are *obliged* by the situation to be so in some social contexts.

Moreover, the study has revealed that when certain situations/contextual call for the use of different euphemisms in two different cultures such as Arabic and English, we expect to find their equivalents in both languages, despite the peculiarities of each language. The best translation strategy in this case is to communicatively convey the intended meaning of the original euphemistic expression while at the same time keeping its euphemistic thrust. The question of politeness is not indicative but the surrounding context; using euphemism by a speaker may not suggest that the speaker is being polite but rather the context dictates it.

The most difficult case is, however, when the two cultures have different backgrounds for a certain cultural/social subject, or different perceptions in relation to a certain topic. Translating a euphemism in such a situation could deprive the source language of a cultural trait, but relay a euphemistically ambiguous message. In a case as such, the translator should make a decision depending on the context he deals with. If the target language does not employ euphemism in a certain topic whilst the source language does, the translator might sacrifice the euphemism for the sake of clarity of meaning. Accordingly, the Arabic euphemistic expression بنات الليل (lit. girls of the night) was translated dysphemistically into *prostitutes* to suit the context; the meaning in this case is more important than the linguistic trait of the SL.

The study has also revealed the influence of context; context has a great impact upon the use of euphemism and the degree of this use. In Arab culture, for example, sex terms are very often euphemized, but referring to sex in a Western culture could be direct and not offensive. Both Arabic and English also agree upon using euphemism in death occasions in order to alleviate the effect caused by hearing death news. While Arabs and Muslims use euphemistic death terms due to cultural and Islamic norms when referring to either a good or bad dead person, the translator of these euphemisms into English might render them dysphemistically, depending on the context he deals with. On the other hand, the translator into Arabic might smartly and wittingly euphemize English death related words (even if they are not euphemized) when the context is about the death of a beloved person. This ultimately relies on the translator's competency in the SL and TL cultures, and their understanding of the text they are translating.

REFERENCES

- Abu Zeid, M. (2007). *Errors in English translations of Euphemism in the Holy Qur'an*. Retrieved from <http://www.islamicwritings.org/quran/language/errors-in-english-translations-of-euphemism-in-the-holy-quran/>. Accessed on February 5, 2014.
- Allan, K., & Burrige, K. (1991). *Euphemism and dysphemism: Language used as shield and weapon*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Casagrande, J. (1954). The ends of translation. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 20, 335-6.
- Faiq, S. (2004). *The cultural encounter in translating from Arabic*. In S. Faiq (Ed.), *Cultural encounters in translation*. United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Farghal, M. (1995a). The Pragmatics of Insha'llah in Jordanian Arabic. *Multilingua*, 4, 253-270.
- Farghal, M. (1995b). Euphemism in Arabic: A gricean interpretation. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 37, 336-378.
- Farghal, M., & Shunnaq, A. (1999). *Translation with reference to English and Arabic: A practical guide*. In D. Al-Hilal (Trans.). Irbid: Jordan.
- Karim, H. K. (1997). The historical resilience of primary stereotypes: Core images of the muslim other. In S. H. Riggings (Ed.), *The language and politics of exclusion*. London: Sage.
- Larson, M. (1984). *Meaning-based translation*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Leech, G. (1983). *The principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman Group.
- Mahfouz, N. (1947). *Ziqaq Al-Midaq*. Cairo: The library of Egypt. In T. L. Gassick (Trans., 1975) as *Midaq Alley*. London: Heinemann.

- Mahfouz, N. (1959). *Awlad Haritna*. Beirut. Dar Ala'dab. translated by Peter Theroux 1996 as *children of the alley*. Cairo. Egypt. The American University in Cairo Press.
- Mahfouz, N. (1972). *Khan al-Khalili*. Beirut. Dar al-Qalam. Translated by Roger Allan 2008 as *Khan al- Khalili*. Cairo. Egypt. The American University in Cairo Press.
- Mahfouz, N. (1977). *Hadrat al Muhtaram*. Cairo. The Library of Egypt. Translated by Rasheed El-Enany (1986). as *the Respected Sir*. Cairo. Egypt. The American University in Cairo Press.
- Mahfouz, N. (1987). *Hadith Alsabah wal Masa*. Cairo. The Library of Egypt. Translated by Christina Phillips 2007 as *Morning and Evening Talk*. Cairo. The American University in Cairo Press.
- Pour, B. S. (2010). A study of euphemisms from the perspectives of cultural translation and linguistics. Retrieved from <http://www.bokorlang.com/journal/54euphemisms.htm>. Accessed on January 3, 2014.
- Saleh, T. (1969). *Mawsimu Al-Hijra ila Ashamal*. In D. J. Davies (1969, trans.), as *the Season of Migration to the North*. Beirut: Dar Al-Awda.
- Shunnaq, A. (1993). Lexical incongruence in Arabic-English translation due to emotiveness in Arabic. *Turjuman*, 2(2), 37-63.
- Sofer, M., (2002). *The translator's handbook*. Rockville and Maryland, Schreiber Publishing.
- Thawabteh, M. (2012). The Translatability of euphemism and dysphemism in Arabic-English subtitling. *Lexis* 7, 145-156.
- Venuti, L. (1996). Translation as social practice: Or, the violence of translation. In M. J. Rose (Ed.). *Translation horizons beyond the boundaries of translation spectrum* [Translation Prospective IX]. Binghamton: State University of New York at Binghamton.
- Zaro, N., (1996). A pragmemphemestic aspect in English-Arabic translation: A problem in equivalence (Unpublished MA Thesis). Irbid: Yarmouk University.

APPENDIX

1. فقال بلهجة مؤدبة وهو يعين في قسوته:
- لسنا مراهقين فلنتكلم كراشدين ولنبحث عن سعادتنا بإخلاص وشجاعة..
- لا أفهم شيئاً.
- حسن، إني معجب بك ولكني أعزب أبدي.
- ولماذا تقول لي ذلك؟
- ربما وجدت عندك حلاً للحالة المستعصية.
فقالت باستياء شديد:
- إنك تجرح كرامتي بأسلوب غير إنساني. (Hadrat al-Muhtaram , p.116)
- 1). – “It’s not as though we were two adolescents,” he answered politely, but persisting in his cruelty. “Let’s talk like adults and look for happiness with sincerity and courage.”
- “I don’t see what you mean.”
- “Well, I admire you, but I am a bachelor forever.”
- “Why do you tell me that?”
- “I thought you might have a solution for my incurable case.”
- “You insult me **inhumanly**.” She said with great indignation. (Respected Sir, p.113)
2. - أسرة طيبة حقاً وأنا شريفة أيضاً كما تعلمين يا ست أم حميدة..
- أعلم هذا يا حبيبتي. وهو لا يتحرى إلا الأخلاق الطيبة ولولا هذا لتزوج من عهد طويل، ولكنه يزدري بنات اليوم وينقم عليهن **قلّة الحياء**. (Ziqaq al-Midaq, p.119)
- 2).- “a good family indeed, I, too, as you know, come from a noble stock.”
- “Yes, I know, my dear. He is a man who associates only with the best people. If it weren’t for that, he would have married long ago. Any way, he doesn’t approve of modern girls and says they have **too little modesty**.” (Midaq Alley, p.123)
3. وصاح زقلط بصوت كالرعد:
- كل واحد يلزم بيته.
فيادر إلى تنفيذ الأمر كل شخص، من آل حمدان أو من غيرهم، وتتابع وقع الأقدام المترجعة. وجاء الليثي بفاتوس فظهر على ضوئه زقلط والفتوات من حوله، في حارة خالية، لا يسمع بها إلا أصوات النسوان. وقال بركات متودداً:
- وفر نفسك للشدائد يا معلم، وعلينا نحن **تأديب** الصراصير.
وقال أبو سريع:
- لو شئت جعلنا من آل حمدان تراباً تمشي عليه بحصانك. (Awlad Haritna, p.134)
- 3). - “Everyone is confined to his house!” shouted Zaqlut in a voice like thunder.
There followed the sound of retreating steps as everyone rushed to obey the order, whether they were of the Al Hamdan or not. Al-Laithy brought a lantern, whose light revealed Zaqlut and the gangsters around him in an empty alley in which nothing could be heard but women’s shouts.
- “Spare yourself the trouble, teacher of misfortunes,” Brakat flattered him. “We can **discipline** these cockroaches.”

- "If you like," added Abu Sari, "we will grind the Al Hamdan into dirt for you to trample on your horse." (Children of the Alley, p.130)

Another translation of the same extract/euphemism by Stewart (1981, p.86)

Zoklut shouted thunderously: "everyone will stay in his house!" They all hurried to carry out the order, whether they were of Hamdan's people or not. There was a stampede. Laythi brought a lamp, and its light showed Zoklut with the chiefs around him in the deserted alley, in which all that could be heard were the screams of women. Barakat said, laying on the flattery: "Save yourself for more important things, Chief; *we* [italicized by the translator] must **deal** with these beetles."

Abu Sari said:

"If you wanted, we'd make Hamdan's people into dust for your horse to trample on."

4. "إلا أنه في نفس اللحظة وقبل أن يفارق الحجرة- جاء صوت أجش من الطريق يصيح غاضباً: 'الله يخرب بيتك ويحرق قلبك يا بن...! فرد صوت آخر بأقبح مما قُذِف به، مما دل على أن اثنين يتقاذفان بالسباب كعادة أهل البلد.'" (Khan al-Khalili, p.13)

4). "At that very same moment and before he had had a chance to leave his room, he heard a gruff voice coming up from the street below. 'God destroy your house and damn your eyes, **you son of a ...!**'" (Khan al-Khalili, p.9)

5. "أما هو فكان درويش الحانات والملاهي الليلية ونوادي القمار. ولم يفكر أبداً في تكوين أسرة أو الالتزام بأي قيد. وقد اختار لنفسه شقة في عمارة بشارع النيل [...] وشهدت من بنات الليل والفنانات أشكالا وألوانا" (Hadith al-Sabah wal- Masa', p. 74)

5). "But he was a dervish of bars, nightclubs, and casinos. He never contemplated forming a family or sustaining any ties. He chose an apartment for himself in a building on Nile Street [...]. It bore witness to all manner of **prostitutes** and artistes." (Morning and Evening Talk, p. 60)

6. "وكان يقول لنفسه: 'عجيب أنني لم أمارس الحب مع امرأة عادية إلا مرة واحدة رغم هذا التقدم في العمر!' وتذكر أصيلة، فتذكر بالتالي أنها كانت جريمة وليست ممارسة للحب.'" (Hadrat al Muhtaram, p. 142)

6). "strange,' he would say to himself, 'that in all my years I haven't **made love to** an ordinary woman except once!' He remembered Asila, but he also remembered that what he had done with her was a criminal act and not **an act of love**.'" (Respected Sir, p.108)

7. ونقول له راضية بلسانها اللادع:

- الأصلح أن تكون طباحاً من أن تكون عالماً من علماء الدين كأيك [الشيخ معاوية]..
ففيهه قانلاً:

- أنا رجل حائر بين أب عالم وأخت مؤاخية للعفاريت..

في ذلك الوقت كان الشيخ معاوية قد انتقل إلى جواريه... (Hadith al-Sabah wal-Masa', p.32)

7). "You'd be better as a cook than a theologian like your father," Radia remarked with her biting tongue. He chuckled, "I'm wavering between a scholastic father and a sister who fraternizes with ifrit."

Around this time, Shaykh Mu'awiya **departed for the land of his Lord**... (Morning and Evening Talk, p.28)

8. "وعند الضحى احتضرت الفتاة ثم أسلمت الروح. وهكذا فقدت سميرة بكريتها كما فقدت مطرية بكريةا."

(Hadith al-Sabah wal-Masa', p. 30)

8). "Death came for the girl at noon and she **passed away**. Thus, Samira lost a daughter just as Matariya had lost a son." (Morning and Evening Talk, p.22)

9. "وأسلم الرجل الروح بعد عذاب، وودعته دموع زوجته ووحيدة وصالح، أما شكيرة [زوجته السابقة] فلم يخفف الموت من كراهيتها العميقة له." (Hadith al-Sabah wal-Masa', p. 60)

9). "He **gave up the ghost** after much suffering, seen off by the tears of his wife, Wahida and Salih. But death did not lighten Shakira's [his ex-wife] deep hatred of him." (Morning and Evening Talk, p.48)

10. "وبعد عام من حياة سعيدة أنجبت له (نادر)، وبعد عام ثان سقط الرجل في قبضة السرطان ومضى قيل الأوان." (Hadith al-

-Sabah wal-Masa', p. 62)

10). "After one happy year together she gave birth to Nadir but the next year the man fell into the clutches of cancer and **died**." (Morning and Evening Talk, p.49)