Injecting Vitamin C in Literary Translation

Dr. Zainab Abuelma’atti  
Department of English and Translation, Effat University  
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
zabuelmaatti@effatuniversity.edu.sa

Abstract—Translation is the process through which a written or spoken text in one language is transferred into another. In the process, many problems arise due to cultural differences. This paper handles three problematic areas namely: culture-specific items and references, foreign words, and word choice. For the purpose of this research Abdulwahhab Mutawe’s Tales of our Neighborhood has been chosen for translation into English. The book is a collection of short stories that depict the Egyptian culture. Mutawe was inspired in his stories by real-life accounts.

Keywords-translation; intercultural communication; human experience; ethics

I. INTRODUCTION

Literary translation is believed to be the bridge between the delicates of one culture and language and those of another furthering as such the understanding of constituents across national borders. “In the act of literary translation,” writes Professor Rainer Schulte the co-founder of ALTA, “the soul of another culture becomes transparent, and the translator recreates the refined sensibilities of foreign countries and their people through the linguistic, musical, rhythmic, and visual possibilities of the new language.” Effective cross-cultural communication requires well-articulated pieces in the language of the target audience hence providing precise and culturally sensitive translations.

II. INJECTING VITAMIN C

Literary translation is believed to be the bridge between the delicates of one culture and language and those of another furthering as such the understanding of constituents across national borders. “In the act of literary translation,” writes Professor Rainer Schulte the co-founder of ALTA, “the soul of another culture becomes transparent, and the translator recreates the refined sensibilities of foreign countries and their people through the linguistic, musical, rhythmic, and visual possibilities of the new language.” Effective cross-cultural communication requires well-articulated pieces in the language of the target audience hence providing precise and culturally sensitive translations.

A literary translator thus is an actor – a performer who embodies the voice of the author (the narrator). Literary works are often artistic pieces creatively produced as a social endeavor and carry in their chosen vocabulary, style and structure the sensibilities of their home culture. Literary translators thus are expected to have the ability to swiftly switch between languages and cultures to embrace other human experiences the way they embrace their own freely and without constraints.

Poetry and rhyming prose are two of the most daunting text types a literary translator deals with. That is because poetry and rhyming prose require high level of creativity in transforming form intertwining with content. Unrhymed prose on the other hand is constrained by the mood and spirit of the moments making up the story line. Abdul Wahab Mutawa’s Tales of our Neighborhood is an example of a literary work – a social endeavor – charged with emotions, moods and spirits of moments that changed the author’s life. Mutawa’s Tales of our Neighborhood is a keen recollection of the circumstances and dialogues that shaped the author’s journey from childhood to adulthood written in Arabic in the form of short stories. Mutawa’s language is simple – no sophisticated use of form, structure or vocabulary. At a first glance translating On the Train, The Celebration, The Barefoot, Little Red Riding Hood, and The Festival seem like a problem-less task suited for amateur translation students. As the translator moves further into translation, Schulte’s definition above become clear enough that translation becomes near impossible – it is the soul of that other culture and delicates of another human experience that require injecting with Vitamin C!

According to Halverson (1997:207), equivalence is defined as "A relationship existing between two entities and the relationship is described as one of likeness/ sameness/similarity/ equality in terms of any of a number of potential qualities.” Bush (1998:127) defines literary translation as "an original subjective activity at the center of a complex network of social and cultural practices." Social and cultural practices are controlled by cultural specific items, which include references. The reader is expected to recognize the references in translation. Toury (1978), stated that translators are permanently faced with the problem of how to treat the cultural aspects implicit in a source text (ST) and to find the most appropriate technique to successfully convey these aspects in the target language (TL) - these problems may vary in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gap between

DOI: 10.5176/2251-2853_2.1.83
the two languages concerned. The translator also has to decide
on the importance given to certain cultural aspects and to what
extent it is necessary or desirable to translate them into the TL.
Considering the cultural implications for a translated text
implies recognizing all of these problems and taking into
account several possibilities before deciding on the solution
that appears the most appropriate in each specific case.

*Tales of Our Neighborhood* is rich in cultural specific items
that include names of famous figures, places and food. Given
that the names stated in the stories are related to the source
culture, target people find difficulty to figure out the
importance of stating these names in the stories. As there is no
other solution but to transliterate theses names, footnote
explanations are very important to give the target readers a
good understanding of the functions of these names and their
relation(s) to the source text.

Names of places are equally problematic. However, there are
two different solutions to overcome this problem. In his book
*a textbook of Translation*, Newmark stated that there are two
opposing methods: transference and componential analysis
Although in this method emphasis is placed on culture,
Newmark claims this method may cause problems for the
general readership and limit the comprehension of certain
aspects (ibid.). The importance of the translation process in
communication leads Newmark to propose componential
analysis that he describes as being "the most accurate
translation procedure, which excludes the culture and
highlights the message" (ibid, 1988:96).

Names of food raise another problem in translation. The
author mentions certain types of food that are alien even for
many readers of Arabic. Venuti's theory of domestication and
foreignization may be very beneficial in solving the problem
of translating names of food. According to (Venuti, 1995).
Domestication means to change the SL values and make them
readable for the TL audience. On the other hand,
foreignization means preserving the values of the SL and
exposing the target audience to them. Both methods were
adopted in translating the names of food.

Translating colloquial language is difficult because there is no
identical equivalent in English.

The language of *Tales of our Neighborhood* is simple; however, in some cases the author chooses sophisticated
language to attach special feelings to the story line. The author
employed in more than one of the stories certain words that
affect the reader and change to some degree the general style
of the stories. Translating such sophisticated language is
challenging and exciting at the same time.

Translation, involving the transposition of thoughts of certain
group of people into the suitable equivalence for another
group, requires a process of cultural transferring too. During
the process of translation, the translator is not just dealing with
words but with cultural aspects too. The process of
transferring the text from one language into another requires a
high degree of accuracy. Thus, language and culture may be
seen as being closely related and both aspects must be
considered for translation to ensure that equivalence is
achieved.

Abdulwahhab Mutawe was a famous Egyptian author and
journalist. He was known of his unique style in writing letters.
In fact, he was one of the very few authors who worked very
hard to preserve the art of letter in Arabic literature. In this
regard, Mutawe was responsible for *Bareed Al-Jumah* (Friday
Mail). He adopted a literary style based on reason, logic and
wisdom. He supported his answers by providing proverbs and
famous sayings to resolve different kinds of social problems.
This fact inspired his readers to call him ‘The Man of a
Merciful Pen.’

Abdulwahhab was born in November 1940 in Dosouq, Egypt.
He graduated from The Department of Journalism, College of
Arts, and Cairo University in 1961. In 1984, Mutawe joined
Al-Ahram Newspaper to work there as an editor of the
Investigations section. Then, he became the editor in chief in
Al-Ahram Newspaper. He started his journey with “Bareed
Al-Jumah” in 1982 through being responsible for selecting the
letters that will be published. In fact, “Bareed Al-Jumah
inspired him to write many short stories and novels based on
real-life encounters. Mutawe died in 2004 at the age of 64.

Abdul Wahab Mutawa wrote many books of which novels
such as *Open Your Heart, Happy days, and Silent Tears.*
*Tales of Our Neighborhood* is one of the most
interesting books Mutawe wrote. It is a collection of short
stories that address different aspects of daily life. The stories
were set in Egypt; however, the values that the stories address
are universal. *The Bending Hood* is a story about a boy who spends
his summer vacation with his father at his workplace. The boy
learns valuable lessons throughout the days. *On the train* is a
reflection on the type of dialogues that commuter on the train
travelling between Alexandria and Cairo used to have at a
critical junction of Egypt’s political history. *Little Red Riding
Hood* is about the journey of life - it reflects on how people
view life. *The Bare Foot* is basically about the innocent love
between children - it tells stories of their simplistic thinking.
*The Celebration* describes in details the traditions of
celebrating specific events at a certain time in the history of
Egypt. *The Festival* is the last of the six stories. It reflects on
how people celebrate Shm ‘Insym which is the Egyptian for
Easter.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

It is with gratitude and appreciation that I dedicate this work
to my parents for their continuous support.
REFERENCES