

Translation Irrelevances in the English Version of Naguib Mahfouz's the Riffraff "Al Harafish"

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Abstract

One of the main problems that faces the translator is that some words or expressions of the source text do not have equivalents in the target language, so he/she has to go beyond the meaning and try to convey the idea of these words and expressions to the target readers according to their cultural background and environment. Sometimes the translator fails in translating some words and expressions because of the cultural differences causing translation irrelevances that lead to misunderstanding between the source text and the target readers. The current research indicates how the translator of Mahfouz's epic of "The Riff-Raff" (AL- Harafish) fails in translating some words and expressions of the source text. It also shows the reasons and forms of translation irrelevances on the part of the translator.

Introduction

There are different types of translation such as literary, legal, economic, religious, and mass media, but the literary one is the most important one that represents the cultural communication among countries. As Hassan (2011) states that literary translation is considered a distinguished type of

translation. It reflects the imaginative, intellectual and intuitive style of the author besides the literary features of the source text like sound effects, figures of speech and word selection.

Literary translation, as Hakemi (2013) mentions, is seen as the most difficult type of translation because it is a translation of culture not just a language. It is characterized by some features:

- 1- It is important to convey the meaning of the original text accurately in the target text; and
- 2- The role of translator is to establish a relationship with the source text and its author. This means that the translator should read the text carefully and understand the idea of the author and the meaning he wants to intend, at the same time he should translate and convey the meaning according to the culture and environment of the target audience. Thus, he establishes a relationship between the source text and the target audience.

It also, as Colenciuc (2015) sees, enhances awareness among different cultures and nations. Literary translation is considered the bridge that connects emotional links between cultures and languages and strengthens the understanding of human beings across national borders. It also reflects the soul of another culture.

Translation in general strengthens the interaction among cultures through enhancing mutual understanding and allowing people to know foreign cultures, and literary

translation in particular is a domestic representation of foreign text and culture. Thus, cultural exchanges represented in literary translation contribute to drawing the image of a national culture. (Wilson, 2014).

The cultural differences may sometimes lead to misunderstanding on the part of the translator, so he/she fails in translating some words or expressions of the source text and this in turn leads to translation irrelevances which mean that the translator uses words or expressions that do not give the required or the exact meaning. The current study indicates how the translator of Mahfouz's epic of "The Riff-Raff" (AL-Harafish) fails in translating some words and expressions of the source text.

Theoretical framework

Literary translation is a high-level form of translation because it does not only translate a text but also it is a process of rewriting or reproducing a text. Thus, the literary translator has to be experienced to translate feelings, cultural distinctions, humor and other minute elements of the source text. He also translates message more than meaning. Therefore, one of the problems that faces the literary translator is to find equivalents in his/her language that express the meaning to the target audience accurately especially if there is a difference in cultural groups to which the source and target languages belong. The translator is keen on translating the meaning of the original in a way that makes target readers enjoy the text like the source readers. (Haque, 2012).

Haque (2012) formulates some principles which the literary translator should follow:

1. A great understanding of the language, written and verbal, from which he is translating i.e. *the source language*;
2. An excellent control of the language into which he is translating i.e. *the target language*;
3. Awareness of the subject matter of the book being translated;
4. A deep knowledge of the etymological and idiomatic correlates between the two languages; and
5. A delicate common sense of when to metaphrase or translate literally and when to paraphrase, in order to guarantee exact rather than fake equivalents between the source- and target-language texts.

As translation is a means of communication among cultures the translator is the first one who reads the other culture presented in the foreign language text (the source text). The successful translator should achieve relevance in translating any text. He/she has to know how to read the other culture to produce a text acceptable for the readers of the other culture. Therefore, the translator bridges the gap between the cultural aspects of the source language community and that of the target language community. Zhonggang (2006) indicates that in relevance theory translation represents the interpretive

use of language and a text that represents the original thought of communicator. Thus a translator should be accurate in translating the text to achieve relevance for the target reader.

When the translator does not give the right equivalent of some words or expressions of the source text, he/she fails in conveying the accurate meaning to the target readers; hence translation irrelevance occurs. The word “irrelevance” as defined in Cambridge dictionary means “the fact that something is not related to what is being discussed or considered and therefore not important”. Translation irrelevance means that the translation of a word or an expression in the target text is not related to its equivalent in the source text. Such irrelevance may lead to misunderstanding as the target readers could not get the message or the accurate meaning of the source context. To avoid translation irrelevance, the translator must be aware of the meaning of each word or expression and its equivalent in the target text and if some words do not have an equivalent in the target language the translator has to get the closest meaning to these words. He/she must also be honest in conveying the meaning to the target readers. **Methodology**

Translation irrelevance is considered a failure in translation as the translator fails to convey the intended meaning and the message of the source text to the target readers, preserve the soul of the source text or achieve equivalence. The success of the translator depends on his/her accuracy and faithfulness in conveying the meaning to the

target readers. Since the source text, especially in literary translation, is the mirror that reflects the culture and the environment of the source society, the role of the translator is to preserve the soul of the original text and reflect to the target readers the image of the culture of the source society. The translator also has to carry out the mission of conveying the meaning and the message of the source text to the target readers in terms of their culture. Thus, if he/she fails in that mission, translation irrelevance will happen.

Translation irrelevances have different forms such as:

- 1- Giving different meaning: the translator sometimes mentions words or expressions in the target text that have different meaning to their equivalents in the source text. This is considered dishonesty on the part of the translator as he/ she has to convey the intended meaning of the source text to the target readers to help them understand the right idea and significance of the source text;
- 2- Giving irrelevant equivalent: although some words and expressions in the source text have equivalents in the target language, the translator sometimes does not mention it in the target text. The translator must have an excellent command on the target language to be able to convey the accurate meaning of the source text to the target readers. When the translator uses irrelevant equivalents, he/ she strays from the meaning and idea of the source text and the target readers get a meaning

different to what is stated in the source text, so the target text lacks its credibility;

- 3- Avoiding some expressions related to the culture of the source text: this form of irrelevance happens when the translator imposes the culture of the target readers on the target text ignoring the cultural background of the author of the source text and in this way the translator does not preserve the soul of the source text; and
- 4- Translation irrelevances related to grammatical issues: since sentence forms play a role in the meaning of the text, the translator has to abide by the sentence form of the source text. The declarative sentences have a different significance from imperative or interrogative ones. The tense form of the sentences sometimes contributes to the meaning of the text; so it is better for the translator not to change the tense form of the source text if it is not required. If a sentence in the source text is stated in the past simple tense, the translator has to state it in the same tense in the target text. The translator does not have the right to add any words that are not mentioned in the source text and do not make sense to the target text.

Translation irrelevances that are related to grammatical issues could be stated as follows:

- Adding words to the target text without reason;
- Grammatical mistakes;

- Using pronouns irrelevant to their equivalents in the source text;
- Changing the form of sentences of the source text; and
- Using different verb tenses.

The translator of epic of “The Riff-raff” fails in translating some words or expressions to the target text thereby gives rise to some translation irrelevances that could be classified as follows:

- Giving irrelevant equivalents;
- Giving different meanings;
- Translation irrelevances related to grammatical issues; and
- Avoiding some expressions related to the culture of the source text, especially the Islamic ones.

The first translation irrelevance that the translator makes is the title of the epic. Although the word "الحرافيش" has an equivalent in English which is “the riff-raff” the translator does not mention it in the title, so she fails in translating it as she uses transliteration strategy without explaining to the target readers what “the harafish” means. Since the title is the most important element of any text, it must be translated accurately because it reflects the subject of the whole text and through it the reader could get the idea of the text. The title is also considered the mirror of the whole work that reflects the success and accuracy of the translator. Due to such irrelevance, the target readers may not understand the title of the epic or

the subject of the epic, but if she used the right equivalent, the target readers would understand it.

Giving irrelevant equivalent: the translator does not mention in the target text the right equivalents of some words and expressions, so the target readers do not get the right meaning or idea of the source text.

Cut down in his prime

مقطع من شجرة

The translator fails in translating that Arabic expression to the target readers. The English expression that she mentions in the target text means “to die when you are still young”, according to Macmillan dictionary, and it does not match the significance of the Arabic expression in the source text, which means “alone without family”. Due to that irrelevance in her translation, she fails in conveying the accurate meaning to the target readers.

The relevant translation is “alone without family”.

Neighborhood

كل من هب ودب

The translator fails in translating that Arabic expression to the target readers. The Arabic expression means anybody or all ordinary people, while the word “neighborhood” which the translator mentions in the target text means, as it is stated in Cambridge dictionary, “the area of a town that surrounds someone's home, or the people who live in this area”. The two meanings are totally different as the translator does not use the correct equivalent of the Arabic expression which is “Tom, Dick, and Harry”. Such translation irrelevance causes

misunderstanding of the context as the translator fails in conveying the intended meaning to the target readers.

The relevant translation is “Tom, Dick, and Harry”.

Baptized

افتتح

The translator uses a Christian term which is not related to the source text. It also does not give the meaning or the significance of the Arabic word "افتتح". In the source text the Arabic word is mentioned in a context about opening a bar, while the word baptize means according to Cambridge dictionary “to name and recognize a person as a Christian during a baptism ceremony”. The two meanings are totally different and the word “baptize” does not match the context at all, so the target text may lose its credibility. Such irrelevance does not convey the correct idea to the target readers.

The relevant translation is “opening or inaugurating”

Who can follow him?

هل تخلف القطط الأسود؟

The translator fails in conveying the exact meaning of that Arabic expression to the target readers. According to the source text the Arabic expression means that strong and powerful people do not give birth to the weak, but the translator does not express that meaning in the target text. She must convey the exact meaning to the target readers and preserve the soul of the source text as well.

The relevant translation is “cats can never give birth to lions. Or, do cats give birth to lions?”

Salty white cheese

جبنة قريش

The translator fails in giving the right equivalence of that Arabic expression causing translation irrelevance. Although the Arabic expression "جبنة قريش" has an equivalent in English, she does not mention it in the target text. She has to mention the right equivalence to preserve the soul of the source text and convey the right meaning to the target readers. In the source text the writer refers to "cottage cheese" which is a soft white cheese made from sour milk and it is not salty, while the translator refers to a salty cheese which is another type of cheese. Moreover, in the source text the writer mentions a specific type of cheese, while in the target text the translator mentions a salty white cheese without specifying its type.

The relevant translation is "cottage cheese".

Translation irrelevances related to grammatical issues: the translator sometimes makes grammatical mistakes that change the meaning and significance of words and expressions of the source text. She sometimes does not abide by the form of some sentences or its tense, the form of some words whether singular or plural, word order of expressions and the use of correct pronouns. She also adds some words that are not mentioned in the source text to the target text without any reason or significance.

This is what the authorities advise

اسمعوا كلام الحكومة

Although the translation of this Arabic sentence is relevant, the translator does not reflect the soul or the

atmosphere of the source text to the target readers. In the source text the Arabic sentence is imperative as it is said by one of the characters asking or advising the others to abide by the rules of the authorities, while in the target text there is no reference to advising the others. The translator indicates to the target readers that the speaker who said that sentence declaring something not advising the others or ordering them and this contradicts the right form of the source text.

The relevant translation is “abide by what the authorities advise, or abide by the rules of the authorities”.

I'd keep out of his way أبعدي عنه يا بنت

The translation of this Arabic sentence is correct, but the form is irrelevant. In the source text that sentence is said by a male character warning a female one against someone else, but the translator mentions it in the target text as if it is said by the female character speaking about herself. The translator must be accurate in giving the right forms of the sentences to the target readers as it is stated in the source text to reflect the soul of the original text to them.

The relevant translation is “keep out of his way”.

There it is ها هي ذي

Mentioning the demonstrative “there” in the target text is irrelevant to its equivalent in the source text. In the original text one of the female characters gives something to another which means that she refers to immediate thing beside her, while using “there” in the target text indicate that this thing is away from the speaker. The translator has to use the correct

demonstrative as it is mentioned in the source text to help the target readers get the right message of the original text.

The relevant translation is “here it is”.

At this moment Biker would be seeing Radwana again

في هذه اللحظة يلتقي بكر برضوانة

The translator adds the word “again” in the target text although it is not mentioned in the source text. She does not have to mention it as it does not make sense or refer to something.

I decided to marry again قررت أن أتزوج

The translator mentions the word “again” in the target text although it is not mentioned in the source text. There is no need to mention it as it does not make sense in the target text.

Avoiding some expressions related to the culture of the source text especially the Islamic ones: the translator avoids mentioning the Islamic expressions that are stated in the source text imposing her Christianity and the cultural background of the target readers on her translation. She does not have the right to ignore the cultural background of the source text and she must preserve its soul and reflect it in her translation.

All in good time عندما يشاء الله

The translator fails in translating that Arabic expression because it does not match the source text. The equivalent of

that expression is “when God will” or “God willing” but the translator does not mention it in the target text. Such irrelevance does not convey the accurate meaning to the target readers and they do not feel the soul of the source text.

The relevant translation is “when God will”.

There is nothing we can do لا حيلة أمام قضاء الله

The translator does not mention "قضاء الله" in the target text causing translation irrelevance as the exact and full meaning is not conveyed to the target readers. She has to indicate to the target readers why people sometimes cannot do anything or have no choice as it is stated in the source text.

The relevant translation is “There is nothing we can do in front of Allah’s decree”.

He said goodbye قال استودعك الحي الذي لا يموت

The translator does not reflect the Islamic soul of the source text in the target text. She translates that Arabic sentence implying the intended meaning without preserving the soul of the original text and expressing the feelings of the speaker. In the source text one of the characters bids farewell to another, asking God to protect him, while in the target text the translator mentions that the speaker just said goodbye without showing any feelings. She has to express the feelings of the characters in the source text to the target readers.

The relevant translation is “I bid you farewell trusting in God to protect you. Or, I bid you farewell may God protect you.”

Excellent, thanks

عال والله الحمد

The translator fails in conveying the accurate meaning to the target readers because of translation irrelevance. In the source text the Arabic sentence is said by one of the characters expressing his happiness and thanks to God, while in the target text the translator indicates that the speaker thanks another person rather than God. She fails in delivering the right message of the original text to the target readers and this is considered dishonesty in translation.

The relevant translation is “excellent, thanks God”.

We will just have to wait and see فلننتظر والله المستعان

The translator does not mention the Islamic expression "والله المستعان" in the target text. She has to state it to reflect to the target readers the culture of the Arabic society that the Muslims depend on God in their life matters, always put their trust in Him and ask for His help.

The relevant translation is “we will just have to wait and see, and may Allah help us”.

It is clear that the translator fails in translating some Arabic words and expressions and instead chooses irrelevant equivalents causing translation irrelevance. She has to be accurate in conveying the intended meaning of the source text to the target readers to help them feel the soul of the original text and get its right message.

Conclusion:

The translator of Mahfouz's epic of "The Riffraff" fails in translating some words and expressions, causing some translation irrelevances. She sometimes does not give the accurate or relevant equivalent of some Arabic words and expressions. She also fails in translating the title of the epic, which is considered the mirror that indicates and reflects the efficiency of the translator from the beginning. Although the Arabic title of the epic has an equivalent in the target language, she does not use it. She has to use the right equivalent of the title to help the target readers understand it. Although some words and expressions in the source text have equivalents in the target language, she does not mention them in the target text, so the target readers do not get the intended meaning of the text.

The translator sometimes does not stick to the form, structure and tense of the sentences in the source text. She avoids mentioning the Islamic expressions which are mentioned in the source text in her translation, imposing her Christianity and culture on a text written by a Muslim author. She should abide by the culture of the source text and reflect it to the target readers. She sometimes strays from the source text, mentioning some words in the target text that are not relevant to the source text and do not give the shade of the exact meaning or be relevant to the target text. Such translation irrelevances are considered dishonesty on the part of the translator who does not convey the intended or right

meaning of the source text to the target readers and this makes the target text lose its credibility. This also creates a gap between the source and the target readers.

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