A Study of Arabic Translations of Shakespeare's Figurative Language

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Abstract:

This study explores how the figurative language, and tropes in general, cannot be ignored when translating Shakespeare's work into Arabic. An image cannot be isolated from its specific context (natural environment); it only remains a poetic element as long as it is dealt with as an integral part of a particular work of art. Only by establishing the vital relation between imagery and the other aspects of a poet's work can any deeper appreciation of them be gained - hence and adequate translation. Thus, the study does not resort to statistical method or individual archetypes, but takes rather a dynamic and integral approach. The image is inseparable from its context as it both informs and is informed by it. This understanding is applied to comparisons of some Arabic translations of Shakespeare's works, especially The Sonnets.

Being informed by the findings of pragmatic linguistic, Translation Studies and literary theory, the study investigates how translations of some of Shakespeare's works, especially *The Sonnets*, have, or have not, rendered the desired perlocutionary effect as meant by the original work and in a manner that suits the new environment of the target texts.

ملخص :

هذه الدراسة توضح كيف أن اللغة والعبارة المجازية بصورة عامة في أعمال شكسبير لا يمكن تجاهلها أو أغفالها عند ترجمتها إلى اللغة العربية.

حيث إن النص الشعري والأدبي لا يمكن عزله عند الترجمة من صوره الشعرية والمعنى الضمني الذي كان يرومه الكاتب والشاعر .

أن أهم ما تتسم به الترجمة الأدبية هو التعمق في التحليل للنصوص المترجمة أو مضاهاتها بالنصوص المصدر، وهكذا عملت الترجمة على تعديل صورة العمل الشعري، مترجماً أولاً ثم مولفاً بعد ذلك .

وهذه الدراسة تقدم مقارنة بين عدة تراجم لأعمال شكسبير (السونت) لغرض معرفة أي من التراجم أقرب إلى النص الأصلي والعمل الأدبي .

Introduction:

Shakespeare's figurative language and the concomitant rhythmical and prosodic rendering of his oeuvre are part and parcel of his poetic and dramatic achievement. However, in Arabic translations of his works this aspect has not been given all the interest it deserves. Translators have managed, with different degrees of success, to pay due attention to aspects of tropes and prosody in Shakespeare's works, but the paramount portion of their interest hovered around denotation and prose meaning, even when the work translated is lyrical, in verse, and not dramatic.

Similes, metaphors, metonyms, synecdoches, hyperboles, proverbs and personifications are figures of speech which have stylistic and cognitive functions. In addition to making poetry, or the literary text, more expressive and full of life, they add a great deal of different levels of meaning to the text and generate a special relationship between addresser and addressee, in terms of speech acts, to recreate an emotional and cultural effect.

Over the centuries there has been different and conflicting views and definitions of figurative language, usually spoken of as figures of speech or using one type of these figures, the metaphor, as a generic term, so speaking or writing of metaphors as a portmanteau term for all of them. No one definition, however, has ever been agreed upon. Historically speaking metaphor has been defined differently: "Metaphor is applying to something a noun that properly applies to something else." (Aristotle, *Poetics*); it is "two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction" (Richards 1936: p. 93); "as figure, metaphor

constitutes a displacement and an extension of the meaning of words its explanation is grounded in a theory of substitution" (Ricoeur 1977: p.1); it is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p. 5) and "every experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions" (p. 57) (Lakoff & Johnson 1980); a textual interpretation of a conflictual complex meaning that challenges consistent thought (Prandi 2004). Metaphor can sometimes be seen as transcending figurative language in general and may even be equated with form itself: "Metaphor is a means of structuring perception and understanding, and is especially valuable as means of dealing with a subject such as ours which frequently eludes propositional language," (Hurley & O'Neill 2012: p. 10).

The classical rhetorical system saw figures of speech as the smallest structural units of rhetorical stylistics (elocutio). They were based on the fundamental distinction of *tropes* (Gk. tropoi) and *schemes* (Gk. schēmata, Lat. figurae): *tropes* being the words intended to give a meaning other than what they ordinarily signify, such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdochē, etc., and *schemes* where standard word order or pattern is changed, such as anaphora (repeated word or phrase), antithesis (contrasting words, phrases or sentences), etc. (*Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*). This classical system survived through the centuries with little modification until advent of the distinction between tropes and figures/schemes in the course of the nineteenth century. Figures of speech gradually became the norm, and in the 20th century with the rise of modern linguistics and stylistics the traditional system was modernized.

While the figures of speech studied here apply to poetry in some dramatic and lyrical works of William Shakespeare, they are also approached within the newer and larger perspective that sees them as a part of tropes and tropology—a field of study which understands metaphors as a dominant and basic phenomenon in human consciousness. George Lakoff sees all our thinking as metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), and the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur claims that metaphors affect how we understand the world. They disclose the essential nature of human language, which is clear in his concept of "the living metaphor" in his book *La métaphore vive*, 1975, translated as *The Rule of Metaphor*, 1978. Ricoeur links this fundamental understanding of the metaphor to the interest of interpretation as the main problem of hermeneutics, and translation which is also a topic residing at the heart of much of his work.

Whatever the definition of figurative language, figures of speech, and tropes, this type of language is essential to literature in general and to poetry in particular since poetry is not meant to carry one level of meaning expressed in lexical items. Poetry's very existence depends on its form which is formulated through figures of speech and rhythm. However, both figures of speech and poetic rhythm are peculiar to their local language and culture, which renders translation a challenging job.

Some basic questions are naturally raised. Did the translators give the Shakespearean figurative language its due attention in order to recreate the desired perlocutionary effect? And to what degree of success? Is it assumed that tropes in general, aspects of form, and the whole atmosphere created by the

poem, or the paly, are untranslatable (the untranslatability of poetry)? Is it true, as some scholars claim (such as M. Dagut, in his article "Can 'metaphor' be translated?" (1976)), that some elements of figurative language (metaphors) are located "beyond the limits of translatability"?

The figurative language is not restricted to poetry or literature in general; it is a part of our understanding of experience, and an overwhelmingly indispensable part of poetry. If it is ignored in the translation of poetry, or dealt with as a side issue of little importance, our understanding becomes defective and the translation of a work of art - the source text - becomes drastically deficient.

Does poetry not express, reveal and invoke emotions? And are metaphors not important "tools for the understanding of the tacit sides of emotions perhaps because of the metaphoric structure of emotions," as Stefán Snævarr says in his book *Metaphors, Narratives, Emotions: Their Interplay and Impact* (2010) (p. 3)? How can translated poetry or a dramatic work in verse ignore, or belittle emotions?

The study runs a number of comparisons of Arabic translations focusing on figurative language, word play, and tropes in general to attempt an answer to such questions, and since the limits of scope have to be set, the emphasis lies on the Arabic translations of the Shakespearean sonnets with some reference to other works of Shakespeare's.

Early in the 20th Century, at least as early as the first decades, there arose a tremendous Arabic literary and thought revival that revolutionised thought and literacy taste, amounting to

an Arab Enlightenment especially in Egypt and Lebanon. The revival discovered Shakespeare as a dramatist, but not as poet. Accordingly, the sonnets and a great deal of Shakespeare's verse did not get their deserved attention although they are lyrical and lyricism is closest to the Arabic poetic tradition.

The sonnet form is not totally strange to the Arab audiences then, since it has similar counterpart forms in the rich Arabic poetic tradition. Among other forms and purposes of this great poetic legacy is the *udhrī* poetry (الغزل العذري) which belongs to the courtly love tradition that might even have influenced similar strands of poetry in the European canon. As Katherine Hennessey and Margaret Litvin show in the book of essays they edited, *Shakespeare and the Arab World* (2019), "Abu-Deeb lays out an argument not only that the sonnet has its roots in the Arab poetic form called the muwashshaḥ [الموشح], but also that the polyglot Sicilian court of Frederick II (1194–1250) was the forum in which poet Giacomo da Lentini, father of the Italian sonnet, might have heard, adopted and adapted Arabic poetry of this type". Abu Deeb's reference to the Andalusian muwashshaḥ as a source or origin for the first beginnings of the sonnet form needs further research as he himself states. However, this can be seen as an issue of intersexuality, with influences going both ways.

1. General types of tropes in the Sonnets, Sonnet 97 examined

The types of tropes used in the Shakespearean sonnet is naturally affected by structural elements in his form of the sonnet. The fourteen lines of iambic pentameters are composed of three quatrains and a concluding couplet with its own rhyme scheme of *abab cdcd efef gg*. However, that is not all the form it reveals as

the sonnet is a highly structured form that organises its content as well in an *argument* a *volta* and a possible *resolution*. The argument is the subject or the theme; the volta marks a turn or a change which might express two competing points that need a resolution in the final couplet. This outer form reflects its inner form which has meaning, vagueness, conflict, etc., in a condensed way which explains well the adage ascribed to Robert Frost "poetry is language under pressure".

The figures of speech used in the sonnets can be divided technically into two large types: first, and most significant, is that closely related to the idea of the sonnet itself, namely an extended verbal construct made vehicle for a developing tenor, reaching a culmination - the point of the 'argument' - in the concluding couplet. In this construct, each quatrain deals with a certain aspect of the underlying figure: such aspects may be related internally or not, but they cumulatively build up a feeling which would be tantamount to the sonnet's 'argument'. The second type is the 'local' figure, that is the metaphor or the simile used, besides others, in expounding the central idea. Obviously the extended figure may contain as many 'local' ones as the development of the idea requires; but each local figure, whatever its function in the overall vision in the sonnet, is worthy of consideration in itself. It is thought that Sonnets 1-126 are, by and large, addressed to Shakespeare's noble friend, a young aristocrat said to have financially helped Shakespeare's theatrical company. The rest of the Sonnets, 127-154, are addressed by the poet to a dark lady whose identity has never been established. These 'facts' about who is being addressed are more assumptions drawn from the texts than historically proved, or provable, 'facts'. Some sonnets

are therefore capable of being addressed to a man or a woman, such as the sequence 71-74, and surmises proliferate among the handful of authoritative editors of the *Sonnets.* A beautiful example of such an uncertain gender of the addressee is sonnet 97, brilliantly discussed by Helen Vendler in her *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1997). This much anthologized sonnet shows that some translators, however their recognition of the point of the 'argument', tend to feel too timid to resort to explicitation, preferring to stick meticulously to the actual wording of the poem. Here is the sonnet:

Sonnet 97

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
What old December's bareness everywhere!

And yet that time removed was summer's time;
The teeming Autumn, big with rich increase,
Bearing the wanton burden of the prime,
Like widow'd wombs after their lords' decease:

Yet this abundant issue seemed to me
But hope of orphans, an unfathered fruit,
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And thou away, the very birds are mute.

Or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer,

That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

Vendler explains the sonnet depending on its use of tense aspect. According to the modem study of linguistics pragmatics, *deixis* clarifies the intended meanings through the relationship between the structure of language and the context in which it is used. She shows that the 'present perfect' used in the first quatrain refers to a feeling experienced *now,* a realization that something has changed, namely the poet's reunion with his sweetheart. It is the moment of their reunion, whatever his or her gender, that makes the poet feel that their separation (absence) has looked like winter, although their separation *took place* (a past simple tense) in the summer, as confirmed by the tense aspect of the opening line of the second quatrain. The definite assumption is, therefore, that the reunion is taking place now after the summer has gone. Thanks to the fleeting year, a primordial image of time, the lovers have again been reunited.

In simple English terms, the explanation goes like this. One partner says to the other, "I've missed you." This means that they are now together while the absence was in the near past that is now over. Thus saying, "hath my absence been" in the first line of the sonnet; means that the absence is over and they are together now. The structure "time removed was.." of the fifth line describes what was in the past and is now over. Part of the complication for an Arab translation resides in the fact that Arabic does not have *the present perfect aspect* of the tense. The majority

of Arabic students learning English make the following mistake in their first stages of learning the language: translating the Arabic أصبح [which is simply in the past tense] in for instance أصبحت الحواسيب مهمة into "became" [past simple tense as a false equivalent to the Arabic past simple]. The resultant sentence, *Computers became important*, gives the faulty meaning that they are not important anymore.

The figure of speech, central to the sonnet, is the simile which likens the period of separation, in the summer (now gone) to winter, yet to return! In other words, the poet is grateful for the cyclical nature of time which gave him back his beloved. The image is both extended, as it begins with 'like a winter' (that has gone) and ends with 'winter's near' (about to come), and is complex, as it involves another analogy: the beloved is the begetter of new life in the summer, shown in the harvests of autumn. So, whether we assume that the poet is addressing a male or a female, the addressee is compared to the father of nature's offspring. The central image has thus generated another image, namely that the absence of the beloved *looked like* the death of the begetter of all the bounty in nature, the 'abundant issue'. Nature's fruit and flowers which the summer promised 'seemed' (line 9) like orphans, lacking the begetter, the father. This does not necessarily mean that the addressee is a man: what we look at in this figure of speech is an implied comparison of the beloved, even if a woman, to a father. In other words, the gender of the beloved is unspecified, deliberately, though the word 'father' itself is likely to suggest a male partner.

2. The extended simile misunderstood in translation

All Arabic translators of this sonnet find no difficulty in giving us the Arabic image of the fatherless fruit, but some of them are not quite aware of the significance of the central image of time. One in particular is misled by the second line (the pleasure of the fleeting year) into thinking that it refers to the 'absence' of the beloved, not his or her return, which makes a mess of the meaning of the central image. The fault is, apparently, due to the position of that phrase *"pleasure of fleeting"* just after the pronoun "thee". It is not "thee" (or the second person singular "thou") that is a pleasure; the pleasure comes from the fact the times moves fast, i.e., *fleets*, and thus the loved one is back again. Other translators spotted the ellipsis, that is, that this phrase should be complemented by 'which brought you back to me' or 'making our reunion possible'. Here are how the five translators who handled this sonnet rendered the first lines, arranged chronologically:

كالشـــتاء كـــان عنـــك غيـــابي
(Jabra) يـــا متعـــة الســـنة العـــابرة!
لشـد مـا يشـبه الشـتاء غيـابي عنـك
(Tawfiq) يـا بهجـة الصـيف الـذي انقضـى!
مـــا أشـــبه غيـــابي عنـــك بالشـــتاء
(Wali) يـــا بهجـــة العـــام الســـريع العبـــور
مـــا أشـــبه بشـــتاء قـــد كـــان غيـــابي
(Lu'lu'ah) عنـــك يـــا بهجـــة الســـنة المارقـــة!
كم كان غيابك عني أشبه بشتاء بارد
(Enani) لكن العام يدور فيسعدني بلقاء العائد

3. Arabic translations of the sonnets: the progress from locution to illocution

The change from one to the next of these variants is in effect a progress from locution to illocution, in J. Austin's sense of both terms. Locution means, according to Austin, the actual words used by the speaker, while illocution means the meaning intended, that is a kind of interpretation of the perceived meaning of the sentence, regardless of what the individual words mean out of context. The sixteen words in the English text of the first two lines in this sonnet are reproduced in 8, 11, 11, 11 and 13 words in Arabic in the 5 translations respectively. The first compact version gives us the opposite meaning of Shakespeare's lines, and so does the second where the translator believes that the summer was a time of pleasure on account of the presence of the beloved, when in fact it was a time of displeasure because of his or' her absence, looking more like winter. The third makes the same assumption but can be amended by adding words like (فجاء بك). The fourth uses the colloquial Levantine word for 'pass' or 'go' (مارق) while in classical Arabic it may mean an apostate or a renegade. The fifth adds an epithet, qualifying winter as cold, which is hardly an addition as it is what the 'winter' suggests, and is confirmed by the crucial 'freezings.' More importantly, it gives the intended meaning as confirmed by Shakespearean commentators (as explained above). A most significant difference of the fifth version is that it captures the real sense of 'fleeting' *in context.* The entire sonnet is based on what has been called the cyclical nature of time, where we have summer, spring (prime), autumn, then the expected winter. It is the inner logic of the sonnet that the

added word (العائد) captures, and so links, as has been noted, the beginning with the end, then with another beginning.

The conclusion made, following the analysis of a crucial line in Sonnet 97, namely that the Arabic translations of the sonnets generally tend to develop from locution to illocution, can equally apply to the other sonnets, though with slight variations. Examining another sonnet built in the same way on a central trope, with ramifications inspired by it, and contributing to it: it is the well-known and much anthologized Sonnet 116. Though belonging (officially) to those addressed to the young man, that is among the first 126 sonnets, the imagery and the language show that it could be addressed to the dark lady of nos. 127-154, or indeed, to anyone, male or female, and is closest in this feature to sonnet 124 and the sequence 71-74, as previously mentioned. Put simply, the central trope is that love, in the abstract, is a human value powerful enough to resist the vicissitudes of time and fortune, and is thus compared to a light-house on the shore guiding men's ships to their safe haven. Coupled with this is the image of a star, usually thought to be the lode star according to which the position of everything is established.

4. Illocutions and central tropes

The occasional inability to recognize the central trope and the difference between 'the times' and 'time' will naturally lead to deficient translations. Scholars will also be shocked to find a strange miscomprehension of some common words in English (and in Shakespeare). Even at the level of prose sense or at the level of locution, some translators do not grasp the sense of one line or two, and some of them attempt illocution but read the

wrong ‘meaning’ thought to be intended by the poet, only to be corrected by later translators. Sonnet 116 presents such difficulties, among others, unnecessarily despite its non-complex nature:

Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds
Or bends with the remover to remove.

Oh no, it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand’ring ship
Whose worth is unknown, though his height be taken.

Love is not time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

The first hurdle for the beginner is to understand the common expression "Let me not admit", which obviously means "I do not admit", or "Let me declare that I do not admit". This means that the poet does not believe in the existence of obstacles preventing faithful souls from being allied to one another, even in marriage (though the addressee here may be male).

Included in the opening line is the reference to *minds* which means, not only in Shakespeare's day but even today, either *soul* (spirit) or *reason* (the intellect) with the former more probable (as it is in psychology). Shakespeare is not referring to consonant ideas binding two people together but a relationship between what we call today "two soul mates." Following is therefore a variety of the translations of the first sentence:

١- لا تدعني في سبيل تزاوج الألباب الوفية
أقر بالعراقيل (Jabra)

٢- لا تتركني في التزاوج بين أفكارنا الصادقة
أدَعُ سبيلا إلى العوائق (Tawfiq)

٣- لا شيء يمنع قلوبا صادقة أن تتزاوج (Wali)

٤- لن أسلم بـ(وجود) ما يحول دون اقتران
العقول الصادقة (Abu Deeb)

٥- ليتني أجد ما يعيق اقتران
القلوب المخلصة (Lu'lu'ah)

٦- لا أقبل زَعمَ القائل بوجود العقباتْ
إنْ رغبتْ أنْ تقترن نُفُوسٌ مخلصةُ النياتْ (Enani)

The attempt to produce a perfect copy of the source text lands an early translator in trouble. The second Arabic version can hardly be said to convey Shakespeare's meaning but sounds rather ludicrous (لا تتركني في التزاوج). Not only does he miss the fact that the poet is talking about *two people*, but he also thinks that the marriage would be between *our truthful thoughts* (أفكارنا الصادقة). The Arabic (ألباب) in version no. 1 means "intellects" or "straight thinking ability". The expression (ذوو الألباب) in Arabic means those who are intelligent and sagacious, and (اللبيب) is the adjective applied to the men who can think properly or brilliantly. We have quite a variety of this binary structures, producing alternative combinations in the translations of the words: (قلوب) [hearts],

(عقول) [minds / intellects], (صادق) [truthful], (وفية) [faithful] and (المخلصة) [loyal], before the final (نفوس مخلصة).

When we reach example 5 we have the opposite meaning not only of the opening sentence but also of the tenor of the simple simile. The translator has correctly translated the final couplet in which Shakespeare stakes his reputation, both as a writer and as one of the men who have loved down the centuries, on the validity of his initial premise, namely that there can be no obstacles between faithful lovers. But the translator gives us this opening line:

ليتني أجد ما يعيق اقتران
القلـــوب المخلصـــة

This means that he wishes never to encounter what obstacles happen to obstruct or interrupt the progress of marriage of such faithful hearts. Does he imply that such obstacles do exist but that he wishes they never did? Or does he imply that he simply does not wish to come across such obstacles if and when they happen to arise?

What may be truly disturbing is the way in which most translators fail to see the central metaphor, namely that of the beacon or lighthouse which is *ever fixed*, star-like, guiding the errant ships at sea. The association of the beacon with the pole-star is created by contiguity, that is, making one close enough to the other to suggest their combination, if not apposition. This is the kind of symbolic association referred to by the I.A. Richards, in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1936, as "putting two things together to make them work together" (p. 21, edn. 2001). Only translations 3 and 6 capture the trope, the others give us (إشارة), (علامة), (علامة) and (معلم).

Conclusion

Great recent advances in Translation Studies, cognitive linguistics, literary theory, and culture studies have necessitated that we should reconsider the strategies we use to translate and retranslate works of art. These disciplines have also shown greater interdependence which has never been there before. A lexical translation that simply carries across components of meaning understood narrowly lacks a great deal which knowledge and practice of different but related disciplines can remedy.

The present study reviewed various approaches to literary translation to attempt an understanding of how figurative language should be explored, defined and handled in translating works of William Shakespeare. Enlightened by the findings of important philosophers, literary theoreticians, scholars, writers, and practicing translators, the researcher made a comparative assessment of a number of Arabic translations of some of the Shakespearean dramas and sonnets to detect where they succeeded or failed to convey the total poetic experience the figurative language of the Bard conveys to the original audience.

Translating the figurative language of Shakespeare into Arabic faces the huge hurdle of the differences of place, time, culture which includes religion, and targeted audience. However, the hurdle is not as insurmountable as might be thought at the beginning. The partial absence of the difficulty is explained by the parallel richness of the two cultures, at least as far as poetry (and figurative language) is concerned. Arabic poetry has been the record of the Arabic culture since pre-Islamic times. It was tremendously enriched with the advance of the Arabic-Islamic

civilization. It has always had a specially high status in this culture, enriching the language and being enriched by its poets, writers and religious and secular scholars. Thus Arabic translators have always had a large linguistic and poetic reservoir to draw from their vocabulary and poetic imagery.

Translators such as Lu'lu'ah and Abu Deeb have tried verse translation into verse with different degrees of success while Enani rendered the entire sonnet collection (in addition to several dramatic works of the English Bard) in verse without sacrificing the other components of the poetic experience carried across to the target language and culture. Tawfiq relinquished the idea of rendering the given poems into verse, and preferably poetic verse, even using a prosaic style of prose although he is a poet himself. The result is misrepresenting Shakespeare's poetry in a less than mediocre work which suffered as well because of the narrow vision that perceives language and even poetry only on one level, mostly lexical. On the other hand, the first three translators, who are also distinguished professors and scholars of the literatures of the two cultures, have given their readers outstanding renderings which enrich the target language and culture.

The study hopes to have shed some light on the need to look upon translation as something so near to science; it is a serious enterprise that needs erudition, serious study and knowledge of cognitive and stylistic aspects of language. It is at the same time an art that requires talent and taste since it is a creative work in its own right. Perhaps we can express these two elements, of translation being and art and a science, by saying translation is an "exact art" to quote George Steiner.

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