

Variation across the Border: Dialect in Arabic/English Translation

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ABSTRACT

Translation is a multifaceted process that involves decisions at the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and textual levels. This paper examines dialect-related issues, which may involve one or more of these levels, from a translational perspective. It employs Halliday's (1978) socio-semiotic approach to explore dialect-related features that are of relevance to the process and product of translation. The authentic textual data clearly shows that translators need to be sensitized to both user-related features and use-related features. While the former include dialectal and idiolectal features that may entirely or partially mark a discourse, the latter pertain to register-defining components, namely field, tenor, and mode of discourse. Although there is a significant connection between these features, the present study focuses exclusively on user-related aspects. The translator's awareness of the various ways people use language to reflect their power, solidarity, status, education, and other aspects of social identity can significantly enhance the quality and naturalness of their translation.

1. Introduction:

The use of dialect/idiolect and register, which is governed by key sociolinguistic scales including social distance, formality, power and function scales, pervades all language communities. These scales are further consolidated by several social variables like social class, region, education, age, gender, ethnicity, etc. Thus, the way a boss addresses his secretary at work is different from the way she addresses him (e.g. use of first name vs. use of title of address plus family name, respectively). This address manner changes between them when at the pub if they happen to have developed a personal relationship, e.g. the secretary calls her boss by his first name rather than by a title of address plus family name. A similar kind of discrepancy may be noticed in a conversation between an educated and a lay person in an English-speaking country (e.g. the former may use standard forms, whereas the latter customarily employs vernacular forms like consonant cluster simplification and double/multiple negation). Rosa (2012:77) rightly states: "Language homogeneity is a fallacy". For an elaborate discussion of sociolinguistic scales and social variables, and how they impact the way people use language, see Holmes (1991/2004; Almannā and House 2023).

Back in 1972, Dell Hymes accounted for language use in different discourse situations by suggesting his SPEAKING model which appeals to seven components representing the letters in the word 'speaking'. They are:

‘setting/scene’, ‘participants’, ‘ends’, ‘act sequences’, ‘key’, ‘instrumentalities’, ‘norms’, and ‘genres’. For example, the ‘scene’ will distinguish between the language use in discourse produced in the corridor and that produced in the classroom - the former being informal while the latter being formal. Similarly, the ‘key’ differentiates between when an utterance like *‘thank you’* begs a standard response like *‘Don’t mention it!’* or a strong apology like *‘I don’t know what to say to you!’*, depending on the act which has triggered it. In fact, the components of this model cogently explain the parameters of language use in a discourse situation/context (for more details, see Renkema 2004).

2. Statement of the problem and research questions

One of the key challenges faced by translators when rendering a text that contains colloquial expressions from Arabic into English, or vice versa, is the dilemma of selecting the appropriate dialect to use in their translation. This task involves not only identifying the specific dialect employed by the author in the original text but also determining which dialect in the target language best corresponds to the nuances and cultural context of the original. The variation in dialects within both Arabic and English further complicates this process, as each dialect carries its own regional, social, and cultural significance. This study seeks to explore these challenges in-depth, focusing on the difficulties translators encounter when working with dialectal differences and examining the strategies they employ to navigate this complex aspect of translation.

Based on this, the study sets out to answer the following questions:

- (1) To what extent can dialects be translated between Arabic and English?
- (2) If translation is possible, what strategies should translators employ to effectively convey dialectal nuances?
- (3) If translation is not feasible, what alternatives should translators consider in such instances?

3. Objective of Study

This study aims to see how relevant dialect-related features to translation between English and Arabic. By examining a number of excerpts from translation works, the study seeks to unravel dialect/idiolect issues that may have a bearing on the translation process in order to observe how sensitive translation practitioners are to them. Such investigation, albeit based on limited translational data, is expected to benefit different categories of translators/researchers working within the domain of translation studies.

4 Theoretical Framework

Dialect and register variation was first generally approached by Halliday et al. (1964). They hold that language has many functions and takes different shapes according to the situation in which it is used. A year later, Catford (1965: 83) supported the idea of having “a framework of categories for the classification of ‘sub-languages’,

or varieties within a total language”. Some years later, Halliday (1978) put forward a socio-semiotic approach, which is adopted by this study.

Halliday’s socio-semiotic approach (1978), which looks at variation in language use in terms of user-related and use-related dimensions, is grounded in his systemic functional linguistics (SFL), a linguistic theory that conceptualizes language as a social semiotic system. This approach highlights the dynamic relationship between language and the social context in which it operates, asserting that meaning is shaped not only by linguistic structures but also by the social functions language fulfills (Almanna and House, 2023: 175–176). As a socio-semiotic system, language is viewed as a system of signs that people use to make meaning, which is dynamic in nature, as individuals may use and interpret signs differently depending on the context. This, therefore, underscores the dynamic and functional nature of language. Thus, Halliday’s socio-semiotic approach focuses on how language evolves to meet the needs of its users in specific social and cultural contexts.

Halliday (in Matthiessen, 1985/2014: 25) holds that we “use language to make sense of our experience, and to carry out our interactions with other people”. This means that language cannot be used in isolation from what is going on outside the linguistic system. Rather, there is always some sort of interaction between the language and what is happening in the context enveloping it. He posits that language functions primarily to interpret human experience and to mediate social interaction. This view emphasizes that language operates within its external environment, maintaining a dynamic interplay with the context in which it is embedded, rather than functioning in isolation from extralinguistic factors (Almanna and House, 2023: 176). According to Halliday, the transformation of sociocultural experiences into linguistic expression occurs in two steps.

- (1) Experiences and interpersonal relationships are first converted into meaning within the realm of semantics.
- (2) These meanings are then further encoded into wording through the system of lexicogrammar.

Meaning is encoded into wording, realized through the selection of words, structures, conjunctions, and other linguistic elements chosen by the language user. These choices might include certain dialectal features. As such, these linguistic choices are systematically linked to the language variety deemed suitable for a particular context (register), shaped by the conventional text type (genre), which, in turn, is influenced by the broader sociocultural environment (for more details, see Almanna and House 2023: 176).

Halliday’s socio-semiotic approach integrates the concept of ‘register’, which refers to the variation in language use based on context. He identifies three variables that shape a register. They are:

- (1) ‘field’, i.e. the subject matter or activity being discussed; it mirrors the ideational function of language.
- (2) ‘tenor’, i.e. the roles and relationships of the participants; it mirrors the interpersonal function of language.
- (3) ‘mode’, i.e. the channel of communication (spoken, written, standard, dialectal, etc.); it mirrors the textual functional of language.

This socio-semiotic approach can be divided into two main categories: user-related varieties, i.e., dialects, and use-related varieties, i.e., registers (see also Toury 1995; House 1997, 1981, 2009; Rosa 2012; Almanna 2014;

Lapshinova-Koltunski 2015; Quesada 2020; Almanna and House 2023; among others). However, in this study, only the first category, i.e., user-related varieties, is examined from a translational perspective.

5 Methodology

One of the challenges faced by translators when translating a text that includes colloquial expressions from Arabic into English or the other way round is to determine which dialect to adopt in their translation, and which dialect in the target language can be considered equivalent to the dialect used by the author in the original text. This study aims to examine the challenges translators face when working with dialects. In order to address this issue in-depth, a qualitative research design is employed to gain a deeper insight into the problem. Qualitative research is often characterized by the use of text-based data, which can include sources such as interviews, written documents, or observational notes, as highlighted by Saldanha and O'Brien (2014: 22). This approach enables researchers to explore complex phenomena in some detail.

To this end, qualitative data are used, primarily drawing on a carefully selected sample of authentic textual data loaded with dialects. The data is sourced from two main genres, namely literature and religion. Each example is scrutinized from a translational viewpoint, offering a critical discussion of how the translator has dealt with dialects found in the original text.

6. Dialect

User-related language use, i.e. dialects/idiolects, is based on the user's contribution to the text. Such variation occurs due to, for example, the geographical, temporal, social, idiolectal, standard and non-standard uses of language (cf. Gregory and Carroll 1978; Hatim and Mason 1990; Almanna and House 2023). To begin with, geographical variation refers to varieties used in a particular geographical area, for example the Egyptian dialect, the Iraqi dialect, the Syrian dialect, and so on. As such, when features of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar are studied, the geographical area that the language user comes from is given serious consideration (Almanna and House 2023: 225). Temporal variation, however, refers to varieties used in a particular period. Some lexical items, for instance, were acceptable in a certain period, but they have either died out or evolved new meanings over time. An example of this is the lexical item *'petty'* which was used to mean *'slow'* in Macbeth; however, it now means *'trivial'* (Hatim and Mason 1990: 42). In some cases, the primary meaning of a word becomes a secondary one and a new sense claims primacy, e.g. nowadays *'gay'* has the sense of 'homosexual' as its primary meaning and *'happy'* as its secondary one. Arabic examples may include *هالك* *halaka* 'died' and *انصرف* *inSaraf* 'left' which used to have a neutral attitude, but they have over time acquired negative connotations comparable to those in *'kick the bucket/croak'* and *'get lost'*, respectively. Social variation, for its turn, refers to varieties used by members of a specific group or community, for example, Arabic or English used in cities as opposed to Arabic in the countryside or varieties used by different social classes. The use of *'ain't'* in English, for instance, is a good example that can be considered as socially marked form (Almanna and House 2023: 225). Closely related to social variation is standard and non-standard use of language,

for instance, Standard English vs. Cockney English or Standard Arabic vs. Arabic vernaculars. Finally, idiolectal variation refers to an individual's ways of using language.

Al-Rubai'i (1996: 61), advocating Hatim and Mason's (1990) views, states that all these "types of variations under user-related varieties do not represent categories that have clear-cut boundaries but a continuum with the respective features of variation in constant interaction". Approaching a text charged with variation in language use, the translator's progress will automatically slow down in an attempt to cope with this type of constraint by employing different varieties of language available in the original text and to functionally cater for such variation.

7. Discussion

In this section, a carefully selected sample of authentic textual data loaded with dialects is discussed with a view to arriving at comprehensive and sufficient answers to the research questions posed by this study. In presenting these examples, the source text (ST) is provided first, followed by a literal back translation (BT) if it is in Arabic, and then the target text (TT). However, if the ST is in English, the TT is presented first, followed by the BT. Let us begin the discussion with an example quoted from Karīm 'Abid's story *السيدة غرام (ع) 'The Passion of Lady A'* and translated for the purposes of this study:

ST قالت : لا بد أن أبي سيُعيد نفس الأسطوانة عن تأخر الوقت .لم يكن أبوهما موجودا فهذأت مشاعرهما . سمعتا حركة أمهما في المطبخ، قالت (ع) تخاطب أمها :الشباب اليوم يموجون في الشارع مثل عرايش الياسمين، يلعن أبوهم شو حلوين!!

BT She said: My father will certainly repeat the same record about lateness. Their father was not there so their feelings calmed down. They heard the movement of their mother in the kitchen, (A) said addressing her mother: youths are undulating in the street like jasmine arbours, damn their father how beautiful they are.

TT She said, our father will be angry about our coming home late. But their father wasn't there and they relaxed. They heard their mother bustling in the kitchen and Miss A said, addressing her mother, there were a lot of youths undulating in the street like jasmine arbours. Gee, what a handsome bunch of boys they are!

In the example above, there is an instance of code-switching from standard Arabic into vernacular Arabic, viz. *يلعن أبوهم شو حلوين* literally meaning 'damn their father how beautiful they are'. Having recognized such a dialectal feature, the translator needs to opt for a certain local strategy that caters for such a shift from Standard Arabic to Vernacular Arabic. The search may necessitate use of some colloquial/informal English features, viz. 'Gee, what a handsome bunch of boys they are!' to signal the shift. The suggested rendering, as can be seen, invests in colloquial interjections 'Gee', informal usage 'bunch' and colloquial, extended figurative meaning 'boys'. This demonstrates how translators may suffer while trying to decide on the most appropriate features that would reflect such a shift in dialect with a minimal loss. Consequently, a dialectal shift in the ST is supposed to be rendered appropriately by improvising a comparable shift in the TT.

In the following example extracted from a short story titled *صورة ياسمين* 'Yasmine Picture' by Hanan al-Shaykh translated by and cited in Husni and Newman (2008: 152– 3), there is also an instance of intralingual code switching from standard Arabic into non-standard Arabic:

ST	(1) يتمشى في البيت، يدخل كلَّ الغرف. يكتفي بالنظر، يفتح الخزائن والأدراج، وزوجته تقول له وهي تبتسم: ولو شو صاير لك. رد كاذبًا: ((بفتش على كتاب (...)).
BT	[He (was) walking around the house, going into every room. He was content with just looking; he (was) opening cupboards and drawers. His wife said to him while smiling: “So, what happened to you?” He answered, lying: “I am looking for a book ...”]
TT	He walked around the house, going into every room. He was content with just looking; he opened cupboards and drawers. His wife smiled and told him: “So, what are you up to?” He answered with a lie: “I am looking for a book ...”.

In this example, there is an instance of intralingual code-switching from Standard Arabic to a non-standard variety: *ولو شو صاير لك* meaning 'So, what happened to you?' and *بفتش على كتاب* meaning 'I'm looking for a book'. In this instance, the author appears to employ code-switching as a deliberate stylistic choice, likely aiming to enhance the vividness and authenticity of the text while subtly conveying underlying information about the speaker. However, the translators have rendered these as 'So, what are you up to?' and 'I am looking for a book ...', thus failing to preserve the dialectal features. In this regard, Almanna and House (2023: 231) hold that such a loss “has nothing to do with their translation competence, but rather has something to do with the notion of the ‘untranslatability’ of such dialectal features”. Untranslatability, as conceptualized by Cui (2012: 826; also discussed in Almanna and House 2023: 231), denotes a characteristic inherent in a text or any linguistic expression within a given language, where an equivalent expression or textual representation cannot be accurately reproduced in another language. This phenomenon arises from cultural, contextual, or structural disparities between languages, making certain meanings, nuances, or stylistic elements resistant to direct translation without any loss.

A closer examination of the translators' rendering of the utterance *بفتش على كتاب*, translated somehow formally as 'I am looking for a book', reveals that a significant part of the discourse's original dynamism and stylistic nuance has been lost in the TT. In the actual act of translation between language *A* and language *B*, translators make use of a range of localized strategies to address various challenges; however, the task of translating dialects presents a distinct set of difficulties. This clearly shows translators' suffering while dealing with texts that incorporate diverse linguistic varieties.

To reinforce this point, the following example extracted from a short story titled *طبليية من السماء* by Yusuf Idris translated into English by Husni and Newman (2008: 276– 7) as 'A Tray from Heaven' can be considered:

ST	أنت عايز مني أيه. تقدر تقول لي أنت عايز مني أيه؟ ... كان يقول موجهاً كلامه إلى السماء
BT	He was saying addressing the sky: You want what from me? Can you tell me what you want from me?

TT He said, addressing the sky: “What do you want from me? Can you tell me what is it that you want from me?”

Here, as one may observe, there is an example of code-switching from standard Arabic into vernacular Arabic, viz. *عائز* meaning ‘need’ and *أيه* meaning ‘what’. Here, although identifying the dialect used in the ST, namely the Egyptian dialect, is straightforward, the challenge lies in determining which dialect the translator might adopt in such cases if they wish to transfer the dialectal features from the ST to the TT. As can be seen, they have opted for ‘*What do you want from me? Can you tell me what is it that you want from me?*’ where no attempt was made to reflect the dialectal features used in the ST. Again, this has nothing to do with the translators’ competence, but it is related to ‘untranslatability’. It reflects the inherent difficulty in transferring certain linguistic features, such as dialectal nuances. These features do not lend themselves to being easily and accurately conveyed in the TT without losing their original impact.

The translation of social dialects can also be very challenging between English and Arabic as both languages involve tremendous variation in the speech of different social classes. While English vernacular features like double/multiple negation and *h*-dropping are characteristic attributes of low social classes in all English-speaking communities regardless of the geographical area (Holmes 2008), Arabic vernacular features may also designate both social and regional variation. Witness how Gerges Al-Rashdi (1967) has rendered the speech of ‘the Flower Girl’ in Shaw’s ‘*Pygmalion*’ into a variety of Egyptian Arabic that marks her social status.

ST The Flower GIRL. Well, if you was a gentleman, you might ask me to sit down, I think.
Dont I tell you I'm bringing you business?
HIGGINS. Pickering, shall we ask this baggage to sit down or shall we throw her out of the window?

TT بانعة الزهور: إن كنت جنتلمان زي الست مبتقول، كنت قلت لي أقعدي. ياخي دنا جايبالك شغل.
هجنز بيكرنج: هل ندعو هذه البقجة للجلوس أم نلقي بها من الشباك؟

BT Flower Vendor: If you are a gentleman as the lady says, you would ask me for sitting down. O brother (come on) I’m bringing you business.
Higgins: Pickering, shall we invite this baggage to sit down or throw her from the window?

The translator in the above example has chosen the Egyptian Arabic vernacular for the ‘flower girl’ as opposed to Standard Arabic for Higgins in order to reflect differences in social class and education. Other things being equal, one should note that Standard Arabic is a marker of a good education, whereas vernacular Arabic is a marker of a lack of literacy. Not only does the translator take care of this socially significant distinction, but he also invests in a key linguistic feature of social significance within the Egyptian vernacular, viz. he has chosen the pharyngealized velar /G/, which is a shibboleth of countryside (Upper Egypt) speech in Egypt, as opposed to the glottal stop /ʔ/, which is the hallmark of urban Egyptian Arabic, to represent the standard Arabic uvular /q/. Thus, the flower girl pronounces

the words mabit'uul as mabitGuul, 'ultli as Gultli, and 'u'udi as 'uG'udi. Also, the flower girl uses vernacular lexical items, e.g. زي instead of كما meaning 'also', and دنا instead of أنا meaning 'I'.

By contrast, Higgins' speech is characterized by standard grammatical features, e.g. the use of the interrogative particle هل (which is never used in vernacular Arabic), as well as lexical features, e.g. ندعو meaning 'to invite', للجلوس meaning 'to sit down', and نلقي meaning 'to throw'. Below is a reproduction of what Higgins would have said in urban Egyptian Arabic:

TT	إنقول للبننت توعد ولا نرمىها منشباك؟
BT	We say to the girl to sit down or throw her from the window.

Note that the translator has also successfully accounted for Higgins' lexical shift from the standard to the slang in his use of the word 'baggage' by rendering it into an Arabic derogatory word بقجه meaning 'worthless person'.

In contrast with the above example where the translator has employed a familiar vernacular (Egyptian Arabic) for most Arabic native speakers to reflect socially significant nuances, Ihsan Aabbas (1998) has chosen a highly localized Sudanese Arabic vernacular to represent the speech of poor and uneducated black characters in Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Consider the following excerpt in which Flask (the black old man) addresses the sharks:

ST	Fellow-critters: I'se ordered here to say dat you must stop dat dam noise dare. You hear?
TT	أكواني المكلوقات: أنا مأمور أن أقول أنه توقفوا ديك الدوشه الملنون هناك. اسمنتوا؟
BT	Brothers creatures: I am ordered to say that you stop that damn noise there. You hear?

While Abass's option for a Sudanese Arabic vernacular may succeed in capturing the sociolinguistic implications, it fails to reach a large Arab readership, who are unfamiliar with this borderline Arabic dialect. For example, the reduction of the voiceless velar fricative /x/ to a voiceless velar stop /k/ and the voiced pharyngeal stop /ʕ/ to the glottal stop /ʔ/ are an extremely marked phenomenon, which coincides with what most foreigners do when speaking Arabic. It is also a familiar strategy for naturalizing Arabic names in English, viz. علي /'alii/ is phonologically modified to *Ali* and خالد /xaalid/ to *khalid*. An option for an upper Egypt or a countryside Levantine vernacular would have won him a much larger readership. In many cases, the Sudanese vernacular has to be rendered into a more familiar vernacular in order to be understood.

Sometimes, the translator needs to pay utmost attention to the idiolect of the speaker in order to maintain the coherence of the ST. To explain, the following example extracted from McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006) and translated into Arabic by Farghal (2009: 265) can be considered:

ST ... But you should go with me. You'll be all right.
How do I know you're one of the good guys?
You dont. You'll have to take a shot.
Are you carrying the fire?
Am I what?
Carrying the fire.
You're kind of weirded out, arent you?
No ...

TT ... لكن ينبغي أن تذهب معي. ستكون على ما يرام.
- كيف لي أن أعرف أنك من الناس الطيبين؟
- لن تعرف. عليك أن تخاطر.
- هل تحمل البندقية الآن؟
- هل أنا ماذا؟
- تحمل البندقية؟
- لقد فقدت صوابك، أليس كذلك؟
- لا ...

BT But you should go with me. You'll be all right.
- How could I know that you're one of the good people?
- You won't know. You must take the risk.
- Are you carrying the rifle now?
- Am I what?
- Carrying the fire?
- You have lost your mind, haven't you?
- No ...

In the above example, the stranger man tries to convince the little boy to go with him following the death of the boy's father in the wilderness during their search for survival in the wake of a total apocalypse. In this encounter, the boy uses the word 'fire' to mean 'gun', which the man could not comprehend. The boy's mention of 'fire (gun)' may have been cued by the little boy's literal, wrong interpretation of the idiomatic expression 'take a shot' in the man's preceding utterance.

One can clearly see that the mishandling of an idiolectal feature has caused serious damage to the coherence of the translation on two grounds. Firstly, it is inconceivable in a face-to-face encounter for one to ask whether the interlocutor is carrying a rifle or not, for it would be clearly visible to him/her. Secondly, it is inconceivable for an adult English native speaker to not understand what the word 'rifle' means. Being the translator, the second-named

researcher should mention that it is the reviewer and/or commissioner who edited my original translation below into the translation above without consulting me. The problem here has to do the boy's idelect in which the word 'fire' is used to mean 'gun'. The boy's ideolectal feautre needs to be preserved in the translation in order for the TT to be coherent.

ST ... But you should go with me. You'll be all right.

How do I know you're one of the good guys?

You dont. You'll have to take a shot.

Are you carrying the fire?

Am I what?

Carrying the fire.

You're kind of weirded out, arent you?

No ...

TT

لكن ينبغي أن تذهب معي. ستكون على ما يرام.
 - كيف لي أن أعرف أنك من الناس الطيبين؟
 - لن تعرف. عليك أن تخاطر.
 - هل تحمل النار الآن؟
 - هل أنا ماذا؟
 - تحمل النار.
 - لقد فقدت صوابك، أليس كذلك؟
 - لا ...

BT But you should go with me. You'll be all right.

- How could I know that you're one of the good people?

- You won't know. You must take the risk.

- Are you carrying the fire now?

- Am I what?

- Carrying the fire.

- You have lost your mind, haven't you?

- No ...]

The issue of standard vs. vernacular Arabic becomes a key question when translating English comics, e.g. cartoon series into Arabic. Nowadays, most cartoon series are dubbed into vernacular Arabic (mainly the Egyptian vernacular) in order to capture the humorous and casual nature of the discourse. Witness how the excerpt from the cartoon movie

'Timon and Pumbaa', in which Timon is reluctantly serving his master Pumbaa, is dubbed into vernacular Egyptian Arabic:

ST	Here is your food, I hope you choke. I mean, I'm Timon and I'll be your waiter. Here is your royal nourishment, oh mighty, all powerful Pumbaa.
BT	أدي الدود بتاعك بالسسم الهاري. أصدي أنا تيمون أرسون ساعاتك وده فضلة خيرك أكل جنابك يا بميا.
TT	Here the worms that belong to you. May they poison you. I mean I'm Timon your waiter and this is from your endowment your food Mr. Pumbaa

As can be observed, the English humor has been appropriated linguistically as well as culturally by opting for the Egyptian vernacular in rendering the casual humor. Rendering such humor into Standard Arabic may offer stilted, flat discourse. This does not mean that Standard Arabic cannot be employed in all cartoon series. On the contrary, historical cartoon series may require the use of Standard rather than vernacular Arabic, where formality is an indispensable feature. Other genres, e.g. the dubbing of foreign soap operas, would tolerate both varieties of Arabic. In the late nineties and early 2000 the tendency was to dub Mexican soap operas into Standard Arabic, which proved very successful. Later on, however, there was a steady shift to the Syrian vernacular in dubbing both Mexican as well as Turkish soap operas. Both strategies have succeeded in drawing tens of millions of TV viewers across the Arab World (for more details, see Al-Maleh 2013).

The temporal factor, for its turn, may impose some constraints on the translator. Quran translators, for example, tend to employ an archaic variety of English in an attempt to preserve the literariness and sanctity of the religious text. Consider the following Quranic verse, along with Pickthal's 1930/2006) translation:

ST	إنكم لتأتون الرجال شهوة من دون النساء بل أنتم قوم مسرفون. (سورة الأعراف، 8)
BT	You come to men lustfully instead of women; rather you are an extravagant folk.
TT	Lo! ye come with lust unto men instead of women. Nay, but ye are wanton folk.

One can readily note the archaic structure and vocabulary used, viz. *Lo*, *ye*, *unto*, and *nay*, which is indicative of a bygone period of time.

Sometimes, the temporal factor may confuse Quran translators. For example, the word شهيد *shahiid* in Quranic Arabic could mean either 'a martyr' or 'a witness' depending on the context. However, it could only mean 'a martyr' in Modern Standard Arabic. This shift in the meaning of the word has proved problematic to some Quran translators. Witness how the two translations below are based on different premises due to the confusion caused by the said semantic shift:

ST يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا خُذُوا حِذْرَكُمْ فَانفِرُوا تَوَّابِينَ أَوْ انْفِرُوا جَمِيعًا. وَإِنَّ مِنْكُمْ لَمَنْ لَيُبَطِّئَنَّ فَإِنْ أَصَابَكُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالَ قَدْ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ إِذْ لَمْ أَكُن مَعَهُمْ شَهِيدًا (سورة الناس، 71-72).

TT 1 O you who believe! Take your precautions, then advance in groups, or advance all together. Lo! among you there is he who loiters; and if disaster overtook you, he would say: Allah has been gracious unto me since I was not present with them. (Pickthall, p. 78)

TT2 O believers, take your precautions; then move forward in companies, or move forward all together. Some of you there are that are dilatory; then, if an affliction visits you, he says, ‘God has blessed me, in that I was not a martyr with them’. (Arberry 1955/1996, p. 110)

As can be seen, because of the confusion caused by a historically ambiguous word, the two translations offer different scenarios; the former of a ‘witness’ and the latter of a ‘martyr’.

8. Conclusion

Language has many functions and is realized differently according to the social context in which it is used. Therefore, approaching a text laden with user-related variation necessitates the translator’s awareness of the various ways people can use language to reflect their power, solidarity, social class, education, ethnicity, etc. The present paper has selectively explored, with several illustrative examples, communicative features that translators need to be alerted to when handling dialectal features.

The study shows that translating dialectal features between Arabic and English may inherently involve some degree of loss. This phenomenon may have nothing to do with the competence that a translator should have. Rather, it may stem from what is called in translation studies ‘untranslatability’, i.e. the elements within a text that resist interlingual translation due to cultural, linguistic, or contextual nuances. There are some cases, however, when the translator’s competence may fall short of rendering dialectal features that can be captured in the TT.

Regarding the strategies employed by translators, the study reveals the absence of universally applicable strategies that can be systematically adopted in all cases. Instead, the choice of translation strategy is heavily influenced by the specifics of the translation brief. Factors such as the type of text, the purpose behind the translation, the intended audience, and the conventions of the genre play pivotal roles. Additionally, practical considerations, including deadlines and financial constraints, also significantly shape the translation process. Therefore, each translation scenario demands a tailored approach, guided by its unique requirements and circumstances. Despite this, various strategies of handling dialect-related problems may be considered with hopes of bringing them into the consciousness of student as well as practicing translators. Together with other considerations including grammatical, semantic, pragmatic, and cultural aspects, the translator’s work will definitely become an informed act.

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