SOME LINGUISTIC LOSSES IN TRANSLATING THE SHORT STORY

"A GLANCE" BY YUSUF IDRIS

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1. ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on the semantic, syntactic and cultural losses that occur when translating the short story "A glance" by Yusuf Idris from Arabic into English. This paper discusses, the loss at different levels, starting with the meaning loss that happened because of the lack of some specific words in the Target Language (TL), the structural level that is caused by the different structures in both languages, and the cultural level that occur because of the unfamiliarly of the TL culture with the Source Language (SL) cultural terms and idiomatic expression. Therefore, this paper tries to investigate the reasons behind these losses.

Index Terms – semantic *loss*, syntactic *loss* and cultural *loss, source language, target Language, translation*

2. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, interest and demand have significantly increased in translation programs and services, as translation is considered a medium by which communication and exchange of ideas can occur between various cultures worldwide (Kroulek, 2016). Moreover, translation is considered an important tool of communication, understanding and transference between the Target language (TL) and the Source Language (SL). In report published by IbisWorld (2016), an organization specializing in Industry Market Research and Procurement, translation services and demand are estimated to keep on growing, reaching $37 billion in 2018, with globalization being the main factor behind such rapid growth (Cronin, 2016).

However, despite the significant growth in translation services and its importance, losses in translation can occur due to a variety of reasons, which can significantly impact the overall meaning of the text from the SL to the TL.

In this paper, the researcher will investigate three types of losses, namely the semantic loss, the syntactic loss, and finally the cultural loss in the English translation of an Arabic short story, "A glance" by Yusuf Idris.

Yusuf Idris was born in 1927, and was a prominent Egyptian writer of novels, plays and short stories (AP, 1991). "A glance" is a short story from one of his famed first collection of short stories named "The Cheapest Nights" (1954). In this short story, Yusuf Idris attempts to shed the light on the working class and struggling poor of the country. Additionally, he highlights a few of the dire situations in the society in which even children cannot do something simple such as play, because they have to work in order to support their poor families.

This collection has been widely translated into many languages, and this paper will focus on the English translation done in 2013 by Elisabeth Jacquette, a translator from the Arabic, instructor at Hunter College, and director of the American Literary Translators Association.

3. STATE OF THE PROBLEM

Translators often experience some problems in producing an equivalent/accurate translation of fiction, and convey the same effect and reaction for the reader of target language. Additionally, there are the losses that occur at the semantic, syntactic, and cultural level. Furthermore, insufficient knowledge and incorrect application between Arabic and English Linguistics could create a hindrance in accurate translations and conveying the true intent of the translated text. Therefore, this research attempts to examine some of the losses that occur when translating Arabic text to the English language using narratives from the book "A Glance" by Yususf Idris.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1   Research Design

Adopting the view of Strauss and Corbin (1990), this study will make use of qualitative research design, as the findings produced cannot be obtained by the means of quantitative research. This type of research needs written texts of the story, the original text SL and the translated text TL, then the researcher will examine and analyze both texts in order to identify the semantic, syntactic and cultural losses in the translation of the story.

4.2   Data Collection:

The corpus of this research paper is gathered through a direct observation, interpretation and analysis of text from an Arabic short story - "A glance" by Yusuf Idris (1954) and its English translation by Elisabeth Jacquette (2013) After carefully examining the critical analysis carried out by pervious critics, the researcher organizes data from the source text and compares them with the translated text to identify where the losses in the translation occur.

4.3   Data Analysis

The researcher depends on a descriptive approach to analyze data, and Baker's typology is used to identify the semantic loss and he analyzes the structure of the sentence in both languages to show the syntactic loss, and for the cultural loss, the researcher tries to find the idiomatic expressions and metaphor throughout the story.

In addition, this research uses a comparative method to analyze data, as according to Newmark (1991: 163), the comparative method is *"the only way to assess the deficiencies of the translation is to examine the linguistic differences between it and the original."*

5. MAJOR TRANSLATION LOSSES

5.1   Semantic Loss:

The reason behind the semantic loss in translation is that when a single word is attached in a sentence or phrase, it commutates a different meaning according to the context, in which the word may have more than one meaning (Almasaeid, 2013). In other words, there are two types of meaning; denotative meaning, which is the direct dictionary meaning disposed of any overtones or emotions (Elewa, 2015), and the connotative meaning, according to Lyons (1977: 176), is *"the connotation of a word is thought of as emotive or effective component additional to its central meaning"*.

To identify the semantic loss in the translation of the story, the researcher will follow Baker's typology of equivalence between Arabic and English. This theory has been chosen because it discusses in detail the non-equivalence problem at different levels, especially at the word level. Additionally, it sheds the light on the equivalence problems between English and Arabic.

Baker (1992) believes that the concept of equivalence is relative because it is affected by many linguistic and cultural factors. She classifies non-equivalence of the word level into 11 types,

but this study will focus on four types. The semantic loss in the translation of the story will be addressed under these types:

(a) Culture – Specific terms in the two languages; after analyzing the story in both languages, there are some words culturally bound, and there are no equivalent words in the target language.

[Sitee] - Mistress ……[AArabah] - Cart

These two words are not standard Arabic, but spoken Arabic in Egyptian culture, so the first one is derived from the standard Arabic [saeedah] which means 'Madam or Ma'am' and the intended meaning of the word [sitee] is the woman who symbolize for fear and suppression or the woman who despise the people who work under her authority. So the intended meaning can't be conveyed by the word "mistress". The second word [AArabah] which is a spoken Arabic word derived from the standard Arabic word [Sieerah], which means "car", but the translator translated this word to "cart" literally and could not give the intended meaning because this word is culturally bound.

(b) Arabic terms that are not lexicalized in the target language like [Yastameet] and [talamast]. These words can't be represented by using a single word in the TL, but by using a phrase. Yet, this phrase can't convey the implicit meaning of the word.

[yastameet]: trying so hard to do or get sth. (al mu'jam al waseet)

[talamast]: trying many ways to find a solution for example. (al mu'jam al waseet).

(c)English lacks a specific term (hyponym), for example, an Arabic lexical items may have many hyponyms, whereas the English linguistic system doesn't have equivalent lexical items for Arabic hyponyms Abdelaal'& Rashid (2015). Both words [seeneeh] and [saj] are translated to "pan", but they both refer to different tools for cooking.

(d) The TL lacks a superordinate. For example, the word [ṭiflah], which means "female child", is not found as a single unit in the English language.

5.2 Syntactic Loss:

The syntactic loss that occurs in the translating from Arabic to English could be attributed to the syntactic complexity. Al-Jabr, (2006) stated that this complexity occurs in accordance to the inherent linguistic features of the given language(s).

In analyzing the inherent linguistic features of the source language and the target language, the order of sentence in Arabic language is different from the order of sentence in the target language.

In English there is only nominal sentence (Subject+Verb+complement). The type of the complement depends on the verb used in the sentence, but there are verbal and nominal sentences in Arabic language.

Examples:

English:

(1)   Subject + verb + complement.
       John drank the milk.

Arabic:

(1)   Verb + subject + complement
       drank john the milk

Note: The prominent agent is sometimes implicit in the verb (V + complement).

       drank [he] the milk

(2)   Subject + subjective complement
       Ali ṭalb
       Ali student, (Ali (is) a student)

as it can be seen in the above example, the copula (is) doesn't occur in Arabic Nominal sentence.

So, the translator faces a syntactic problem when he translates the story "A glance" and he resorts to adopt the target structure in order to get appropriate grammatical and meaningful translation, and this will lead to syntactic loss. There are some examples from the story to identity the syntactic loss and how the translator fail to maintain the SL structure as a result of syntactic complexity of both languages.

Examples; [wa alqat AAla alkurati wa-alaṯfali nṯhratan ṭaweelatan]

And cast [she] on the ball and the children a glance long]

"as she cast a long glance towards the ball and children"

Looking at the example above, it can be noticed that the translator changes the SL structure (V+S+complement) to the TL structure (sub+V+complement), and that causes a syntactic loss because the translator fails to preserve the writer's intended purpose by using the verbal sentences almost in the whole story. The writer used this verbal structure in this story to emphasize that the role of language is a doer not a describer. Moreover, the adjective "long" follows the noun "glance" in Arabic, whereas it precedes the noun "glance" in English.

Another area, that causes syntactic complexity that lead to syntactic loss in the translation - as Al-Jabr (2006) pointed out - is that while English in general prefers to use long subordinate clauses, Arabic tends to use coordination by using the conjunctions, "namely [wa] (and), [fa] (so), [thuma] (then), and [laakin] (but) Aljabr (1987). The original literal translation of the clausal elements in the second paragraph of the story is as the following:

[I] didn't know what went on inside her head as [I] didn't see her head because the load obscured [her head].<u>and</u> What all happened [she] waited a while to check her grip <u>then</u> [she] left <u>and</u> she was muttering a string of words <u>and</u> none of which my ear picked except one word (mistress).

"I didn't know what went inside her head, obscured as it was by what she carried upon it. She simply waited a moment to checks her grip and then left, muttering a string of words, none of which I caught except the words "my mistress."

In the literal translation of the paragraph, we can see that there are four instances of the coordinators, which are underlined in the paragraph. Furthermore, it is clear that the long Arabic sentences, coordinate and subordinate clauses, tend to be coordinated. These features are lost in the translated text, and the translator tends to use subordinate sentences in order to convey meaningful structure.

5.3   Cultural Loss:

The cultural loss in translation could occur when there are culture – specific idiomatic expressions, or metaphors, which are culturally bound. Nida (1964: 130) points out *"differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure."*

In translating the metaphor or the idiomatic expression in the story from Arabic to English, it can be seen that translation fails to convey the meaning, and the reader in TL cannot get the intended meaning. The following two examples highlight these cultural losses;

a- [rijleha …. kamasmareen rafeeAAeen.]
    her legs ….. two nails   slender.
    her legs ….. like two slender nails

b- [tanshib qadameeha ….. Kamakhalb alkatkoot]
    Clung her feet ….. like the claws the chick.

"as her bare feet clung to the ground like the claws of a chick."

In both examples above, the literal translation of the metaphor, or the idiomatic expression do not convey the intended meaning because they are culturally bound expressions, hence, this may prevent the reader from understanding the true meaning of the context as a whole. Consequently, these issues cause cultural losses in the translation. However; the intended meaning in the both examples is to imply that the girl is so thin and poor.

6. Conclusion

Translation is a very complex process that requires the mastery of at least two linguistics systems. The translator must ensure they are extremely accurate when translating from one language to another, in order to convey and maintain the correct meanings of the original text. However, the translator here adopts some strategies in translating this story. For example; at the semantic level, she uses paraphrasing strategy in order to translate the words that are not

lexicalized in the target language. At the syntactic level, she adopts the TL structure in order to sound meaningful and logical for the TL reader who is not familiar with the SL structure. but at the cultural level, the idioms and the metaphors are literally translated, so that the TL reader could face some difficulties to understand the intended meaning because he is not familiar with SL culture.

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