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TRANSLATION OF *CAPTIVES OF SUPERSTITION STATE* NOVEL FROM CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the strategies adopted in the English translation of the Arabic novel *Captives of Superstition State* (2019) from a Cultural perspective. In translating literary works, especially between Arabic and English which belong to two distant cultures, cultural loss seems to be inevitable. Salih's translation focuses on the transfer of the verbal message of the source text and is mostly concerned with its target reader. In terms of culture, Salih's translation employs many strategies to provide the same equivalent in the receiving culture to maintain the original cultural identity preserved in the source text.

Key Words: *Cultural equivalent; cultural loss; translation strategies*

Objectives

This paper approaches the translation of Salih's novel *Captives of Superstition State* from a cultural perspective. Since this paper deals with the translation of a literary text, it also explores the characteristics of literary text and literary translation within modern translation studies. However, this study also highlights the fact that the notion of equivalence is of much debate among theorists. Some theorists even argue that equivalence does not exist completely in cultural translation.

Research Statement

Literary, translational strategies vary according to the culture-specific expressions in the Arabic language. This paper claims that although Salih's translation succeeds in providing the closest verbal and linguistic equivalents to the Arabic text, it sometimes fails in dealing with many cultural markers in the Arabic culture. Therefore, omission, modification, and literal translation are common strategies in this case study. They are employed to overcome the lack of cultural equivalence in English.

Scope and Methodology

This paper follows both a descriptive and analytical approach to Salih's translation of *Captives of Superstition State*. It presents the cultural turn in translation studies discussing the particularity of the literary text and literary translation. Translation has been a multidisciplinary domain that is communicative in nature since it plays a significant role in transgressing linguistic and cultural boundaries of different systems (Schulte 2). In case of literary translation, the translator provides a textual equivalence that preserves the source

text's linguistic meaning, tone, style and aesthetic effect. Therefore, translation is not a mere transference of syntactic and semantic units. Rather, it involves wider semiotic, linguistic, and extra-linguistic aspects.

Significance of Research

This study approaches the translation of Salih's novel *Captives of Superstition State* from a cultural perspective. Salih's novel depicts the Iraqi scene in the aftermath of the American invasion. Therefore, this paper contributes to the comparative and contrastive studies that deal with the Arabic and English languages as two different linguistic systems. It attempts to enrich the research on the Arabic language and culture, as well as the reception of the Arabic culture in the West.

INTRODUCTION

As put by Hartman, "An understanding of 'text' as manifest communicative discourse is now generally considered the essential prerequisite of any translation theory" (50). Therefore, finding the linguistic equivalent in the target language alone cannot produce an efficient translation. Cultural comprehensiveness of both target and source languages is a requirement in fulfilling a successful literary translation. Translators must break through cultural barriers to render the source language text to its most achievable target text equivalent. In this sense, translation has been recently considered as an act of communication, which involves the transfer of discourse information between languages. It has also been dealt with as an interdisciplinary domain, which entails cultural, social, semantic, and semiotic knowledge. Significantly and consequently, translation is a cultural act (Faiq 2). In this sense, Beaugrande and Dressier explain that machines alone cannot complete the process of translation successfully since they lack the ability to recognize the textual and contextual interrelations. As put by Beaugrande and Dressier:

> Translating entails above all actualizing of language and the traditional linguistic preoccupation with virtually self-contained systems impeded the development of translation theory. This point became dramatically clear when virtual systems were used as the sole basis for machine translation: a computer working only with grammar and lexicon (both virtual systems) was found unable to operate reliably because it could not evaluate context. (190)

Salih's novel constitutes a set of narrative sequences related to its ascending linear sequence, without obtaining that factual moment in time. In addition, as we read the novel, we see the possibility of the narrator entering towards a special textual threshold. At the beginning of the narrative, we face the spatio-temporal shift through highly descriptive glimpses which bring memories of the past within the framework of the present:

> For the first time, I found myself crossing a wide passage ending with a high metallic door with beautiful graphics. Behind it, a huge hall appeared to me that has a teak portal painted with glittery paint. On a corner of the hall's sealing, a small tower and a rusty bell swinging from it, a rope starts from it and goes through the space of the building. (11)

This entry provides us with a simultaneous and divergent vision, (reflection of self / reflected self). The act of reading here relies primarily on the spoken narrative tale and on its set of verbs, perceptions, and narrative. The characters in the text appear without overlap, ambiguity, or exotic narrations. This is due to the theme of the novel itself which talks about the brutal time of bloody events.

The role of the narrator participating in the course of the novel is one of the personal patterns that convey the conditions of the novel's characters and events Isaac the Christian, a professor at the University of Mosul, has become the one who assumes the tasks of telling and conveying the feelings and attitudes of other characters, especially those who belong to members of his family, such as the character of Aunt Dilma, Aunt Miriam, wife Razan, grandfather and grandmother, and even those who are his friends like Walid and Khaled. The personal ego of Isaac, the narrator of Isaac, takes upon itself the most important revelations of photography and transmission of the state of the tongue of other characters through a reference (the narrator/personal ego).

In his *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (1998), Lawrence Venuti criticizes the fact that literary translation research mainly focused on the linguistic approaches that "offer a truncated view of the empirical data they collect" (1). These linguistic-oriented approaches tend to ignore "the fact that translation, like any cultural practice, entails the creative reproduction of values" claiming to be objective or value-free" (1). As such, for Venuti, the process of translation is a cultural act or practice. Generally, the cultural contact between Arabic and English has led, over time, to cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication. Many theorists, such as Joseph B. Casagrande, argue that the notion of culture is essential in the process of translation.

In his essay, "The Ends of Translation," Casagrande argues, "The attitudes and values, the experience and tradition of a people, inevitably become involved in the freight of meaning carried by a language. In effect, one does not translate LANGUAGES, one translates CULTURES" (338). Thus, Casagrande conceives of meaning as necessarily culture oriented. That is, meaning is conditioned by the cultural context in which it is produced. Thus, the linguistic-oriented approaches in literary translation tend to overlook the significance of the socio-cultural context, which necessarily affects both the creation and reception of the literary work in its original culture. Such limitation might lead to the fact that translated texts will not be able to achieve the same significance, which the original works have achieved in their original cultural context.

Therefore, some linguists already acknowledge such limitation of their linguistic-oriented approaches. For example, Otto Frantisek Babler in his essay "Poe's 'Raven' and the Translation of Poetry," published in *The nature of translation: Essays on the theory and practice of literary translation* (1971), claims that

> though we are willing to admit that absolute adequacy on the part of a
> translation is quite impossible, there can be very close approximation in the
> realms of form, phonetic values, and information, but only if the translation
> reflects a high degree of sensitivity to the linguistic elements of the source
> language and the receptor language alike. (195)

As such, the linguistic-oriented approaches do not take into consideration the differences that exist between the source and the target cultures. Therefore, for Nida and Taber, cultural translation is "a translation in which the content of the message is changed to conform to the receptor culture in some way, and/or in which information is introduced which is not linguistically implicit in the original" (199).

It then follows that the translator's task is not simply transferring objective or universal linguistic data or equivalent units from the source text into the target text. Rather, the translator mediates between two cultures (Trosborg 48). Anthony Pym also emphasizes this intercultural role of the translator. In his *Translation and text transfer: An essay on the principles of intercultural communication* (1992), Pym describes translators as intermediary or in-between cultures. He also views culture as a constantly moving and changing entity or "a fact of frontier" (14). That is, it takes place at the intersection of cultures.

Therefore, translation is "substantially conditioned by cultural discrepancies. But cultural diversity is only one side of the coin; the other side comprises the universal

categories of culture" (Sakellario 566). Then, a translator of literary texts has to study as much about literature, in both source and target cultures, as those who translate technical or non-literary texts study science theories (Lefevere 30). Hatim and Mason also underline the cultural aspect of translation. They extend their account to include the individual cultural identity of the translator. In other words, they explain that the difference in the cultural background of translators is one of the most influential factors that leads to variations in translating the same text.

CAPTIVES OF SUPERSTITION STATE FROM A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Many literary translation theorists acknowledge the need to cultural-oriented translation approaches. In their *Between Languages and Cultures and Cross-Cultural Texts* (1995), Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier highlight the cultural turn in translation. They argue that "it seems entirely appropriate that translation theory and practice has, in recent years, turned to both 'source' and 'target' cultures as something to be studied before the translation of a work can proceed" (3). Jeremy Munday also emphasizes the cultural turn in literary translation. In his *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (2013), he argues that this cultural shift is a "move from translation as text to translation as culture and politics" (126). This cultural shift tends to put emphasis on language as necessarily indicative of the cultural context in which it is produced. Nida, in his *Contexts in Translating* (2001), links between culture and language. He argues that language "constitutes the most distinctive feature of a culture, which may be described in a simplistic manner as the totality of the beliefs and practices of a society" (13). Nida's account highlights the fact that the objective of all communication is to transmit a message from the sender to the receiver with the minimum loss of information possible.

Javier Franco Aixelá argues that culture affects both the formation and reception of language. In other words, culture is not static. Rather, it is always changing and developing. This in turn affects everything including language. As Aixelá points out, "the first problem we face in the study of the cultural aspects of translation is how to devise a suitable tool for our analysis, a notion of 'culture-specific item' to define the strictly cultural component as opposed to, say, the linguistic or pragmatic ones" (57). Salih's translation of *Captives of Superstition State* raises syntactic, semantic, and cultural issues that affect both the production and reception of the translated text. *Captives of Superstition State,* which belongs to the postcolonial Iraqi novel, depicts the social, political, and cultural context after the

American invasion to Iraq in 2003. Therefore, it focuses on the oppressive violations of regime as well as the social, political, and cultural transformations in the aftermath of the invasion. The Iraqi cultural identity in Salih's novel is prevalent throughout the novel. Salih uses many vernacular Iraqi expressions that distinguish his text from other dialects in Arab countries:

ومن مقاهيها العامرة بالشاي (السنكين) المعطر بالهال، يتجمهر الأريحيون

من أبنائها على لعب النرد أو الطاولة؛ لتسمع قهقهاتهم البريئة؛ وطرائفهم المعبرة ف

ي كل ضربة (صاي دومنو)، أو (رمية ن رد) يطلقونها بصيغ ملغمة يفهمها الآخر

ويؤولها المار.(12)

In its café's crowded with tea (Al-Sinkeen) scented with cardamom, their expressive jokes in every strike (sai domeno) or (dice cast) saying it in a covert way the other player understands, and the passer-by wonder about. (16)

The Iraqi dialectal expression "السنكين" seems beyond translation by any strategies but domestication and literal translation strategies. This translation is then communicative. For Newmark, 'communicative' translation refers to the translation process that is targeted to communicate the content of the source text so that the target reader does not encounter it as a "foreignized" text. The same analysis applies also on the following excerpt:

وما إن يغادرن تخلفهن بائعات السمك بعطر زنكثه، سعيدات يتنادرن

ويضحكن ويتمازحن مع الزبائن وهن يشققن السمك ويذرن الملح ويناولنه بطيبة:

(بالعافية يمه.) وبسوقها المعقوف وتجاره المرحين، الذين يقتنصون وقت الراحة

بالمزاح على المجانين الأمين السوق، فتتصاعد صيحاتهم من كل جانب لأثارتهم

والضحك معهم: (الله ربك، شكو ماكو، باجة باجة، قوقي وإبراهيم، وأم النومي،

عاشور أبو الكشور، محيسن...) وقائمة كبيرة من مجانين المدينة.(13)

Once they leave, women selling fish with its rancid scent come next. Happy, telling jokes, laughing, and kidding with costumers while slashing and salting fish, then kindly handing it over: "With wellness my child". Its curved market full of cheerful traders, seizing any break to joke about crazy people filling

the market; their cries coming from all directions to provoke them into laughing :(Allah your God, "What's up" "Bajah Bajah" 1 Quqi , Ibrahim, Sa'eda Um Alnomy, Ashour Abu Alkshour, Muhaisn …. (16-17)

Obviously, the translator uses the target language linguistic and cultural equivalents. Therefore, while communicating the source language content, this translation does not render the cultural identity of the source language because of applying strategies of domestication rather than foreignization. foreignization and domestication represent a critical issue in translation theory, since they are related to the translator's perspective of the process of translation, as well as his or her attitude toward the source and target cultures. Schaffner argues that

> The problem for the translator is how to comply with cultural norms . . . The choice of cultural strategy may result in source-culture bound translation (the translation stays within the SL culture), target-culture bound translation (the translation stays within the TL culture) or in a hybrid, where the translation is a product of a compromise between two or more cultures. (329)

> It follows that language, for many theorists, is one of the strongest markers of cultural

identity, or "an essential cultural marker" (Petrovic 7). As put by Falck, "the dialects should . . . be interpreted more broadly as comprehensive measures of local cultural identity" (13). Casagrande comments on the overlapping relationship between language and culture. He argues that:

> Language may be viewed both as a part of culture and as an index to culture. As a learned system of symbolic vocal skills language is a part of the social heritage . . . it is similarly affected by the psychological and sociological processes of culture dynamic. (140)

In this regard, it is important to underline the fact that non-literary texts are much easier to transform from language to language. However, literary texts do not consist of objective facts. Literary texts also utilize various notions that represent challenges to translators, such tone, rhythm, allusions, puns, and metaphors. Wilss addresses this point as follows:

> In literary texts, linguistic form has not only a text-cohesive, but also an aesthetic function, it carries the creative will of the artist, and this lends the literary text an outward appearance, which, in principle, can never be repeated and can therefore be realized in the TL only in analogous form. (76)

However, the translator should compensate for any cultural loss. As Steiner argues, "Translation fails where it does not compensate where there is no restoration of radical equity" (396).

Translating literature has been playing a significant role for all those who cannot read in the original language of literary texts. Therefore, literary translation has helped in the interaction of cultures throughout the world. For Lefevere, translation reflects cultural and, therefore, political, and social aspects. As he puts it, "we are finally beginning to realize that translation deserves to occupy a much more central position in cultural history than the one to which it is currently relegated" (xiv). Susan Bassnett also reinforces the importance of considering the culture of the source text during translation since "language is the heart within the body of culture, so the translator cannot treat the text in isolation from the culture" (14). When translating a literary text, which does not necessarily have an objective correlative in the target language and culture, translation becomes a process of interlingual communication:

هناك صدعت حنجرة مغنٍ على أنغام مزمار ودبكة كردية مختلطة نساءً

ورجالاً بأزيائهم الملونة، وفي ركن منها دبكة غربية على نغم مزمار عربي بزيهم

العربي (151)

There is a throat of a singer throbbed with the melodies of a flute and a Kurdish Dabka of both women and men in their colorful uniforms, and in one of its corners a western Dabka on the tune of an Arab flute in their Arab clothes . . . (151)

The Arabic culture-specific expressions seem beyond translation by any strategies but literal translation and domestication strategies.

Literal translation is clear in rendering the idiomatic and dialectal expressions. Other examples represent neutralizing phrases that are considered idiomatic in the source language and culture. This leads to some loss of the idiomatic character and therefore the cultural and social dimension of the source text. It is also worth pointing out to the use of kunya in the source text which the target text does not have neither the linguistic nor the cultural equivalent. In perception, the target reader is not familiar with addressing names in Arabic:

نظرت بعيني ورأسها يتمايل: '' وعفطتْ القيادي ذلك أعني بل ،أنتَ لستَ

عفطة كبيرة، قيادي في النيك بجدارة، اغتصاب النساء المسكينات المغلوبات على

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أمرهن، أبو جهاد! وأي جهاد هذا الذي يؤديه في ظلم الفقراء وإجحافهم وابتزازهم؟ لا
أتصور مثل هذا الجهاد، يجاهد بقضيبه النساء! هههه أو ماذا! كل ذلك بحجة العقيدة
الدينية، التي يريد تشييدها بالسكين والفساد(170).

> She looked into my eyes, her head swaying "Not you. I mean that leader - she made a funny sound – indeed a worthy leader in sex, raping poor helpless women, Abu Jihad (Struggle), and what kind of Struggle is done in being injustice, unfair and blackmailing the poor. I don't imagine such Struggle, struggling in using his penis with women? Haha or what! All under the pretext of religious belief, which he wants to build with knife and corruption. (218)

The Arabic phrase, 'Abu Jihad', which sounds religious based, has lost much of its cultural weight and the social reference implicitly loaded in it since the source phrase connotes a wide range of different thoughts. Salih's translation successfully renders the communicative message, yet it seriously overlooks, or unable to deliver, the cultural and social implications behind it.

Cultural loss in the previous excerpt is severe since the word "struggle" does not denote or connote the source language word "جهاد". According to translation theorist Almasry, this kind of loss is called cultural "explicit loss" which is divided into two levels: deep loss and surface loss. Obviously, cultural loss is at the "deep" level in the above-mentioned example since "deep" in Almasry's theory means that the target text fails in rendering the equivalent cultural significance and context of the source text. This seems to be because cultural-specific items, such as idioms and proverbs, are situation-based. That is, they must be translated in relation to the cultural context of the source text. As such, when "explicit" loss occurs, linguistic equivalence in the target text tends to be achieved at the expense of the cultural equivalence.

In terms of Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization, discussed before, cultural loss, when found at different levels, leads to the notion of alienation on the level of the target reader. In other words, the target reader may miss the richness of the source text, including much of the cultural information impeded in the source text. The following excerpts provide many examples in which cultural-specific items represent a real challenge in translation:

<div dir="rtl">

وصلن إلى زقاق بيت أبي آمنة، سمعته يصلي ويبتهل إلى الله ويدعو
ويتضرع الى الباري بالرحمة والفرج القريب، طرقت الباب فجاء صوت الشيخ وهو
يا يتمتم باسم الله والصلاة على رسوله وأله وصحبه ، ثم يردفها يا كريم يا ألله يا حافظ
ساتر (196)

</div>

We came to the alley of Abu Amina house, I heard him praying and pleading to God, calling and entreating the Creator for mercy and near ease. I knocked the door, and heard the Sheikh's voice murmuring, in the name of God and prayers may be upon the Messenger, his family and his companions and then added, O Honorable, O God, O Protector, O Coverer (254)

Additionally, translating the cultural expression linguistically will fail to preserve any cultural information. It can only do the communicative function of the text. Therefore, many translators tend to omit such cultural expressions or figurative forms. Salih tends to employ the literal translation strategy to transfer the idiomatic expressions. In other words, Salih often prefers to translate the message, rather than providing a cultural equivalent. Therefore, Salih's literal translation sometimes causes a complete cultural loss since the translation does not provide an agreed-upon verbal sign, nor succeed in transferring the cultural information delivered by the source text.

In short, Salih's translation tends to adhere to the cultural, stylistic, and linguistic norms of the receiving culture. In so doing, this translation depends mostly on neutralizing the cultural information impeded in the source text. As have been analyzed, there are many cultural losses in this translation which have been categorized as explicit, implicit, modified, and complete. The most dominant translation strategies applied are literal translation, functional equivalence, and domestication strategies. As Venuti explains, domestication characterizes a type of translation in which the translator adopts a normative and transparent style to minimize the foreignness or the strangeness of the source text for target-culture readers. In so doing, the aesthetic impact of the target text upon its readers differs greatly from that of the source text upon its readers. It is worth mentioning that this study perceives of the concept of "cultural loss" as a label for the inevitable inequivalent items between two distant cultures, such as Arabic and English.

CONCLUSION

In a spirit full of deep interaction and sincere realism, the novelist Abdel-Ridha Saleh Muhammad completed his novel. This novel is characterized by its broad horizons, the multiplicity of events, and issues that it dealt with. It focuses on a single process in which all visions and concepts are united in a collective national spirit that makes the recipient a participant by weaving the events' formations according to the recipient's intellectual precepts and interaction with the reality of events. In writing his novel, the novelist uses an intimate and warm language that is very close to the language circulated among people of the widest social strata. the events touch its readers' feelings in an interactive, direct, and realistic way.

Salih gives events the color of sobriety and seriousness with a realism that is very close to the real, influential, and vibrant psychological interaction that establishes a coherent cohesion of the human spirit of a sacred entity that is the homeland and true patriotism under the concept of the umbrella of humanity with broad and clear national dimensions that touch the conscience of the largest number of people. The novel can be considered a type of literature aimed at stimulating and reviving human concepts and establishing ties of citizenship with openness and comprehensiveness in which the depth is mature and realistic.

The novelist, despite his identification and overlapping with all the events of the novel, did not slip to play the role of the "knowing narrator" separated from the event. The intellectual content of the novel is this noble intellectual content that aims - as we noted earlier - to consolidate the concept of the national motto of humanity aimed at building a human being who must begin with reconciliation with himself first to be able to be creative.

Translating literature has been playing a significant role for all those who cannot read in the original language of literary texts. Therefore, literary translation has helped in the interaction of cultures throughout the world. This view of language as part and manifestation of culture is central to understanding literary texts, as considered as cultural texts.

As such, the process of translation is immersed in the cultural-linguistic setting of both the translator and the text being translated. Salih mostly adopts literal translation, functional equivalence, and domestication strategies, characterizing his translation as mostly reader-based, which is one of the main characteristics of Newmark's theory of "communicative" translation. Salih's translation is much concerned with providing the communicative and verbal equivalents rather than sticking to the cultural equivalence. One of the main reasons motivating this situation is the fact that the Arabic and English languages

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belong to two distant cultures. Therefore, it is not always simple to find the cultural equivalent which if even can be found, it fails to transfer all the cultural aspects of the source cultural expressions. This is simply because translation is largely affected by socio-cultural norms that are hardly equivalent within different societies.

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