A Moment of Truth in Translating Proper Names in Naguib Mahfouz' Trilogy from Arabic into English

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Abstract

This study tackles the translation of proper names in Naguib Mahfouz's Trilogy from Arabic into English. A masterpiece of three volumes, namely, *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*, was translated by Hutchins and Kenny (1990), Hutchins, Kenny and Kenny (1991), and Hutchins and Saman (1992), respectively. In the English translation of this trilogy, proper names were preserved in a process of transliterating, thus maintaining a foreignized sense of rendition. Such mere strategy constitutes an alternative among a spectrum of many others suggested in the domain of translating proper names, viz., creation, adaptation, addition, omission, among others. Nevertheless, the researcher used four proper names as case studies representative of the inadequacy of merely transliterating proper names in Mahfouz's literary work. Mahfouz imbued his work with an enchanting style that became an emblem of his folkloric locality. Yet this folkloric touch was not faithfully depicted in the English translation mainly due to the linguistic and cultural gaps between the source language and the target one. The analysis of the four names that the researcher purposefully chose represents such loss. A charge of functional equivalence and intended irony was traced thereby. Correspondingly, a backup strategy to compensate this inequivalence between the original work and its English rendition proves to be missing in doing justice to such work.

Key words: Naguib Mahfouz; Literary translation; Foreignization; Domestication; Transliteration

INTRODUCTION

Ever since equivalence was a major bone of contention in the field of translation, proper names stood as a palpable touchstone in tracing an expected loss or gain of meaning per se. Proper names constitute no easy issue for translators who seek an accurate output despite the fact that proper names are generally preserved in their rendition from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL). However, in literary translation a translator cannot but prioritize what the original author of a literary piece chose to be a functional and intentional priority in employing such techniques as proper names in this study.

Jaleniauskiene and Čičelytě (2009, p. 31) stated that "when proper names appear in a literary text, we can evaluate their presence having in mind different aspects: the use of special names, the use of meaningful names, interpretation of names, text function or effect they create, etc." Literature is a miniature of reality where proper names relate to referents with a minimum charge of denotation flexible enough to stretch intentionally in literature to further dense connotative and associative loads of meaning. Nevertheless, some scholars and critics perceived the relationship between a literary name and its bearer as more than merely close and denotative (Bertills, 2003). Not only do literary names hold functional roles but they trigger their reader's schema by activating each reader's personal background, hence allowing the new ideas and interpretations to be set free. Furthermore,

names of literary characters are not devoid of artistic creativity and linguistic innovation. As King suggested,

> Instead of insisting that a name refers to a specific object or concept exclusively, I argue that poetic names contain semiotic spaces that describe, refer to, and voice a kind of deep talk of their own within an encoded text. This deep talk is the interpretive discourse, or utterances, of a poetic name that expresses actions and onomastic intent. It assumes multileveled interpretive roles within literature-roles that pivot upon a name's use as symbolic, metaphoric, metonymic, or allegorical discourse. (Bertills, 2003, p. 181)

1. RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

In this paper the researcher shall explore the roles of proper names purposefully selected from Mahfouz's Trilogy as case studies and the strategies that translators need to activate in rendering such names into the target language per se. Proper names constitute a delicate element in a literary work. In fact characters in literary pieces are functional and aid their readers in their literary appreciation and criticism. They function to the extent of personifying characters of real flesh and blood. Hence, competent translators need to overcome a number of hurdles in swinging between the two extremes of foreignizing or naturalizing the proper names employed in a literary work which itself stands as a mosaic of features portrayed by the original author in the source language. Translators owe such favor to the target language readers especially that the reader's reaction does count from a literary and critical perspective. This matches with Hatim and Mason (1990) who pinpointed that "every reading of a text is a unique unrepeatable act and a text is bound to evoke differing responses in different receivers" (p. 24). Axiomatically true, a literary piece is vulnerable to open-ended readings due to the creativity of its nature and the versatility of the readers' schema.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The researcher decided in this study to elucidate the theoretical frameworks utilized by different scholars and critics in developing compensatory strategies regarding proper names. In fact, no proper mission can be accessible without dwelling on the general dichotomy of treating a text as a whole in a translation process; namely, foreignization and domestication. The terminology of these two poles does vary from one scholar to another; nevertheless, the thematic notions conveyed remain relevant.

When adopting the strategy of domestication, the translator aims to minimize the element of strangeness, rather, he or she yields a smooth and fluent style imbued with closeness to the target language readers. Such endeavor involves a possible loss from the source text. On the other hand, foreignization demands expressing the original authors' text in as faithful style as possible in the target language. The debate of favoring one strategy to the other is an old age with imminent proponents to advocate one strategy more than the other over the passage of time. A distinguished founding figure in this domain, Schleiermacher is worth mentioning. According to him, "either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him, or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him" (Munday, 2001, p. 145). Schleiermacher opted for the strategy of moving the reader toward the writer, thus retaining a sense of "alienating" (as opposed to naturalizing) the translator.

Venuti (1995) capitalized microscopically on the previous taxonomy. He perceived domestication as the dominating strategy in the Anglo-American translation culture entailing a limitation of the foreign language text. Consequently, it is TL-culture oriented. On the other hand, Venuti (1995, p. 20) pointed out that a foreignization method is an "ethnodeviant pressure on [target-language cultural] values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad."

Mespoulet (2009) reckoned that both domestication and foreignization are significant concepts and valid alternatives in enhancing a translator's approach in bridging any linguistic or cultural gaps. He considers foreignization as a transcending of a cultural transfer whereas domestication opts to be the very opposite of such transcendence. However, he highlighted the sensitivity of not being judgmental in blindly choosing one extreme rather than the other. For Mespoulet, translators in practice should vary their style according to different text types, readers' reception levels and purpose of the original text.

Though translation studies have now become evidently of age and gained momentum in all ramifications of equivalence between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) involved in the process of translation, there remain some unsaturated answers in the field including some core assumptions relating to the translation of names. Hence, this study is to shed light on proper names as innovative pointers to the discrepancy between the original and its translation. Though no fully-fledged approach or ready-made strategies are prescribed a priori in this study, a starting point is to unveil previous considerations and criticisms that fall under the ambit of such topic by scholars such as Nida (1969), Newmark (1988), Munday (2001), Dickins, Hervy and Higgins (2002), Bertills (2003), Kalashnikov (2006), (2009), Jaleniauskiené and Čičelytě (2009), Standowiez (2009), Ghadi (2010), and Pour (2010).

Though proper names constitute a translation difficulty in any given text (Newmark, 1988), names of literary characters are crucial elements on the micro-level of the text significantly related to the overall function of the narrative (Bertills, 2003). Bertills (2003, p. 2) points out that "as much as the social and cultural stamp, the specifics of literary names bear the marks of the creativity

of the author as well as language. The author's ability or wish to be creative with social and cultural conventions is as significant as his or her command of the language".

Nida (1969) depicted in his preface a translator of a text dealing with significant cultural differences just like a juggler who tosses and catches a set of items simultaneously. Thus, he or she ought to address a set of priorities some of which are: 1) contextual consistency over purely verbal consistency 2) dynamic equivalence over formal correspondence. This notion corresponds well with Munday (2001) who stressed the very depiction of proper names as culturally sensitive items; yet no fixed overall translation strategy is to be prescribed in rendering them as safe and sound. Munday elucidated this through selectively comparing proper names from Harry Potter, the world-wide famous children literature. Names are related there to the school of magic and sorcery holding cultural suggestive tones. Munday pushed his argument further via a comparative perspective between two target translations, namely, the Spanish and the Italian. The former retained the original names in the translation though selected footnotes were occasionally injected for names like Darco Malfoy. Nevertheless, in the Italian version, other factors were invested to maintain the original spirit of the literary work with the strategy of rendering the sense of names more than the original especially in cases that stand difficult for the target audience to pronounce or deal with.

Kalashnikov (2006) conducted a study relating to the translation of charactonyms from English into Russian. He conceived names carrying a characterizing function that he called "charactonyms" or "significant names" undertranslated in many outstanding literary pieces yielding accordingly less of a faithful translation. According to Kalashnikov, a name that transcends its nominal load ought to be imbued with all injected expressive and stylistic shades of meaning. Moreover, he depicts a charactonym flexible enough to carry a spectrum of meanings in the same book relevant to a semantic continuum that constitutes an insurmountable challenge for translators.

Standowicz (2009) studied the Polish translation of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone in regards to the translation of proper names. A number of techniques were clearly utilized in the translation of the proper names. The most prominent of such strategies is enclosing a glossary at the end of the novel where exotic names were explained. Standowicz reiterated the fact that in a growing globalization the need for domestication is less appreciated and agonized over as a strategy of compensation.

Jaleniauskiene and Čičelytě (2009) and Ghadi (2010) illustrated that proper names in real life appear as labels referring to persons. However, they are not non-informative as they indicate more than the racial, ethnic, national, and religious identity. Hence, translators should not suffice with linguistic competence but should approach a cultural education. Moreover, a translator is to validate his or her target audience and consider its age in the midst of the translation process. In their empirical research, Jaleniauskiene and Čičelytě traced the following seven compensation strategies in rendering proper names in certain fantasy literature: preservation, addition, omission, globalization, localization, transformation, and creation.

3. THEORETICAL EVIDENCE

The Cairo Trilogy by Mahfouz is an epic masterpiece representing a slice of the Egyptian society life (1917-1944). This long family saga falls into three volumes: *Palace Walk, Palace of Desire and Sugar Street*. These three volumes were translated into English as follows: Palace Walk (1990) by Hutchins and Kenny; Palace of Desire (1991) by Hutchins, Kenny, and Kenny; and Sugar Street (1992) by Hutchins and Samaan.

The novel tackles a Muslim Egyptian family in Cairo during the British colonization in the early years of the twentieth century. The novel mirrors the everyday life of three generations parallel in their microscopic evolution to the macroscopic national turbulences crossing Egypt itself. The nucleus of the saga revolves around the tyrannical patriarch, al Sayyid Ahmad Abd al Jawwad, his obedient wife, Amina, his children (Yasin, Fahmi, Kamal, Khadija and Aisha) and his grandchildren.

Translating any literary masterpiece written by Mahfouz, the pinnacle of the Egyptian literature, manipulates paying heed to all tactics induced by such creative artist. He actually excels in his trilogy by sagaciously adhering to his unique hallmark of creative and elegant style. He demonstrates all interwoven dimensions that render the locality of this Cairene ambience. To achieve such mission, Mahfouz utilizes all elements to aid his readership in deciphering the fulfillment of his realism. With the unfolding of the accumulative events, a reader becomes certain of Mahfouz's intentionality in weaving such elements, one of which is proper names.

Proper names are in their modest definition labels tagged to characters personifying the roles of real flesh and blood. Such choice cannot be void of creativity and most importantly intentionality, both of which peculiarly distinguishing Mahfouz in enticing a framework of proper names. Not only did Mahfouz grant his characters names that comply with the boundaries of time and place to give his novel an authentic aura of locality transcending any reader to Egypt at a certain era, but he had his artistic style in doing so. For such a novelist proper names were mainly activated for two main reasons: an ironic juxtaposition of what a character actually holds in a certain piece of work for the reader to decipher on the one

hand or an embodiment of what a character represents all through. This research gives illustrative examples of both purposeful uses.

The first name that sets a successful example in such regards is that of al Sayyid Ahmad Abd al Jawwad. The first part of this name is actually a title that holds more than one interpretation through a careful reading. Its direct correspondence in modern English is sir or master. Yet this English title does little justice to the Arabic one though it carries the social Cairene rank of respectfulness for the character of an upper middle-class merchant depicted in the novel. Another significant sense lost in the translation relates to a cultural and religious dimension. Judy (2007) pointed out that such title is an extension of an honorific attachment to the names of Muslim saints. This religious thread can be construed in the novel that uplifts al Sayyid Abd al Jawwad to the rank of a demigod in full authority and domination of his family affairs. Hence, the mere preservation of the Arabic title did little justice to the cultural, religious and social loads of such title. The first name itself, Ahmad, is a Muslim name that carries a highly emotive and religious connotation. This depiction matches the external trait of piety that the character claims. He performs all required prayers in Islam and takes his sons to the mosque every Friday. His appearance of a strict believer is thus manifested in rituals and familial conservatism. Nevertheless, he is an emblem of juxtaposition due to his double standard life; at home he presumes to be a sanctimonious patriarch who dominates severely his family members while outside his house he is a hedonistic philanderer. Wine and women are the apex of his daily agenda; hence, his name stands as paradoxical and ironic due to such mundane hypocrisy. The last part of this character's name is al Jawwad which literally means generous in English. Indeed, the generosity depiction of this character is traced in the novel not only in his neighborhood where he lives but more evidently in the parties that he throws entertaining his fun loving friends.

Another example that holds an ironic dosage of meaning is in the name Kamal. The name Kamal means literally perfection in English. Thus, for a first hand impression in introducing this character, a reader can expect a reflection of ultimate truism and absolute positivism. In fact, Kamal starts his quest as a bookish youngest son and a religious devout. He soon grows up to encounter the truth of his hedonistic big brother Yasin who unfolds some shocking facts about their oppressing father who himself happens to be a womanizer and wine partaker. Thus, he delves into a crisis of skepticism and raises new conceptual and ideological questions that trigger his awareness. He occupies long soliloquies seeking safe shores for his free thinking though daring far enough to delve restlessly into a rapidly changing structure that he struggles with. All in all, Kamal as a name becomes an ironic emblem of the character's true essence of immaturity and imperfection.

The third proper name tackled in this study is Amina, the central matriarchal figure in the trilogy. Her name literally means faithful. As a matter of fact, the name corresponds mostly to the name fidelity in English as this character reflects the extreme degree of loyalty towards her husband, children and grandchildren. She dwells in the realm of piety and devotion. She got married at the age of fourteen and grew up consciously aware of serving her husband al Sayyid Ahmad. She obeyed his orders and had no objection to his words. On the other hand if there were any family issues to be discussed and decided by the father she was the channel to safely render the issue and get it finalized with. As for her legitimate right to have a social life, she barely had any outside the walls of her house. Wanting to visit her mother was only through her husband escorting her. Looking outside her house was forbidden for her as well as for her daughters except through the openings of the cage of latticework on the balcony. Even when she increasingly gains some new freedom with the development of the trilogy to visit either her married daughters or the mosque, she remains faithful and subservient to her husband and maintains strong familial bonds with her family members. Hence, it becomes crystal clear that the character's name matches perfectly the portrait she assumes in this literary work.

The fourth name to be discussed is Khadija, the eldest daughter. She was twenty years old with some saliently physical disharmonious features that she inherited from her parents. She had a strong personality which aided her adopting a sarcastic attitude towards her three brothers who kept teasing her all the time. She also reflected a rivalry relationship with her younger sister, Aisha who was more attractive than her. Her name rings a bell for an Arab and Muslim reader for its religious connotation and emotiveness as it was the name of Prophet Mohammad's first wife. However, from a deeper linguistic perspective the name holds proper psychological and physical associations that match Khadija's appearance and inner personality. Linguistically speaking, the name Khadija means imperfect and lame in Arabic. Hence, the meaning convincingly matches a good deal of the bearer's intrinsic and extrinsic traits. In other words, the name becomes symbolic in revealing the bearer's character all through the Trilogy.

After unfolding the previous four proper names, it becomes evident how much pivotal the role they play in insinuating certain purposeful loads of meaning in the genre of literary translation. A reader who tackles any masterpiece written by Naguib Mahfouz finds himself dwelling in the locality of Egypt and inhaling the spiritual aura of all places portrayed by this author. It becomes axiomatic that all injected ingredients are woven to flow within the same destination of an Egyptian realism at

that intended epoch. To narrow down the analysis in this paper, certain issues should be stressed; the element of proper names is of no triviality; on the contrary, it renders two main tones in this masterpiece, namely, an ironic juxtaposition of what a character holds in its name or an embodiment of what it stands for all through. The former is represented in the names al Sayyid Abd al Jawwad (the allegedly devout and firm gentleman who proves to be a womanizer and a wine partaker) and his son Kamal (the flipping ardent seeker of absolute virtues and skeptical dreamer of another tomorrow to come). The latter is depicted in the names Amina (the true believer in Allah and the dweller in a spiritual realm of honesty and fidelity) and Khadija (the lady lacking natural beauty but exposing a strong personality of tongue lashing).

CONCLUSION

Based on the above mentioned analysis, a careful reader can sense the signification of proper names from a literary and critical perspective. They are not merely symbols attached to their bearers; rather they solidify the linguistic and cultural threshold of embarking a sound literary criticism. Nevertheless, a translator finds himself hanging between the two horns of a dilemma in rendering them, namely, foreignizing these proper names or monitoring them in terms of domestication. There is no readymade formula to suggest a certain strategy for any literary genre but a translator's discretion in rendering the utmost load of meaning is what does justice in such domain. The four names chosen in this paper are exemplary of keeping the original names utilized in the original target text; thus a sense of foreignizing these names was kept but it could never suffice a successful rendition due to the loss of other loads of meaning. A foreign reader might struggle with the strangeness of these names but only by chance can he or she grasp their intended and associated layers of meaning. The translators of the Trilogy used the strategy of transliterating its proper names in an attempt of being faithful to it while they should have elevated their rendition with further techniques as suggested by different scholars. The researcher suggested some valid techniques pinpointed in this regards as footnoting or providing a glossary of proper names to enhance a better sense of literary appreciation.

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