Onomatopoeic Problems in Translating Conrad's *The Lagoon* into Arabic

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Abstract: *This study aims at investigating problems of translating onomatopoeic expressions as encountered in translating Conrad's short story The Lagoon from English into Arabic. It combines the practical side with the theoretical one. After translating the short story from English into Arabic, the study investigates this problematic area theoretically and then discusses the strategies used in dealing with it. Finally, it concludes that onomatopoeia is not used haphazardly; it is used functionally and it also constitutes a challenge for the translator. It is recommended that more research should be conducted on this issue.*

1. Introduction

According to Nida and Taber (1988:12), "translation consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style." Nida (cited in Shunnaq: 2008) adds that "translation is both discouraging and challenging: discouraging because there are no simple rules to follow and no way to know in advance if the solution is completely correct and acceptable; it is also challenging because it is excitingly creative". Hence, we are dealing with translation in the sense of 'approximation' rather than complete equivalence.

Translation is considered to be a form of authorship, which is redefined as a derivative, not self-originating one (Venuti, 1998). He also considers it a form of scholarship since both translation and scholarship rely on historical research in representing archaic or foreign texts. But neither translation nor scholarship can produce a completely adequate representation of the author's intentions.

Of all other types, literary translation may be considered the most difficult type of translation. In addition to all types of translation problems posed by different kinds of texts, literary texts add their own to the pile. They contain a plethora of figurative language, rhetorical devices and unusual or complex structures which make translation an adventure that may result in success, or, in many cases, frustration. This being the case, many translators would abstain from translating literary texts, especially when it comes to poetry, being the one most difficult to translate among all types of literary texts.

What distinguishes literary texts from other types of texts is being more important in their mental and imaginative connotations than their factual denotations. Newmark (1988: 16) gives a theoretical distinction between literary and non-literary texts. "In a non-literary text the denotations of a word normally

come before its connotations. But in a literary text, you have to give precedence to its connotations, since, if it is any good, it is an allegory, a comment on society."

When it comes to literary translation, both difficulty and creativity are maximized, and it is considered a literary work in its own right. The problem is that, unlike some other types of texts such as scientific texts, if the translation is not a good literary work, it may not be accepted by the audience. Furthermore, literary texts differ from each other. For example, the distinction between the short story and the novel lies in the formal and thematic concentration and unity of the short story. Newmark (ibid) adds that the short story is the second most difficult literary form for translation, poetry translation being the first, and that the more language resources (e.g. sound-effect) there are in a text, the more difficult it is to translate, but also the more worthwhile.

This emphasizes the creative aspect of translation and requires the short-story translator to read the story several times in depth and analyze it to be able to understand its intention and the way it was written, and to decode the intensive meanings in it. Shunnaq (1992: 10) emphasizes this: "The duty of the text analyst translator is to know how to reconstruct the meaning of the source language text and how to convey it to the reader." This time-consuming type of translation which requires a lot of creativity, patience and effort is, in many cases, avoided by translators. If not overcome, different translation problems encountered by short-story translators may cause their translations to lack any comparative literary value that reflects the original text, or even to distort its message.

1.1. Theoretical Background

Short stories abound with translation problems. They are always a challenge for translators since, in many cases; one does not necessarily have one-to-one correspondence, if any at all, in the TL. Ghazala (2004:117-119) highlights the role of sound effects such as onomatopoeia which he defines as: "conformity of sound to meaning":

> It is unfair to ignore sounds which can sometimes have an interesting role to play in meaning. They have a more direct than indirect effect on the message. Usually such effect is implied, and the translator is responsible for including it and taking it into consideration in translation.

As its Greek root suggests, onomatopoeia is the making (poiein) of a name (onoma). It is the formation of a word by imitating the natural sounds associated with the object or action involved (Webster's, 1997).

Cruse (2006:16) defines onomatopoeic words as: "words whose sounds either imitate the sounds to which they refer (boom, thud, ping, screech, etc.) or imitate the sounds made by their referents (cuckoo, hoopoe, etc.)." He (1986:34) puts into focus the semantic value of some phonetic sequences:"

> There are some phonetic sequences which seem to have semantic value of a sort, yet they do not correspond to grammatical elements: there seems to be a direct pathway from sound to meaning, bypassing grammar.

Hervey and Higgins (2002:81) touch upon an important aspect of the problem.

> There will virtually always be some phonic translation loss. …. It can be more significant if, as often happens, the source text (ST) onomatopoeic word does not have a one-to-one target text (TT) counterpart.

Roberts (1988) talks about literary imagery and its function in evoking sense impressions. As visual images are the most significant, since sight is the most important of our senses, olfactory images (images referring to smell), gustatory images (images referring to taste), tactile images (images referring to touch) and auditory images (images referring to sound) are frequent. Roberts gives an example from Wilfred Owen's poem "Anthem for Doomed Youth", which is about needless death in war. The only sound for those who have fallen in battle, Owen points out, is the "rapid rattle of shuttering rifles",i.e. the horrifying noises of war. These auditory images evoke corresponding sounds in our imaginations and help us experience the poem and hate the uncivilized depravity of war. Al-Hassan (2001) emphasizes the extreme difficulty of translating these auditory images that a speaker may choose as an aesthetic device in his speech.

Ullman (1972:83) elucidates "sound motivation" or onomatopoeia. He maintains that this device is as old as poetry, giving an example from the Odyssey. He points out:

> In the use of onomatopoeia as a stylistic device, the effect is based not so much on individual words as on a judicious combination and modulation of sound values, which may be reinforced by such factors as alliteration, rhythm, assonance and rhyme. These words, he proceeds, are a great challenge to the translator.

Ullman distinguishes two types of onomatopoeia: primary and secondary. In primary onomatopoeia, the sound is an echo to the sense. The phonetic structure of the word more or less closely imitates the referent which itself is an acoustic experience. Therefore, it is an imitation of sound by sound. Examples of primary onomatopoeia are: crack, roar, buzz, hum and whizz. In secondary onomatopoeia, the sounds suggest a movement (dodder, dither, quiver, slouch, wriggle), or a physical or moral quality, usually unfavourable (sluggish, sloppy, gloom, grumpy, sloth) (ibid.).

He adds that onomatopoeic words often work by vowel alternation. Different noises can be expressed by substituting one vowel for another. In primary onomatopoeia, one may consider: sniff–snuff, flip–flap, snip–snap; in secondary onomatopoeia: gleam–gloom.

Bloomfield (1933) pushes the discussion a step further. He states that the intense, symbolic connotation of these terms is associated with a system of initial and final root-forming morphemes of vague signification. For example, [fl-] signifies 'moving light' as in: flash, flame, flare and flicker, or movement in the air as in: fly, flap and flit; [kr-] signifies 'noisy impact' as in: crash, crack and crunch; [gl-] signifies unmoving light as in: glow, glare and gloat; and [-awns] signifies 'quick movement' as in: bounce, jounce, pounce and trounce. This system, Bloomfield adds, can be distinguished with varying degrees of clearness

and with doubtful cases on the border-line. This, of course, makes the process of translation an extremely challenging one.

Onomatopoeic terms would be expected to be similar in different languages, and this is, indeed, the case in many occasions. Different people are expected to render the same sound or noise they hear similarly. However, it has to be borne in mind that different languages have conventionalized many of these onomatopoeic forms in different ways. While the crow of the cock, for example, is transcribed by the Englishman as cock-a-doodle-do, the Frenchman transcribes it as cocorico, and the German as kikeriki.

Onomatopoeic expressions should be reflected, as much as possible, in the TL text. Not only they add to the emotiveness and the aesthetic aura of the text, but they also provide a different and more effective way of expressing meaning creating a physical world for the audience.

1.2. Statement of the problem
In literary translation in general and in short story translation in particular, translators face problems translating onomatopoeia. This study attempts to explore this problem to show how challenging it can be.

1.3. Purpose of the study
The purpose of this study is to (a) explore a main problem in translation, namely, onomatopoeia which short-story translators encounter, and (b) discuss strategies used in translating this problem. Being an empirical study that combines practical translation and research, the study is hoped to shed more light, in practical terms, on this problematic area.

1.4. Significance of the study
This study derives its significance from the fact that Arabic and English are linguistically and culturally remote languages. Therefore, problems in translating onomatopoeia are expected to be of interest for students and researchers in the fields of contrastive linguistics and translation. Further, exploring this problem and discussing strategies used in dealing with it is hoped to be helpful to translators and researchers.

1.5. Limitations of the study
Due to the practical nature of this research which involved translating a short story from English into Arabic in addition to discussing the translation problem of onomatopoeia, the study was limited to primary onomatopoeia.

2. Method
The study starts with translating Conrad's *The Lagoon* from English into Arabic. Upon finishing the translation, the data was collected by tracing onomatopoeic terms in the English source text (ST) and their translations in the Arabic target text (TT). Onomatopoeic terms have been analyzed and then the Arabic terms have been compared and contrasted with the English ones and then classified

into: onomatopoeic forms which maintain relatively similar sounds when translated into the TT; those which have almost different sounds when translated into the TT; those which may be translated into more than one TT form depending on the context and the category includes different ST onomatopoeic forms which are translated into the same TT form.

3. Review of Related Literature
Being a universal phenomenon, onomatopoeia has attracted the attention of researchers in different languages. However, it was difficult for the present researchers to find studies dealing with onomatopoeic terms between Arabic and English, especially when it comes to translating them from English into Arabic.
An enlightening study on translating onomatopoeia from Arabic into English was conducted by Shunnaq and Al-Thebian (2003) in which they examine the translation of onomatopoeia in Edward Al-Kharrat's *Turabuha Za'faran* into English. In their detailed study, the researchers analyze some Arabic onomatopoeic terms such as: يَقرْقَع and قرقعة ، يجلجل ، اصطفاق While some of these terms indicate sound, others indicate sound and movement. Moreover, they shed light on the significance of the repetition of some sounds in an onomatopoeic term and their impact upon the reader. Then, the researchers compare and contrast these terms with their English translations. They found out that some of the English terms convey neither the semantic nor the functional value of their Arabic counterparts. Further, some other English terms, at their best, reflect some but not all the semantic domains of the Arabic terms. They conclude by emphasizing the functional use of onomatopoeic terms which are not always adequately rendered into English. They attribute that to different reasons among which are the different phonological systems of Arabic and English.

Inose (2007) conducted an interesting study in which he identifies the methods used in translating Japanese onomatopoeia and mimetic words in literature into Spanish and English. Almost 300 cases have been extracted From the novel *'Sputnik No Koibito'* by Haruki Murakami, which is used as the data source, and nine methods (using adverbs, adjectives, verbs, nouns, idioms, onomatopoeia in the TL, explicative phrases, combinations of words and omission) have been identified. Each method is analyzed with some examples showing its effectiveness in transmitting the meaning of the original expressions. The study concludes that the difficulty lies in understanding profoundly the meaning of each onomatopoeic and mimetic expression, being able to 'decompose' it into various elements and translating each of them into the TL. When there is no equivalent word in the TL, the study adds, translators should consider using other resources, such as explicative paraphrases or combination of various words. Yet, this has the risk of making the translated phrase too redundant, or imposing the translator's interpretation on the readers.

Tsoi & Chung (2004) have conducted another study investigating the characteristics of onomatopoeia. They conclude that onomatopoeic expressions belong to a distinct class of words. They are found in every language and due to

their imitative nature, onomatopoeic terms for the same sound in different languages often share some universal characteristics. Yet, they are influenced or restricted by the different phonological systems, leading to discrepancies between them.

4. Findings and Discussion
In this section, findings and discussions of the present study are furnished. Tables and examples which illustrate the main points of arguments and discussions are provided.

4.1. Findings
In the source text (The Lagoon), the researchers have traced onomatopoeic forms. Different onomatopoeic forms with a total recurrence of (22) times have been found. These forms are listed in table (1) below:

Table (1): Onomatopoeic forms in ST and their translations in TT

ST	TT
Grunted	
Splash	
Murmur	خرير
Gurgled	
Rattling	
Murmurs	
Muttered	
Ringing	
Murmur	
Murmur	
Murmuring	
Murmur	
Rang	
Murmur	
Humming	طنين
Splash	
Hiss	هسهسة
Splash	
Ringing	
Rattled	
Murmured	
Murmur	

These onomatopoeic forms may be classified into the following categories:

4.1.1. ST onomatopoeic forms which maintain relatively similar sounds when translated into the TT

These forms are listed in Table (2) below.

Table (2): ST onomatopoeic forms which maintain relatively similar sounds in the TT

ST	TT
Ringing	
Hiss	هسهسة

4.1.2. ST onomatopoeic forms which have almost different sounds when translated into the TT

These forms are listed in Table (3) below.

Table (3): ST onomatopoeic forms which have almost different sounds when translated into the TT.

ST	TT
Humming	ين
Rattle	

4.1.3. ST onomatopoeic forms which are translated into more than one TT form depending on the context

These forms are listed in Table (4).

Table (4): ST onomatopoeic forms which are translated into more than one TT form depending on the context

ST	TT
Humming	طنين
Humming	تهمهم
Rattle	
Rattled	
Murmur	خرير
Murmur	

4.1. 4. Two different ST onomatopoeic forms which are translated into the same TT onomatopoeic form

These forms are listed in Table (5).

Table (5): Two different ST onomatopoeic forms translated into the same TT onomatopoeic form.

No.	ST	TT
1 .	Rattle	
2.	Jingling	

It is important to note that some of these onomatopoeic terms are on the border-line and, therefore, do not fall in any of these categories. They are difficult to classify since they could be looked at from different perspectives. Examples of such terms are: *'muttered'* and *'gurgled'*.   These cases will be elaborated in the discussion section.

4.2. Discussion

As it is shown above, onomatopoeic forms are classified into the following categories:

4.2.1. ST onomatopoeic forms which maintain relatively similar sounds when translated into the TT (these forms are listed in Table 2 above)

These expressions may seem not to pose any problems for the translator; therefore, one would assume that the ST onomatopoeic forms and their TT counterparts are close equivalents. Considering an example like *ring* and its Arabic counterpart يرنّ shows that, to a certain extent, this may be true; they have a close similarity of sounds. Yet, other examples, though showing a close similarity of sound, have some important differences to be considered. The word *hiss*, for instance, and its Arabic counterpart هَسْهَسة are not as similar as they may seem to be. To illustrate this point further, consider the following example:

> There was no braver or stronger man in our country than my brother. I could not spare the strength to turn my head and look at him, but every moment I heard the hiss of his breath getting louder behind me. Still he did not speak.

> لم يكن في بلدنا رجل أشجع ولا أقوى من أخي. لم أستطع أن أستجمع القوة لأدير رأسي وأنظر إليه، ولكني كنت في كل لحظة أسمع هسهسة نَفَسِه تعلو خلفي، ومع ذلك لم يتكلم.

According to Webster's (1997), the word *hiss* means: to make a sound like that of a prolonged 's', as of a goose or snake when provoked or alarmed, or of escaping steam, air, etc. The word هسهسة is defined by Abadi in Alq m s Almo   (1994) as: كُلُّ ما لهُ صَوْتٌ خَفيٌّ (anything that has a muted sound), and الهَمْس، أو الكلام الخفيّ الذي لايُفهم according to Almo jam Alwas   (1985), it means: (whisper, or muted unintelligible speech). *Hiss* and هسهسة show a relative similarity of meaning and a close similarity of sound: they share the sounds /h/ and /s/. However, it is unavoidable to notice that هسهسة is alliterative: the consonants /h/ and /s/ are repeated. This combination of onomatopoeia and alliteration adds to the expressiveness of the word and its impact upon the reader. It appeals more to the senses, gives more depth to the text and intensifies the auditory image. Since the ST term is not alliterative, the TT term may be considered an over translation. Many other Arabic onomatopoeic forms such as (جلجل ، همهم، غرغر، رشرش، تمتَمَ، غمغمَ) show the same phenomenon; they are alliterative. It is, therefore, axiomatic that maintaining similar sounds of ST onomatopoeic forms in their TT counterparts does not necessarily guarantee a similar impact upon the audience, a function that may be considered the translator's ultimate goal in literary texts.

4.2.2. ST onomatopoeic forms which have almost different sounds when translated into the TT (These forms are listed in Table 3 above).
ST onomatopoeic forms in this category have TT counterparts which have almost different sounds. The word *Humming*, for instance, means, among other meanings, طنين according to Al-Mawrid (1992). To illustrate this point further, consider the following example:

We left, paddling downstream close to the bank; and as we passed by the creek where they were fishing, the great shouting had ceased, but the murmur of voices was loud like the humming of insects flying at noonday.

غادرنا متجهين إلى أسفل النهر ونحن نجدف بجانب الضفة، وعندما مررنا بالجدول الذي كانوا يصطادون السمك فيه، كان الصراخ العظيم قد توقف، ولكن غمغمة الأصوات كانت كطنين الحشرات وهي تطير وقت الظهير .

The difference in sounds between the English word *humming* and its Arabic counterpart طنين does not necessarily mean that they refer to different sounds. Both refer to the same sound, but, as it has been mentioned, different languages have conventionalized many of these onomatopoeic forms in different ways. Yet, the significance of individual sounds should be taken into consideration. Some sounds or groups of sounds, as mentioned by Al-Hassan (2001), give a feeling of verbal complication, while others carry soft music and give a feeling of delight.

As mentioned earlier, some onomatopoeic forms suggest a movement, or a physical or moral quality. It can be noticed that some of them may indicate both sound and movement. In Webster's (1997), the word *rattle*, for example, means: *to make a series of sharp, short sounds in quick succession*, and *to go or move with such sounds*. Similarly, the word جلجلة, according to Alqᵐ s Almo   (1994), indicates: التحريك وشدة الصوت (movement and fierce sound). Therefore, the aspect of movement in *rattle* is covered in جلجلة, but the sounds are different. Moreover, the fact that جلجلة is also alliterative cannot be overlooked. It combines alliteration with sound and movement. Undoubtedly, this rich word adds a lot to the expressive, emotive and aesthetic aspects of the text.

4.2.3. ST onomatopoeic forms which are translated into more than one TT form depending on the context (These forms are listed in Table 4 above).
Different contexts may cause the same onomatopoeic form to be rendered differently. Moreover, idiomatic language or collocations may restrict our choice to one term or another. This can be illustrated in the translation of *murmur* in two different contexts:

The churned-up water frothed alongside with a confused murmur.

كان الماء الممخوض على جانبي الزَّورق يعلوه الزبد وله خريرٌ مشوَّش.

The meaning of *murmur* in the second context is shown below:

A plaintive murmur rose in the night; a murmur saddening and startling, as if the great solitudes of surrounding woods had tried to whisper into his ear the wisdom of their immense and lofty

indifference. Sounds hesitating and vague floated in the air round him, shaped themselves slowly into words; and at last flowed on gently in a murmuring stream of soft and monotonous sentences.

ـ وعلا في الليل صوتُ غمغمةٍ كئيبةٍ.
المحيطة العظيمة حاولت أن تهمس في أذنه حكمة عَدم اكتراثها المتشامخ الهائل.
أصواتٌ غامضةٌ مترددةٌ في الهواء من حوله، وشكّلت نفْسَها ببطء على شكل كلمات،
وأخيراً تدفقت بلطفٍ جدولَ غمغمات من الجمل اللطيفة الرتيبة.

In the first example, *murmur* is translated as خرير since it refers to the sound of water which, in this context and in most of its contexts, is translated as خرير. In the second example, however, *murmur* is translated as غمغمة since it refers to a murmur of a human being. Other examples are *rattle*, which is rendered as جلجلة and خشخشَ , and *humming* as طنين and تهمهم in different contexts.

4.2.4. Two different ST onomatopoeic forms which are translated into the same TT onomatopoeic form (These forms are listed in Table 5 above).

Here, the direction is the opposite of that of the previous category. The two different ST forms *rattle* and *jingle* would be translated into the same TT form جلجلة .

It is important to note that some of these onomatopoeic terms are on the borderline and therefore do not fall in any of these categories. One of these cases is the term *muttered on*. The Arabic translation تمتم has the consonants /t/ and /m/ in common. However, they are in a reverse order. Hence, for the hearer, they may seem not so similar. Another case is the term *'gurgled'*. Its Arabic translation غَرْغَر shares only the consonant /r/. Yet, for the hearer, they may seem relatively similar because, phonetically, the sounds /g/ and / / are close in the point of articulation.

5. Conclusions and recommendations
Below are some conclusions and recommendations of the present study.

5.1. Conclusions
The following points are concluded based on the present study:
1. This study agrees with other studies on the same topic that, generally speaking, especially in literary works, onomatopoeic terms are used functionally. They add a lot to the aesthetic aura of the text and intensify the mental image for the audience. They bring the text to life especially when they are combined with other aesthetic or stylistic devices such as alliteration. Therefore, they should be given utmost attention in translation.
2. These onomatopoeic terms are not always close imitations of the actual sounds they refer to. This may be attributed to the limitations of the phonological system and the vocal tract of human beings.
3. The same sound may be referred to in different languages by different onomatopoeic terms. It goes without saying that different languages have different phonological systems. Moreover, languages have conventionalized these terms differently; therefore these differences are likely to occur.
4. Onomatopoeic terms may indicate sound, or combine sound and/or movement with stylistic devices such as alliteration. This combination makes

translating these terms a great challenge. On the one hand, the TT term may not cover all semantic domains of the ST term which may be considered under translation. On the other hand, the TT term may cover more semantic domains than the ST term does resulting in what may be considered over translation.

5.2. Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

1. Due to the dearth of studies on the translation of onomatopoeic expressions between Arabic and English, as it has been observed in this study, more research is needed on the nature of these expressions and their translation between Arabic and English, especially in literary texts.

2. Translators should give onomatopoeic expressions due attention since they are used functionally.

3. Translation programs should include courses covering theoretical and practical studies and training on translatability of onomatopoeia because it is sadly neglected in current course plans of these programs.

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