

## The Relevance of Relevance Theory to the Teaching of Literary Translation to Speakers of Arabic Language

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**Abstract:** *This paper deals with the relevance of relevance theory to the teaching and learning of literary translation to Arabic speaking students. It also seeks to demonstrate that the use of a relevance-theoretic framework to teach translation practice to Arab students can yield positive outcomes in terms of accuracy, communicative potential and faithfulness to the original writer's intentions, among others. After introducing the major premises of the relevance theory of communication and the pertinence of communicative clues to the practice of literary translation, this paper proceeds to a systematic illustration of how these clues can substantially help the student of literary translation to produce communicatively and culturally relevant translations or renditions of texts from English to Arabic and vice versa. Though it involves occasional hints at the translation of stylistic devices, this discussion does not engage with the issue of figurative language in a systematic or explicit way, but rather opens up paths of enquiry into its potential handling from the perspective of the relevance theory of communication.*

### 1. Introduction

The present discussion is the product of an increasing awareness that relevance theory 'which offers valuable insights about how communication is interpreted' (Dooley, 2008) can be of considerable help to the teachers and learners of literary translation in Arabic-speaking countries. As a teacher of English language and translation for many years, I have become strongly concerned with the relevance of translation theories to the teaching of literary translation and the relating methodological issues. Besides, it can be said, with solid foundation, that the teaching of translation has known a remarkable growth over the past few decades due to the incorporation of theory and practice in translation classes (Perez, 2005). Assuming that students of translation can at least grasp the basic concepts provided by translation theories, one is tempted to wonder: how can they learn to apply them *relevantly* in the practice of literary translation? In a sense, this is a falsely asked question, for theory and practice should not be so ineptly dissociated. There are two reasons for the kind of reproach usually held with regard to the study of theory: the theorist's habit of dealing with theory as independent of practice and the practitioner's overlooking of the presence of theory in any kind of practice. One way of way of overcoming this tight spot is to deal with theory in the context of practice and to see theoretical models at work.

The aim of this paper is to therefore demonstrate that the use of relevance theory in teaching literary translation to Arabic-speaking students can be very

beneficial and exceptionally helpful for an enlightened grasp of the various processes involved in the translation exercise. However, believing that not all theories have immediate practical utility, I shall use in this article, within a courteous eclecticism, a certain number of concepts that pertain to the *relevance theory of communication*, believing that they are of seminal importance for a sufficient grasp of the relevance of relevance theory to literary translation. Some concepts are characteristically used to introduce the theory to the reader; they include: the cognitive principle of relevance, optimal relevance, the inferential nature of human communication and semantic representations. Other concepts, namely those related to the notion of communicative clues, are used for the illustration of how relevance theory can be of extreme benefit for the understanding and practice of literary translation. They include: communicative clues arising from semantic representations, communicative clues arising from syntactic properties and communicative clues arising from stylistic properties.

All these concepts will be used with a view to explaining how the principles of relevance theory can account for a number of translation processes and can be exceptionally valuable for the teaching of literary translation to an Arabic-speaking audience. However, one should state that the underlying aim of this discussion is not, in the least instance, to claim that relevance theory is an infallible approach to literary translation, or a panacea for translation problems, but rather to demonstrate that its precious contributions to this field have to be exploited, together with the insightful works of other theorists like Ji í Levý, Katharina Reiss and Andre Lefevere, in such a way as to make the study and practice of literary translation a more prolific and fruitful undertaking.

## **2. Importance of the discussion**

As hinted at above, what lends legitimacy to this account of the relevance of relevance theory to the teaching of literary translation is not only the emphasis on its practical dimensions and implications for classroom instruction, but also its articulated intent to lay bare those phenomena of communication that pass unnoticed in the translation exercise and that are extremely formative in ensuring an adequate and communicatively successful transfer of knowledge from English to Arabic and vice versa.

## **3. Review of the literature**

During the 1990's, the study of translation witnessed a significant shift of emphasis with the rise of relevance theory as an alternative cognitive approach to translation. In his book *Translation and Relevance, Cognition and Context* (1991), Ernst-August Gutt formulated what he considered a unified account of translation by anchoring the theory of translation in the relevance theory of communication developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986b). Gutt claimed that translation is a form of secondary communication; it is the interlingual interpretive use of language in which the translator tries to achieve interpretive resemblance in a way that would faithfully represent the meaning of the original text in another language. Gutt also distinguished between direct translation in

which case the translator seeks to understand the socio-cultural context of the original text so as to achieve maximal interpretive resemblance, and indirect translation in which case the translator settles for interpretive resemblance in relevant respects only. However, despite the criticism addressed to Gutt's relevance theoretic framework, his theory still entertains widespread recognition and use among translation theorists and practitioners. Works by K. Smith (2002), Sang Zhonggang (2006), Robert Dooley (2008) and others demonstrate that relevance theory still contributes efficiently to the general activity of practicing and theorizing about translation as an interpretive act of communication *par excellence*. Moreover, despite the tendency of the proponents of relevance theory to apply its findings to the translation of different types of texts, including the literary text, and to target different types of linguistic environment, there is still a conspicuous shortage of application of the relevance-theoretic framework in the teaching of literary translation to an Arabic-speaking audience. The present discussion will hopefully assist in familiarizing Arab learners, not only with the most important principles of the relevance theory of communication, but also the application of the relevance-theoretic framework to the translation of literary texts from English to Arabic and vice-versa.

#### **4. Questions posed in the discussion**

Since the prime concern of this paper is to bridge the gap between theory and practice and since this process is only possible when a neatly-drawn method is adopted, one has to begin, I think, by asking some fundamental questions that should throw into relief the pivotal elements of the discussion: what is the relevance theory of communication? What is its relevance to translation? And how practical are its insights for the teaching of literary translation to Arab learners?

For the present topic, these are the relevant questions. Yet, once they are taken up, a process of delimitation inevitably occurs, since otherwise they are too general to be discussed within this limited scope. We shall therefore begin with an indispensable review of the fundamental principles of the relevance theory of communication, then proceed to a thorough discussion of the key notions of the relevance-theoretic framework that pertain to the translation of literary texts.

#### **5. The relevance theory of communication**

Relevance theory can be traced back to the works of H. Paul Grice who explained that one of the essential aspects of human communication is the expression and recognition of intentions (Grice, 1961). Grice is also said to have established the premises for an inferential model of communication as an alternative to the classical code model. Utterances, according to Grice, always create expectations which guide the hearer to the speaker's meaning (Grice, 1961). This is one of the major principles upon which the relevance theory of communication rests. Relevance theory became fully established and recognized

after Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber had published their seminal book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (1986b).

The relevance theory of communication is anchored in cognitive psychology. It is a theory which argues that communication occurs between people as a result of mental processing rather than behavior, habit, or conditioned response. As introduced by Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber in the above-stated book and developed later in their subsequent works (1986a, 1990, 1995, and 2002), relevance theory aims at explaining how the information-processing faculty of the human mind enables individuals to communicate with one another. It seeks to:

give an explicit account of how the information-processing faculties of our minds enable us to communicate with one another. Its domain is therefore mental faculties rather than texts or processes of text-production. (Gutt, 1991:20)

Relevance theory is also premised on the belief that the expectations of relevance provoked by an utterance are usually accurate and probable enough to orient the hearer towards the speaker's meaning and that these expectations which are motivated by an innate drive for relevance should normally make communication between human beings possible. Here, it should be pointed out that relevance theorists and proponents have come up with and subsequently developed a number of principles that contributed to an insightful explanation of the essence of relevance theory. In a typical translation course that seeks to familiarize learners with the practical side of the relevance-theoretic framework, the major principles of relevance theory have to be included as an integral component of the syllabus and have to be explained in detail before any practice is taken up. Among these principles, we mention: *the cognitive principle of relevance, optimal relevance, informative intention and semantic representations*.

### 5.1. The cognitive principle of relevance

The cognitive principle of relevance is premised on the belief that utterances create expectations of relevance because the tendency to maximize relevance is a fundamental aspect of human cognition. Thus, when a speaker produces an utterance, his/her interlocutor tends to pick out the most relevant stimuli in his/her environment and processes them in such a way as to maximize their relevance. In this case, the less the effort required to make sense of the utterance, the more relevant it will be and vice versa. For instance, if a stage director, using Beckett's words, tells an actor: 'Try again. Fail again. Fail better'. افشل بصورة أفضل. . . to help him perform a scene of failure, and the actor replies: 'I think I need further exercise' اعتقد أنني بحاجة إلى مزيد التمرين, the latter's response shows that he has assumed, on the basis of the stimulus 'better' and the context of rehearsal, that that his performance is still below the director's expectations. Notice that in the Arabic translation, the expression بصورة is used to render the comparative adjective 'better' on the basis of its relevance to the cognitive environment of the Arab speaker. A

literal translation like \_\_\_\_\_ could possibly mean 'it's better to fail', which is definitely at odds with the intended meaning.

## 5.2. Optimal relevance

A given utterance is said to be optimally relevant when its interpretation by a given hearer is carried out with a minimal processing effort. Optimal relevance may be summarized in the following statement: if a speaker wants his utterance to be optimally relevant, he has to formulate it in such a way as to make the hearer grasp the intended meaning without making an unnecessary effort. In the field of translation, the translator may achieve optimal relevance by making the target text as comprehensible to the target reader without gratuitous effort as the source text was to the source reader. Let us consider the following utterances:

(1) 'my sister almost lost her head when she heard the news'

إِنِّي فعلا أشفق عليها (2) 'I really feel sorry for her', حين علمت بالخبر كادت أختي تفقد رأسها. It can easily be noted that the above translation is more optimally relevant to the cognitive environment of the Arab speaker than the literal translation which would force the target reader to think of a possible injury of the lady's head as a result of fainting. The same thing holds true for utterance (2) which is more conceptually relevant to the target audience than the literal translation إِنِّي حقا أحسن بالإشفاق من أجلها.

## 5.3. Informative intention

In their book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (1986b), Wilson and emphasize the fact that the most important faculty of the mind is the ability to make inferences from people's behavior. The sender of a message, for example, produces a verbal stimulus from which an addressee is expected to infer what he 'means', that is, his informative intention in terms of relevance theory. Thus, if a student asks an instructor: 'I wonder if you could have a look at this report?' أتساءل إذا كان باستطاعتكم أن تلقوا نظرة على هذا التقرير. The instructor might look at his watch and say: 'The train will leave after half an hour' سيغادر القطار بعد نصف ساعة. Assuming that his interlocutor will pick out the most relevant stimuli, the instructor wants the student to infer that he cannot examine the report at that particular point of time because he is rushing to the train station, that the examination of the report requires some reasonable time and that there is no much time left for the train to leave. Notice that the translator has managed to reproduce the informative intention of the source text by using a verbal sentence سيغادر القطار بعد نصف ساعة which places a the emphasis on the action of 'leaving' and therefore, indirectly, informs the hearer that the speaker is more worried about the train's 'leaving' than about not being able to examine the report. It is also noteworthy that translator has used the expression \_\_\_\_\_ which is more comprehensible (without gratuitous effort) to the Arab speaker than the literal translation \_\_\_\_\_ (have a look).

#### 5.4. Semantic representations

According to relevance theory, semantic representations are the product of the language module of the mind (the unit that is responsible for language processing). When this unit of the mind receives linguistic data as input, it assigns to them mental formulae as output that forms semantic representations. But these representations are neither full propositions nor full assumptions, but rather assumption schemas or ‘blueprints for propositions’, as defined by Blakemore (1987, quoted in Gutt 1991: 24), that need to be further processed in the context of available assumptions to be able to produce positive cognitive effects. Let us take an example. John says: ‘this is a leap in the dark’<sup>هذه</sup>

and James replies ‘don’t invest your money in risky projects’<sup>لا تستثمر أموالك</sup> ريع محفوفة بالمخاطر. The utterance ‘this is a leap in the dark’ may produce various semantic representations in the minds of various hearers, since the word ‘this’ is very general and can be used in *different contexts* to refer to different types of things or situations. However, James’s response shows that he understands perfectly well what the word ‘this’ refers to, namely investing money in risky projects. This is attributed to the fact that James, on the basis of the assumptions he has about the subject, has mentally processed the semantic representation elicited by the utterance in a way that has yielded the truth-conditional proposition: *investing money in risky projects is not safe*. The translator who seeks to achieve interpretive resemblance with regard to an original stimulus has to formulate a target stimulus that could produce a similar semantic representation. If John’s utterance is translated by <sup>هذه قفزة في الظلام</sup>, it may produce a different semantic representation and may lead to a misinterpretation of the meaning intended by the original speaker.

The same thing holds true for individual words which have *logical* entries (meaning postulates) and *encyclopedic* entries (meanings associated with them in different contexts). This point will be further developed in the forthcoming section on semantic representations.

#### 6. Relevance theory and literary translation

Relevance theory so defined in terms of the principles outlined above grounds literary translation immediately in cognition. It aims at demonstrating that the quality of a translation depends on how successful it answers the requirements of communication, including optimal relevance, and at showing that what the translator can achieve in a translation depends largely on the context of his audience, that is, on the context of the receptor language reader. Here, one should point out that the fact of grounding literary translation in communication and focusing on the reception of the target text, including the reproduction of the intended effects of the original, was not a pioneering discovery of relevance theory. In fact, the works of Jiří Levý in this area have, in no small way, informed the studies of literary translation in relation to communication, aesthetics, interpretation and pragmatics. His concepts of stylization, re-stylization, translation as an art, translation as a decision process, translation as communication as well as his famous notion of the ‘minimax strategy’ have

entertained wide use among translators, researchers and teachers of translation everywhere in the world and continue to inspire present-day scholars and students of translation. In his seminal essay “*Translation as a Decision Process*” (Levý, 1967), he criticizes the normative approaches to translation and argues that translation must be regarded as a pragmatic activity in which case the translator applies the ‘minimax strategy’, i.e. chooses from a number of possible solutions the one that ‘promises a maximum of effect with a minimum of effort’ (ibid: 1179).

While Levý related the ‘minimax’ concept to the translator’s task, relevance theory related the principle of optimal relevance illustrated earlier to the achievement of interpretive resemblance with regard to the target text. This is perhaps the most innovative element that relevance theory has brought into the general field of translation studies. As previously explained, if a translator seeks to maximize relevance and minimize the processing effort made by the receptor audience, he/she has to make the target text as intelligible to the target reader as the source text was to the source reader. By the same token, if a target reader expects the translation of a literary text to replicate the semantic and aesthetic features of a source text, the translator has to do it in such a way as to provide the most appropriate contextual clues that could guide the target reader to the intended semantic and aesthetic effects.

When applied to the translation of literary texts, relevance theory requires at least two procedures: reproducing *what* was intended to be expressed and *how* it was expressed. These two procedures, in turn, involve the consideration of a number of textual signs that are of special significance for a successful rendering of the original text. These signs are referred to in terms of relevance theory as: communicative clues arising from semantic representations, communicative clues arising from syntactic properties and communicative clues arising from stylistic properties. Communicative clues, to use less overburdened terms, are simply indications or signs which offer the hearer/reader the most relevant contexts for an adequate grasp of what is intended to be expressed and how it is expressed. In the teaching as well as the learning of literary translation, these clues should be treated as assumption schemas that need to be developed inferentially until they yield the propositional forms intended and the ways in which they are articulated. For instance, in the utterance ‘many African tribes have been worshipping totems’ لا تزال العديد من القبائل الإفريقية تعبد الطوعم , the use of the present perfect is an important communicative clue. It guides the hearer, through the tense-aspect assumption it elicits in his/her mind, towards the intended proposition, namely the fact that many African tribes worshipped totems *in the past* and still worship them *today*. Notice that the translator has picked the above syntactic clue and achieved interpretive resemblance by using the auxiliary verb instead of which would have missed that clue.

The following subdivisions will elaborate more on communicative clues and will illustrate the significance of using them as elements of a practical approach to literary translation.

### 6.1. Communicative clues arising from semantic representations

We have previously pointed out that semantic representations are the immediate properties of the linguistic input that are mentally processed to yield propositional forms. In translation, one of the first concerns of the translator aiming at finding resemblance between stimuli will be to consider the semantic representation of the original stimulus. For instance, the translation of a given expression may sound different from the original in some respects, but we cannot be sure whether the difference is due to a misrepresentation of its communicative clues or perhaps an incompatibility in the contextual assumptions used to interpret it. The success of translation is therefore largely dependent on the extent to which the translator manages to produce a target-text that interpretively resembles the original – *in many respects* – in the context that is assumed for the source-text.

The following examples may illustrate this point:

The utterance ‘Iago is a true villain’ is very meaningful for an English reader/hearer who understands very well the true meaning of ‘villain’, especially if he/she acquainted with Shakespearean drama. Its semantic representation is beyond any doubt highly suggestive inasmuch as its logical entry (immediate postulates or assumptions) as well as its encyclopedic entry (further meanings associated with it) reveal a significant range of associations of meanings. If translated into Arabic by *ياجو فعلا شرير* or *إياجو حقا رجل ماکر*, the word ‘villain’ will lose an important share of the contextual effects of its semantic representation because ‘villainy’ proper produces assumptions about the act of harming people and deliberately creating trouble to satisfy certain dark, sadist or vicious desires. The Arabic equivalents *شرير* or *ماکر* are literal translations of the word. Though they can readily be recognized by an Arabic-speaking reader, they remain too general or too abstract to convey the sense of conspiracy the original word is infused with. In this case, if the translator wishes to reproduce the intended meaning, he has to say more than ‘wicked’ or ‘cruel’ by adding more sense and more contextual clues as in saying *إياجو حقا رجل ماکر شديد الأذى*. Adding further emphasis in the literary translation of ‘Iago is a true villain’ should not be construed as a species of long-windedness, but rather as an attempt to bring into play a semantic representation that interpretively resembles the source text in as many respects as possible. The same holds true for the English word ‘shower’ whose semantic representation normally produces in the hearer’s mind the idea of standing under a spray of water. If we translate the utterance ‘I had a shower’ by *أخذت مساحا*, the Arabic expression will sound a bit awkward because the infrequency of use makes the passage from semantic representation to propositional form a bit slow and uncertain. Similarly, translating the Arabic utterance *رجل وامرأتان يصعدان الجب* by ‘A man and two women were climbing the mountain’ does not seem to reproduce the meaning assumptions as well as the communicative clues arising from the semantic representation of the source text. This is mainly attributed to the use of the word *يصعد* which is borrowed from the Holy Koran. The emphatic stress on the sound ‘s’, which suggests the difficulty of breathing when one rises up in the air,



is instantly recognized by an Arabic-speaking reader who is familiar with the religious text. Its translation by the plain expression 'climbing the mountain' therefore does not yield the same contextual effects in his/her cognitive environment. The translator has to find an alternative rendering that interpretively resembles the original expression in this direction. Inserting adverbs like 'breathlessly' or 'agonizingly' in the translation would certainly do the job better from the perspective of relevance theory.

In this connection, given the importance of taking into account semantic representations for the realization of maximal relevance with regard to the receptor audience, the teacher of translation should normally train students to give due importance to lexical varieties by advising them to identify their preferences and their choice of lexical items on the basis of the principle of relevance illustrated above. Students should accordingly bear in mind that the target-text has to be brought in line with those assumptions that form the cognitive environment of the receptive audience, so that the semantic representations elicited by the lexical items of the translated text can produce relevant propositional forms with a minimal processing effort.

Since the lexical properties of a language are intimately bound up with its syntax, equal attention must be paid to those communicative clues which normally arise from syntactic properties.

## 6.2. Communicative clues arising from syntactic properties

The syntactic properties of a given text can be very numerous; however, for practical reasons, we shall limit our analysis to two fundamental properties which frequently confront the translator of a literary text: sentence structure and word order. The below-stated selection from Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, was quoted in Gutt (1991: 137) where he supports Chukovskii's claim that the translators of the extract into Russian language 'did not catch the author's intonations and thus robbed his words of the dynamism stemming from the rhythm' (ibid: 138). However, we shall demonstrate in what follows that the translation of the same passage into Arabic does produce the rhythmic effect and ironic tone intended by the author by creating similar contextual effects in the target reader's cognitive environment as in the source language text.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.

Let us now consider its translation into Arabic:

كان ذلك أجمل الأزمان وأسوأها، زمن الحكمة والسذاجة، زمن العقيدة والإنكار، زمن النور . كان ذلك ربيع الأمل وشتاء اليأس، إن كل شيء بين أيدينا ولا شيء بين أيدينا .

No reader may fail to pick out the exceptional poetic dimension the English excerpt is marked with. Its sound symmetry, rhythmic regularity and

oxymoronic pattern of phrasing convey its ironical tone in the most explicit way. Owing to the fundamental syntactic differences between the two languages, however, the translator sought to reproduce these communicative clues in a different way, namely a way that suits the expectations of the target audience. While Dickens relied on the technique of juxtaposition to set the clauses against each other, the translator relied on a type of coordination that juxtaposes as it combines and unites as it separates, which is typical of the Arabic poetic style. As we have just mentioned, the separation of these clauses in the English text bears important communicative clues for the source-text audience. It allows the reader, as Gutt explains, ‘to experience each clause as an independent statement’ and each one as echoing ‘what different groups of people thought about those times’ (ibid: 139). Such an interpretation not only allows the reader to appreciate the marvelous effects of juxtaposition, but also reflect imaginatively on how those paradoxical times affected human life and human emotions. Gutt also summarizes the significance of reproducing the intended communicative clues of the original text to overcome syntactic or structural differences between languages as follows:

Due to the structural differences between languages, it is not possible to reproduce the linguistic properties of one language in another. However, it is often possible to identify the communicative clues of the source text and formulate receptor language equivalents that serve the same communicative function. (Gutt, 1991: 139)

Seeking to formulate receptor language equivalents that bear interpretive resemblance to the source-text in the context of an Arabic-speaking audience, the translator has opted for the use of coordinated clauses. Such an option makes possible the structural flow of the linguistic input in a way that would stimulate the imagination and reflection of the target reader in view of the fact that Arabic language prefers the use of coordinated sentences in the generic context of reflective prose.

It is quite salient a fact, therefore, that using the relevance principle of reproducing the same communicative clues as those of the original is much more accurate and functional in terms of the communicability of the text in the context of the target audience. What has allowed the above translation to achieve relevance to the target language’s cognitive environment is not only its reliance on coordination, which is generally endorsed by Arabic-speaking readers, but also its use of juxtaposition within coordination, which is also a distinguished lyrical tradition in ancient Arabic literature.

A further substantiation of the tendency of Arabic structure to use coordinated sentences and to rely less on punctuation is offered by Hussein A. Obeidat in his article entitled ‘Stylistic Aspects in Arabic and English Translated Literary Texts: A Contrastive Study’ (1998) where, on the basis of the cogitations of Michael Williams, he explains the syntactic difference between English and Arabic as follows:

Arabic texts clearly indicate the use of more coordinated sentences than the English texts which use more complex and mixed sentences...This is in accordance with the claim that coordination is a salient feature of Arabic style and the fact that the punctuation system is used in Arabic in a non-functional manner.

The second point that retains validity in our discussion of communicative clues arising from syntactic properties is word order, which is very much determining in achieving special effects in literary texts. Let us examine the following English utterances and their literal translation into Arabic:

(1) And he naturally expressed his thanks.

وهو طبيعياً عبّر عن تشكراته

(2) Sad as he was, he didn't utter a single word.

كئيباً مثلما كان، لم ينطق بكلمة واحدة

In example (1), the receptor audience will scarcely grasp the assertive force of the adverb 'naturally' and will rather associate it with the manner of expression, that is, 'in a natural way' as the word *طبيعياً* plainly suggests. Similarly, the use of the word *تشكراته* to preserve the plural form of the English word seems quite awkward given the fact that it does not suit the target audience's lexical preferences. In order for the translator to achieve interpretive resemblance by recreating similar communicative clues as those intended by the original writer, he has to change word order by placing the adverbial phrase after the verb and has to have recourse to modulation by changing the adverb into prepositional phrase and the plural noun into a singular noun. The Arabic translation *بالطبع عن امتنانه* would definitely be more accurate and syntactically more correct for an Arabic-speaking reader.

In example (2), the Arabic translation sounds a bit deviant to an Arabic-speaking audience who has a preference for verbal constructions, i.e. using a verb at the beginning of the sentence, and whose linguistic assumptions naturally presuppose the use of an adjective after the modal verb *كان*. The translation fails to reproduce the stylistic proximity of the English original as it preserves word order and weakens the element of causality embedded in the sentence. A more adequate rendering of the utterance would rather change word order, add the particle of causality *بأن* and use an idiomatic expression to create the stylistic effects expected by the target language reader: *كان كئيباً، فلم ينبس ببنت*

*شفة*

It has to be noted as a final remark in this connection that relevance in matters of style does not simply depend on word order, but rather on many other factors, such as the choice of expressions, the choice of syntactic categories, the choice of tenses, the choice of sound patterns, etc. This is precisely what we shall discuss in the following section.

### 6.3. Communicative clues arising from stylistic properties

As pointed out earlier, it may be argued that literary translation as interpretation of intended meaning and effect can produce an array of different renderings.

This is justifiable because what is involved in literary translation is not simply what is expressed in the original text, but also how it is expressed. 'How it is expressed' clearly points to the style in which the source message was originally composed. Since style varies from one writer to another, its rendering is expected to vary from one translator to another. In rendering literary texts through the use of a relevance-theoretic framework, however, the translator not only seeks to achieve interpretive resemblance to the semantic components of the original, but also, emphatically, to produce communicative clues from which the target reader could infer the connotative and emotive meanings intended by the original author. These meanings are related to both the idiosyncratic style of the author and the general context of history and culture within which the original text was produced. In an online article entitled 'Literary translation: recent theoretical developments', Sachin Ketkar gives an elaborate definition of literary translation where he emphasizes the necessity of rendering the elements of style in relation to the historical and cultural values orchestrating it:

The traditional discussion of the problems of literary translation considers finding equivalents not just for lexis, syntax or concepts, but also for features like style, genre, figurative language, historical stylistic dimensions, polyvalence, connotations as well as denotations, cultural items and culture-specific concepts and values.

While Ketkar stresses the significance of finding equivalents to style in relation to the historical and cultural values of the target audience, Xiaoshu and Dongming underline the importance of reproducing the aesthetic effects the original writer intends to achieve on the source reader. 'Literary translation', he contends, has to 'reproduce the original artistic images in another language, so that the reader of the translation may be inspired, moved and aesthetically entertained in the same way as the native reader is by the original'. When we intend to deal with the stylistic properties of a given text, we need to bear in mind that style is an all-encompassing communicative clue and that the choice of equivalent stylistic features in translation is indispensable because it gives a more accurate reproduction of the formal functionality of the original text and ensures the recreation of the effects it is meant to achieve on the source reader.

We also need to bear in mind that the stylistic features of literary writing vary from one author to another just as their reproduction in another language varies from one translator to another. However, there are at least three features which are endemic to all colors of literary style: the use of idioms/idiomatic expressions, the use of figurative language, namely metaphors, and the use of abstract diction in setting the mood/atmosphere of a story that is rich in implicational meaning and that often targets the reader's emotions and thoughts. Since the success of translation, as we explained earlier, depends on how well it can answer the requisites of communication in the context of the receptor language audience, the rendering of these features requires a number of processes and procedures that aim at bringing the translated text in line with the contextual expectations of the target language reader. Moreover, as the use of idiomatic expressions and affective language are too ramified subjects to be

explored within the confines of the present discussion, we shall limit our analysis to a limited number of examples that will ultimately serve to illustrate the extreme usefulness of the relevance theoretic framework for an adequate and pertinent rendering of communicative clues arising from stylistic properties. Following are a few of instances of idiomatic uses, metaphorical expressions and a short prose extract – markedly using abstract diction – that we shall exploit to discuss the problems of literary translation in relation to stylistic clues.

To begin with, let us consider the following utterance: ‘I decided to adapt to my new situation believing that every cloud has a silver lining’. The speaker, who expresses his determination to get a feel for his new situation, in consolation for himself, expects the hearer to convert the semantic representation of the utterance into a propositional form, meaning that every hardship carries the seeds of relief with it. This conversion into a propositional form is only possible when sufficient mental processing occurs. By mental processing we mean understanding the utterance within the immediate context of the conversation and within the metaphorical context of the expression’s use by speakers of the same culture. When literally translated into Arabic by *قَرَّرت أن أتعيش مع وضعي الجديد مؤمنا بأن لكل سحابة بطانة من فضة* to be used in the above-stated context, the receptor language audience will not grasp the correct propositional content intended by the source language author and mental processing will stop at the level of semantic representation, simply because the principle of relevance to the cognitive environment of the target language reader is broken. In fact, the latter’s imagination may even be driven away from the intended effects of the metaphor by virtue of the positive meanings that are more often associated with ‘clouds’ as signs of God’s grace and kindness in Arab-Islamic culture. However, when the metaphorical dictum ‘every cloud has a silver lining’ is translated by the Koranic verse *إن مع العسر يسرا*, the propositional content intended by the speaker will immediately be grasped because the retrieval of contextual clues from the memory will be done with a minimal mental processing effort in view of the relevance of the utterance to the hearer’s cultural background.

The same thing holds true for the translation of metaphor in which case the receptor language expression or image must be relevant to the cognitive environment of the receptor audience and must create contextual assumptions similar to those created by the original metaphor. For example, if one translates the utterance ‘the place is pigsty’ by *المكان خنزيري* or the famous Arabic metaphorical expression *بكانت الشمس في كبد السماء* by ‘the sun was in the liver of the sky’, one would certainly mislead the receptor language hearer/reader because both translations violate the principle of relevance in terms of the interpretive use of language and both of them fail to communicate the originally intended implicatures. In fact, the relevant translation of metaphors is one of the most sophisticated controversies in literary translation and it is often burdened with pitfalls. It is not enough to look for equivalent metaphors in the target language context on the basis of their relevance to the receptor audience culture. The translator has to find metaphors that carry communicative clues and implicatures similar to those produced by the original text. As Smith pointed out in his article

'Translation as Secondary Communication: the Relevance Theory Perspective of Ernst August Gutt' (2002), 'relevance theory does not regard figurative language as a stylistic way of expressing a single thought that could have been expressed equally well in a literal statement. Instead, figurative language is seen as projecting a range of weak implicatures upon the subject'. Since the relevance theoretic framework of translation requires that mental processing be kept to a minimum and that the target text be able to reproduce the implied meanings intended by the original author (weak implicatures), the translation of metaphor should be concerned with the reproduction of those meanings while looking for equivalents to the aesthetic effects that accompany them and that mark the overall stylistic tenor of the text. The translator should therefore avoid direct translation (complete interpretive resemblance) in which case the different metaphorical meanings associated with equivalent words or expressions in different linguistic traditions often result in misunderstanding on the part of the receptor audience. Since the translation of metaphor has always been a subject matter of controversial debate, we shall limit ourselves to what we have thus far explained believing that a more extended exploration of figurative language from the perspective of relevance theory will help give a more detailed and convincing account of the topic.

The third feature that concerns communicative clues arising from stylistic properties is the use of abstract diction in setting the mood/atmosphere of a narrative story. Here, it should be pointed out that the use of abstract diction has been a subject of controversial debates in matters of stylistic preferences. While critics like Sir Philip Sidney and many neoclassicist writers valorized the use of abstract imagery, romanticists and twentieth-century poets like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot advocated the use of concrete diction in writing both prose and poetry. However, it makes no big difference whether or not concrete imagery is better than abstract imagery in terms of style. What counts more is that in translation, abstract diction poses serious problems for the translator in view of the fact that languages have different traditions and patterns of describing things and thoughts and these patterns are often easily recognizable by the native speakers of a given language but not necessarily decipherable by others speakers. It is therefore the role of translator to choose the type of diction that interpretively resembles that of the original text and to make it as relevant to the receptor audience in terms of stylistic preferences as the original text to its audience.

Here is an example of abstract diction used in setting the atmosphere or mood of an Arabic novel by Hasan Nasr and its rendering in English:

الدنيا أواخر شتاء وبداية ربيع غامض في زمن مشتبه لا يدري المرء ماذا يصيبه. في مثل هذه الأوقات من تحولات الفصول، كما في كل تحول، تفقد النفس حالة استقرارها. تدخل حالة من الخوف والقلق والترقب. لا شيء يدعو إلى الطمأنينة. فترات بأس حالكة تفاجيء القلب، ثم تعقبها بعد ذلك لحظة الفرح.

It was late in the winter and early in a mysterious spring at an uncertain time, a time when nobody knew what befall mankind. For at such moments of

seasonal change, as in all changes, one becomes restless. One is in such a state of fear, anxiety and expectation that no sense of serenity could be felt, save the dim moments of despair that come to surprise the heart, followed later by the instant of happiness. (MyTranslation)

In this example, the Arabic text is the original. It describes the impact of the change of seasons on the human psyche and the dialectic of emotions and thoughts it imparts to people's hearts and minds. The text is infused with implicational meanings and it is endowed with an exceptional poetic effect that is noticeably the product of a rich blend of thoughts, feelings, images and metaphors. Clearly, what the author intends to achieve is to make the reader identify with him, give free rein to imagination and subscribe to the deepest human thoughts that often accompany the change of seasons, namely the departure of the winter and the onset of the spring. These are precisely the semantic and stylistic markers which constitute the communicative clues of this passage. When we examine its translation into English, we notice that despite the many changes that occurred on the level of sentence structure, the choice of words, the change of tenses and the choice of corresponding figurative uses, the target text seems to have reproduced not only the semantic components of the text, but also the poetic effects it is supposed to achieve on the reader. When read loudly in a language class of twenty-one students, sixteen of them thought that the English text was the original. This means, at least, that the Arabic text is rendered in a way that does not ruin the spirit of the target language. It also implies that the style of the translated text is fairly gratifying to an English-speaking reader who has a preference for certain language usages, such as: the use of the passive voice, the use of the impersonal pronoun 'it', the use of words that have abstract meanings in reflective prose and the strict commitment to tense consistency, which is not always the case for speakers of Arabic.

In fact, what has enabled this translation to render the Arabic text into its poeticized equivalent while keeping in tune with the stylistic preferences of the target reader is its remarkable consistency with the principle of relevance. Such a principle, as we hinted at earlier, implies that the target reader can grasp the intended meanings of the translated text with a minimal processing effort and can, at the same time, experience its poetic effects while responding positively to the communicative clues arising from its stylistic properties. It has to be stated, as well, that what has enabled the translator to achieve interpretive resemblance to the original text and to tone with the target reader's contextual assumptions is the use of a number of stylistic shifts such as transposition, modulation and other structural changes. Tables (1) and (2) illustrate these shifts in a detailed way.

It is quite clear that there are differences between English and Arabic on the level of stylistic properties. While English has a preference for the use of adjectives and prepositions, Arabic has a preference for the use of nouns where no emphasis on time or temporal reference is needed and nominal sentences *الجمل الاسمية* where the emphasis is placed on agents rather than the information attached to them (Al-Ghalayini, 1993). Unlike English sentences which require

the predicate to include a verb or at least an auxiliary, Arabic nominal sentences may consist of a noun as a subject and a noun as a predicate as well, such as الرجل خبير 'the man is an expert'. Moreover, whereas Arabic prefers the use of concrete images to describe the self, as can be seen from the works of many Arab writers, English has some kind of mystical predisposition to use abstract attributes while depicting the self in relation to emotional experience. Translating the clause تفقد النفس حالة استقرارها by 'the self loses its state of stability' would rather sound unnatural to an English-speaking audience. A more reliable translation, using modulation from concrete to abstract as in 'one becomes restless' as well as 'one is in such a state' instead of 'one enters a state', would reproduce the aphoristic tone marking the Arabic text while doing justice to the spirit of the target language. Similarly, the use of the passive voice 'followed later by the instant of happiness' is contextually more predictable to an English-speaking reader than the use of the active voice in circumstances where the human experience is overwhelmingly controlled by destiny. It is therefore necessary for the translator who seeks to receive a positive response from the target reader in relation to style to bear in mind the above-stated differences, because relevance is less concerned with words as isolated items than with the contexts and contextual assumptions within which those words are used.

Table 1: Comparative locution

<b>Textual range</b>	<b>Arabic</b>	<b>English</b>
Words	54	76
<b>Syntactic category</b>	<b>Arabic</b>	<b>English</b>
Nouns	26	22
Adjectives	3	7
Conjunctions	5	3
Prepositions	7	13

Table 2: Stylistic shifts

<b>Stylistic shift</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Transposition	4
Modulation	4

## 7. Conclusion

Despite the gaps left over and the points that need further elaboration, the present discussion has sought to demonstrate that using a relevance-theoretic framework to translate literary texts from English to Arabic and vice versa can help in producing a translation that fits the target reader's expectations and contextual assumptions as it seeks to achieve interpretive resemblance to the original text and its properties. The discussion has also attempted to expand on the previously-quoted statement by Gutt that: "due to the structural differences



between languages, it is not possible to reproduce the linguistic properties of one language in another”, but “it is possible to identify the communicative clues of the source text and find receptor language equivalents that serve the same communicative function”. Moreover, the relevance theory hypothesis that “translation is clues-based interpretive use of language across language boundaries” (Gutt, 1991) was illustrated through a number of examples where the consideration of communicative clues arising from semantic representations, syntactic properties and stylistic properties proved to be extremely helpful in making the target text as relevant to the receptor audience as the source text to its audience.. However, while there is a certain consensus that it is often possible to achieve a reasonably large scale of resemblance in semantic representation across languages, the same cannot be said of stylistic properties in literary texts which involve linguistic, cultural and idiosyncratic features that determine the communicative clues guiding the receptor audience to interpret the intended meanings and effects. Resemblance in terms of stylistic properties is possible, provided that the reformulated communicative clues are sufficiently natural to the idiom of the receptor language. This can be further elaborated through a methodical consideration of the translation of rhetorical devices from the perspective of relevance theory, which would, beyond any doubt, raise other issues in other research directions, directions specified by systematic study of those issues.

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