The Increase of Literal Translation: A Feature of Globalization

Tara Moayad
The University of Sharjah

Abstract: *Due to globalization translation has become more vital than it has ever been in human life for the transmission of human knowledge and communication. In this paper I argue, by means of an analytical and deductive approach that it is literal translation in particular that is gaining pace. The aim of translation has become that of speed and cost-effectiveness, which resulted in numerous translation errors. The increase of literal translation can also be attributed to the global impact of the Lingua Franca-language of the global village.*

Introduction:

The rising tendency towards globalization is Mankind's defiant way to break many barriers, amongst which is language. By turning global, language is remarkably turning from an impediment into the main tool that makes globalization itself feasible. To bridge the gap, the translator not only deals with all those linguistic differences, but with the thorny path of cultural discrepancies, too. It is the translator's everyday challenge to achieve both linguistic and cultural equivalence in order to render the translation more accessible and comprehensible to the target audience. But due to the demands of the digital age and global community, literal translation is on the increase. Literal translation is inflexible and does not mirror the linguistic and cultural discrepancies between the two languages. (Lyons, 2002 qtd in Fritzala 2009: 46).

Linguists, translatologists and translators themselves have long warned against the inaccurate, awkward, and sometimes funny results of literal blunders. For instance, Nida (1964: 14) notes that literal renderings, "generally make for a doubtful translation". Regarding correctness of a translation, Nida (1971:185) points out:

> Ultimately, however, the correctness of a translation must be determined not in terms of the corresponding sets of words, but on the basis of the extent to which the corresponding sets of semantic components are accurately represented in the restructuring. This is essential if the resulting form of the message in the receptor language is to represent the closest natural equivalent of the source-language text.

Hence, a correct translation should strive for accuracy, natural flow and communicativeness. Literal translation usually fails to realize all three

objectives at once because it is "an SL-oriented, word-for-word, style of translation in which the denotative meaning of all words in the ST is taken as if straight from the dictionary, but the conventions of TL grammar are respected." (Dickins, et al, 2002:238). One scholar has gone as far as indicating that literal translation "is a lie; it is a fake and fraud". (Burton, 1973:13 qtd by Ordudari (2008:4). In fact, Ordudari (ibid) affirms that "in today's world we are fundamentally dependent on translation, even though it emerges in its literal form." However, literal translation does have its advocates too. A good or true translation, as Nabokov (1964 qtd in ibid) claims, is literal translation "rendering as closely as the associative and syntactical capacities of another language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original" (ibid). He emphasizes that "only this [literal translation] is true translation." In line with Nabokov (1964), Newmark (1988a) considers that "Literal translation is the first step in translation, and a good translator abandons a literal version only when it is plainly inexact or… badly written. A bad translator will always do his best to avoid translating word for word". (ibid: 79). What Newmark is calling for here, is an absolutely truthful translation that abides by the rules of faithfulness to the original, in other words he is biased to the SL. According to Dickin et al (2002:17), "Between the two extremes of literal translation and free translation, the degrees of freedom are infinitely variable." They (ibid) introduce the following diagram which is adapted from Newmark (1981: 39):

Figure 1: SL bias/TL bias diagram adapted from Newmark (1981:39) in Dickins, et al (2002:17)

SL bias ⟵   ⟶ **TL bias**

○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Literal   Faithful   Balanced   Idiomizing   Free
                            (SL/TL)
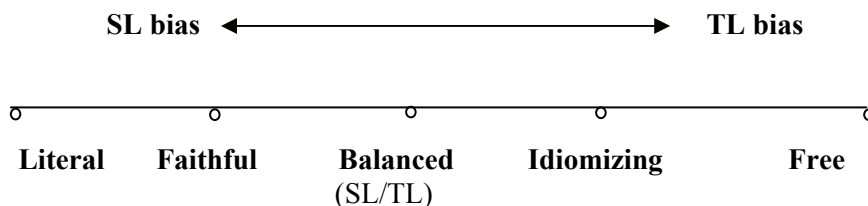
Hence, SL bias covers many variables too. But whatever it is, whether truly faithful, extremely faithful, interlinear, or even literal -the "practical extreme of SL bias" (Dickins et al 2002:16), all these variables show evidence of literalism since they include a percentage of literal renderings in their attempt to be biased to the STL.

        In the heat of debates concerning Literal vs. Free translation, a counter-argument to Nida's position from literal translation is that some texts (e.g. legal texts, such as a marriage certificate; and such pragmatic texts as instructions on a medicine bottle or a guide to assemble a piece of equipment) require a more literal rendition. In refutation, the researcher is against literal translation that attempts an *exaggerated* form of close adherence to the lexical and syntactic properties of the ST. It is literal translation that impairs comprehensibility

because it has little or no regard for context, meaning or what is implied by a given utterance that should be unacceptable. Hatim and Munday (2004:14) stress that "Ignoring such factors as text type, audience or purpose of translation has invariably led to the rather pedantic form of literalism, turgid adherence to form and almost total obsession with accuracy often encountered in the translations we see or hear day in day out." It is not enough for a translation to be intact in terms of vocabulary and grammar. It is the sense of the ST message that needs to be carried over to the TT by means acceptable to the TT reader.

1. Hypothesis
In this paper, I argue that other than the incompetence of the translator, the following factors are behind the increase of literal translation:
  i.   Technical evolution of the translation market
  ii.   Industrial demand for cost-effectiveness and speed
  iii.   The global impact of the lingua-franca

1.1. Technical evolution of the translation market
The first factor which contributes to the increase of literal translation is the technical evolution of the translation market which forces translators to translate literally. By typing "free translation" in a search engine, you can get any text you want translated by Computer Assisted Tools all over the net. CAT tools include electronic dictionaries, glossaries, terminology databases, Translation Memories known as TM tools and many more as the technology of translation tools continues to evolve. Gil (2005:78) points out that translation memory software is among the frequently used programmes by freelance translators and translation agencies nowadays. However, TM tools constrain the translator's freedom because they are developed with the underlying idea of one-to-one linguistic equivalence. (Gil, 2005:77) Technology limits the decisions a translator can make due to the technical limitations of the text segmentation and formatting. (Webb 1998). According to Gil (ibid) a TM tool

1. chops up a text into segments (usually sentences or smaller grammar units), which the translator translates one by one.
2. the segments and their translations are stored in a database.
3. when the same segment appears again, the programme displays the previous translation.

The inherent defect of TM software lies in its segmentation of the text. When using it one would perceive the text being translated as a sequence of individual sentences and thus would feel a bit out of context with each step. Translation memories can only deal with a text simplistically in terms of linguistic segments; they cannot, unlike the human translator, have a vision of the text as a whole with regard to ideas and concepts of overall message. (Craciunescu, et al, 2009:15). TM tools work best on tailored source texts that avoid cultural references and help speed up the translation process. However, TM tools can still make literal renditions even with texts that reduce the number of cultural

references. Consequently, the translator will need more editing time. The following is an example of a Google on-line free translation:

> http://translator.imtranslator.net/translator.asp?vendid=1&clientid=IDA
> JOTTB&appid=tr-pgn&ver=2.1.

I chose the English sentences randomly but made sure that they were simple in content and structure. Then after typing them in, I set the direction of the translation from English into Arabic and pressed on *Translate*. In an instant, I got the translation in the bottom box that can only be judged as ludicrous.

For smoother results, a translator has to improve the integrity and wholeness of the translation so as to produce consecutive sentences stitched to each other. This is important not only for creative translation, e.g. ads, but for other types of translation too like news headlines.

1.2. Industrial demand for cost-effectiveness and speed

The second factor can be attributed to the fact that literal translations are seen as an industrial need, closely attached to production goals. With the cutting-edge technology and newer generations of CAT tools and competing software packages, not to mention the electronic dictionaries, glossaries and online

resources, acting as productivity tools, translation has turned into a business itself. Speed and cost-effectiveness are the two marketing features demanded out of a translation nowadays. According to Gil (ibid) the use of these translation tools has two industry advantages:

- the translator saves valuable time and physical effort.
- Memories simplify project management and team translation by ensuring consistency.

To add a third advantage, I would suppose it to be linked to the first one on speed and would consider it as:

- *Cost-effectiveness*. By saving time, a business saves money also, let alone meets the industry deadlines.

My argument here is that when speed and low-cost are a prevalent concern, many a translator would produce what might be termed as a *default translation*. Although it may be completely *accurate*, but for sure it can be relatively sloppy in several regards. It aims for merely getting the information through. Sometimes, however, a totally straightforward translation fails to convey the meaning. Hence, it is very unlikely to work with ads or even news headlines. In fact, those same advantages listed for CAT tools turn against the efficiency and effectiveness of these very tools. Why?

1. In the aim for consistency, translation agencies give their translators pre-translated texts using TM. Hence, the translator, in order to maintain this consistency becomes consistent with the previous translator's style. Thus, the translator is not free to make the decision of tilting towards ST bias or TT bias or even maintaining a balance between the two. Whether a translator should employ literal or free translation is a matter that depends on the individual translator him/herself to make the final decision based on the text type, the purpose of the translation, and the target audience. In this concern, Fritzala (2009:46) observes that "most of the times the translation produced is an amalgam of both literal and free translation".
2. Due to translation memory software being used in large products [large texts in short time], translators do not translate linearly." (Gil, 2005: 81). This means that the translator who is working on just part of the project lacks the whole context. This forces him/her to work close to the segment producing literal translation.
3. They are not time-savers straight out of the box. Training time is essential for efficient use and even then it takes time to build an extensive database. (Craciunescu, et al, 2009:16).

1.3 The global impact of the lingua-franca
The third factor that contributes to the increase of literalism is the global power of the lingua franca. English is the language of innovations in the age of cutting-edge technology. It is the most accepted, adopted, and used means of

communication. It is globally agreed that English is a universal language of the global village. Commonly known as the language of business, English has gained linguistic hegemony. English as a lingua franca has become a controversial issue with those who cheer for it and those who criticize it. Wiersema (2004: 5) sees that "the use of English as a global language is an important trend in world communication." On the other hand, Phillipson (2007) questions "whether its advance is as a *lingua franca* or rather as a *lingua frankensteinia*." Whichever is the case, globalization is the most important change the translation profession has recently undergone and since English is the language of globalization then definitely English has a strong impact on translation both as a process and as a product. According to Craciunescu, et al (2003: 6) the languages for which there was most translation demand in 1991 were as follows:

Table 1: The languages for which there was most translation demand in 1991 (Craciunescu, et al 2003: 6)

	EN	**JP**	**FR**	**DE**	**RU**	**ES**	**Others**
As source lang.	48%	32%	8%	5%	2%	---	5%
As target lang.	45%	24%	12%	---	5%	10%	4%

These percentages strongly supported the prediction that English will prevail, as it did definitely do. The pending question is: what are the implications of this on Arabic?

To partially answer this question, it is only proper to start with the impact of globalization on the role of the translator. In today's world where various cultures are coming into greater contact with each other, cultural considerations are the latest challenge facing translation. Therefore, "the job of the translator is no longer simply to discover the meaning of the source text and re-express it in the target text, but mostly to de-code and en-code the cultural elements of the source language into the target language." (Fritzala, 2009:45). As a result, proficiency in both languages is no longer sufficient; a translator must also have a deep understanding of both cultures. In other words, the age of globalization needs bi-lingual translators who are bi-cultural as well in a sense. "This necessity is also stressed by the fact that the target audience of a translated text may not be familiar with some cultural elements of the source text and it is again the task of the translator to introduce that target audience to these unknown realities." (ibid). This spells one thing: "foreignization" (introduced by Venuti) or "Exoticization" as opposed to "domestication" and "transparency" so as to reflect the ST's culture, which can only lead to SL bias. To foreignise in translation involves "pressure on target-language cultural values to register the

linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad"(Venuti 1995:20). One good evidence of this global trend can be exemplified by the Arabic version of the Harry Potter series – an international best-seller of this decade. The translators tried to be faithful to the foreignness of the ST "to move the reader toward [the author]", rather than "the writer toward [the reader]" in the terms used by the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher. The Arabic translation of all 7 Harry Potter volumes show extreme SL bias through foreignization and strong adherence to the ST. These children's fantasy books were translated with little consideration to the needs of the TT audience. In an aim to exoticize, the Arabic translations transliterated all loaded proper names despite their suggestiveness. Where names carried a transparent meaning the Arabic translation attempted mostly erroneous literal renditions. See the following table of names I picked from the *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* along with a suggested translation:

Table 2: Literal translation of proper names in the Goblet of Fire by Rowling (2000) with a suggested translation

ST name	TT	Suggested Translation
The Hanged Man	حانة الرجل المعلق	حانة الرجل المشنوق
Daily Prophet	جريدة المتنبيْ اليومي	جريدة النبأ اليومية
Unforgivable Curses	تعويذات لاتغتفر	السحر المحرم، او: التعويذات المحرمة
Seeker	الباحث	الخطاف
Death Eaters	آكلي الموتى	فرسان الظلام
The Burrow	الجحر	منزل عائلة ويزلي المخفي عن الانظار، او: المنزل المخفي لعائلة ويزلي.
Unspeakables	غير المتكلمين	جماعة الكتمان orالمحلفون بالكتمان

In the case of English-Arabic translation, it is evident from the table above that the direction has been for a long while now from English into Arabic rather than the other way round. This means that Arabic translations have been adhering very closely to English Source texts in this global age because of the status of English as a Lingua Franca. We can find more and more Arabic versions being dampened by the stilted effect of literal translation. Observe the following examples of literal translation seen in the headlines of the Arabic version of Newsweek published in 2008 and 2009:

1. The Forbidden Tongue: (Newsweek 9 March, 2009)
Background: Turkey's leader is in a tough spot after a Kurdish politician dares to speak his native language.
اللسان المحرم
(Newsweek 10 March, 2009)
A suggested translation: اللغة المحرمة

2. The View from the Kitchen Table: (Newsweek 26 January, 2009)
Background: Reference is made to the shrinking social stratum of the middle class.

المشهد من طاولة المطبخ

(Newsweek 27 January, 2009)

A suggested translation: تقلص الطبقة الوسطى

3. Campfire Questions: (Newsweek, 26 January, 2009)
Background: On Boy Scouts of America.

اسئلة حول نار المخيم

(Newsweek, 27 January, 2009)

A suggested translation: اسئلة عن الكشافة

4. The Peaple Speak: 'Yes, He Can' (Newsweek, 26 January, 2009)
Background: 66% of Americans are optimistic that Obama will make things better.

الشعب يتكلم : "اجل ، يستطيع"

(Newsweek, 27 January, 2009)

A suggested translation: "الشعب يقول : "اجل ، اوباما يستطيع

5. Play The Devil's Advocate: (Newsweek, 19 October, 2009)
Background: On the U.S president's Veep Biden and how he sometimes defends a lost case just for the sake of argument.

يلعب دور محامي الشيطان

(Newsweek, 20 October, 2009)

A suggested translation: و من الحب الجدل في قضايا خاسرة

6. As Bad as It Gets, Until It Gets Worse: (Newsweek, 30 December, 2008)
Background: On the gruesome political violence in Zimbabwe.

اسوا مايكون الى ان يصبح الامر اكثر سوءاً

(Newsweek, 31 December, 2008)

A suggested translation:لن تتخيل الافضع حتى تسمع ما كان افضع

7. The Natural No More: (Newsweek, 6 May, 2008)
Background: Reference is made to the Clinton has turned from the most gifted politician of a generation to become an unceasing gaffe machine.

لم يعد طبيعياً كما كان

(Newsweek , 7 May, 2008)

A suggested translation: عهدناه سياسياًموهوباً. وجدناه أخرق

Or: لم يعد السياسي الموهوب

8. Exploding with Ideas: (Newsweek, 12 Jan, 2009)

Background: On London City Hall member who is vibrant
with ideas to improve the Londoners.
يتفجر افكاراً
(Newsweek, 13 Jan, 2009)
A suggested translation: يتوقد ذهنه افكاراً

9.   From Russia with Love: (Newsweek, June 23, 2008)
Background: On Russia's preference of McCain over Obama in leading
world economy. An allusion is made to a James Bond Movie title where a
Russian Spy falls in love with OO7. In the article McCain has said that he
sees the letters KGB in Putin's eyes. However, the Russians find him prefer
him over Obama.
من روسيا مع حبي
(Newsweek, June 24, 2008)
A suggested translation:ود روسي لمكين

10. In Need of 'Wins on the Ground': (Newsweek, 30 June, 2008)
Background: King Abdulla II of Jordan reflecting on the state of affairs in
his part of the world.
نحتاج الى "انتصارات على الارض"
(Newsweek, 1 July, 2008)
A suggested translation: نحتاج الى انتصارات على ارض الواقع
Or: نحتاج الى انتصارات حقيقية

2.   Conclusion

The three factors that are behind the increase of literal translation exist due to
erroneous attitudes adopted by today's translators and translation agencies
towards globalization.   According to Bates (1943:7), "nothing moves without
translation…No change in thought or in technology spreads without the help of
translation". In other words, it is translation that makes the world go round; not
Lingua Franca nor Globalization itself. It is high time that translators dealing
with the pair (Arabic/English) should aim for good quality and acceptable
adequacy when they are performing the global act of translation. Acceptable
adequacy is accomplished by a translation that strives sensibly to transfer the
original's message across the boundary of language but does not forget about
what makes this message tick in the TL, or what makes it communicative to the
Target Audience. Arabic/English translators have been affected negatively by
globalization and this has led to the increase of low quality translations. The
more Arabic translations are aimed at giving information about the source text
and reflecting its culture in an exaggerated form of adherence, the more they
become mere literal translations that lack consideration for discourse, integrity
and readability.

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