

## **Inevitable Loss of Effect in Translating Poetry**

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### **Abstract**

The translation of poetry is probably one of the topics in translation that triggers very controversial arguments and unmanageable dilemmas. The disagreement is perhaps embodied in the various views concerning whether or not to translate poetry, and if one opts to translate it, which method would be the most appropriate one.

An inevitable loss of effect is expected in the translation of poetry- whether into poetry or into prose. Nevertheless, it is claimed that in prose translation, the main loss is in effect rather than in meaning, because poetry stirs senses and emotions more than prose does. In verse translation, however, the loss of meaning is expected to be more significant than that in prose. This is attributed to the fact that the conveyer (translator) sticks to rhyme at the expense of meaning; in other words, he concerns himself more with the choice of words that meets his needs than with meaning. The present study focuses on the unavoidable causes of the loss of effect that are inherent in the nature of both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL), on the one hand, and on the untranslatable areas of poetic texts, on the other. The investigation attempts to lay out some ideas about how to approach a poetic translation that remains faithful not only to the context of the original, but also to the effect and spirit of the work.

### **1. Some Characteristics of Poetic Language**

What is poetry? And what is it characterized by? According to Wikipedia (1), poetry is the use of ambiguity, symbolism, irony, and other stylistic elements of poetic diction. This use often leaves a poem open to multiple interpretations.

A thought provoking-comparison of poetry to another art, painting, might serve as a good entry to our discussion. Savory (1968) speaks of poetry as

**The art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the senses, the art of doing by means of words what the painter does by means of colours.**

The American poet and critic **Robert Frost**, looks to poetry from a translation perspective saying that "poetry is what gets lost in translation".

Poetry is characterized by a number of features- be it in Arabic, English or any other language. These features can be classified under four main categories: sound (alliteration, assonance, rhyme, rhyme scheme etc.), structure (unfamiliar grammatical constructions aimed at showing creativity and novelty, poetic license), meaning (metaphor, simile, personification, pun, allusion, etc.), culture (cultural variations, using culture-specific names, ecological differences, etc.). In what follows these categories will be examined in some detail.

### **1.1. Sound Devices**

Sound and metrical patterning are usually used copiously by poets and they aim at producing aesthetic pleasure or at demonstrating creativity. Sound plays a vital role in poetic language. The use of consonants, vowels, stress and intonation (rhythm) is of great significance in emphasizing meaning by means of sound. For example, stress and intonation play a vital role in getting precise meaning. Consider the following line by Ted Hughes's where the action of a bird attacking a worm in the lawn is portrayed:

**... with a start, a bounce, a stab**

Here, the combined effect of a very light stress on 'a' and a strong stress on the three short monosyllables 'start', 'bounce' and 'stab' suggests the speed of the movement ( Miller and Currie,1970:15).

The use of consonants and vowels is also of significance in emphasizing meaning by means of sound. Thus Miller and Currie (Ibid: 11) rightly comment on the splendid employment of consonant for stylistic effect saying that "it is not by accident that Tennyson, by the use of consonants suggests firmness and hardness of eagle and rock in:

**He clasps the crag with crooked hands**

Rhyme represents the most regular sound pattern in poetry except, of course, for blank verse (2) or prose poem in Arabic.

Rhyme occurs when the last vowel and consonant sounds of two words are identical. In Robert Frost's "**Fire and Ice**", 'fire' rhymes with 'desire'; 'ice' with 'twice' and 'suffice'; 'hate' with 'great'.

Some say the world will end in fire  
Some say in ice  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To know that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

Rhyme scheme is the pattern established by the arrangement of rhymes in a stanza or poem and is generally described by using letters of the alphabet to denote the recurrence of rhyming lines. The lines above have the rhyme scheme: abaacdcdc . Meter (wazn) is based on the length of syllables rather than on stress. A short syllable is a vowel letter followed by either an unvowelled consonant or a long vowel.

Rhyme, rhythm and meter are not the only distinctive characteristics that distinguish poetry from prose; other features might include figures of speech and special architecture, so there are many things or properties by which one can distinguish poetry from other literary genres.

**1.1.1. Alliteration:** is the repetition of the initial sounds (usually consonants) of stressed syllables in nearby words at word beginnings. A good example is from Lord Byron's "**She Walks in Beauty**"

She walks in beauty, like the night  
Of cloudless climes and starry skies

**1.1.2. Assonance:** is the repetition of vowel sounds, the relatively close succession of the same or similar vowel sounds, but with different consonants; a kind of vowel rhyme. In the lines below assonance is represented in 'thy' and 'mine', where the sound /ai/ is found in both words:

**Presume not thy heart when mine is slain;  
Thou gavest me then, not to give back again**

All sound devices are interesting because they bring together words that sound alike but do not necessarily have anything else in common. In "**Fire and Ice**" the words are opposite in meaning but have the same vowel sound (assonance). The effect would be less strong if the words lacked this assonance. That is why poetry is so difficult to be translated.

## **1.2. Structural Devices**

Poets also employ unfamiliar grammatical constructions to affect readers or show their novel use of language. They use adjectives as nouns and nouns as verbs, etc. Such liberty (referred to as poetic license) provides the poet with a powerful tool that enables him to give more than the ordinary meaning, that is, to make his poem effective or to emphasize certain words.

Another source of loss is attributed to the different lexical, syntactic and phonological systems of both the SL and the TL. When a contemporary English poet employs an archaic word or construction, there will be an inevitable loss of meaning, as exemplified in Dylan Thomas's poem "Why East Wind Chills":

**When cometh, Jack frost? The children ask.**

Here the poet connects the modern child with children of past ages. (Miller and Currie, 1970:33). When uncommon structures that cannot be reflected in the TL are used by the SL author an unavoidable loss is expected, as in the line below by Tennyson's where the adverb that ends with '-ly' is compared by the suffix '-er' : (Peacock, 1974:77)

**Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,  
Then tired eyelids upon tired eyes**

The only thing a translator can do in such cases is to translate into ordinary structures, which results in loss of effect and evaporation of the flavor of history.

It is well known that Arabic has many types of plural forms; the plural of scarceness (qillah), the plural of multitude (kathrah), and the plural of plural (jumuu'). The lexical item أسد (lion), for instance, has five plural forms 'aasud', 'usud', 'usd', 'aasaad', and 'usuud', (Al-Razi, 1981:16).

The variety of forms, when conveyed, affects the meaning as well as the stylistic spark intended by the SL poet, as in the line below.

سهرت أعين ونامت عيون في أمور تكون أو لا تكون

The first plural form "أعين" is a plural form of scarceness, while the second "عيون" is of multitude. The translator, no matter how good he is, will stand helpless in front of such cases. The only thing he can do in this case is to translate both Arabic plural forms into 'eyes' or resort to adding modifiers like 'few' and 'lots of' to compensate for the loss taking place. In some poems there are linguistic nuances which cannot be rendered into the TL without losing traces and flavor of the original text syntactic uniqueness.

One of the structural devices which are often resorted to by poets is inversion- the reordering of the usual word order of a sentence, often by placing the subject after the verb as in the lines of Philip Larkin's from "**Coming**".

**On longer evenings  
Light, still and yellow,  
Bathes the serene  
Foreheads of houses**

A famous example is the beginning of Milton's "**Paradise Lost**":

**Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit  
Of the Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,  
Sing Heav'nly Muse...**

The use of syntax in unexpected or deviant ways has stronger effect on receivers than normal structure or style. Some theorists believe that when the poetic meaning of the ST is bound to form it becomes impossible to be translated.

### 1.3. Meaning Devices

Poets also try to use words not in the usual sense used in ordinary non-figurative language so as to provoke and delight readers. Many ways are open to them to accomplish their objectives as far as meaning is concerned. Figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, pun, and irony, to name but a few constitute a mine for poets. Semanticists often stress the fact that meaning is a complicated component of language. If so, it is inevitable that literary meaning is far more complicated than ordinary meaning. Accordingly, writers may deliberately explore the edges of possible meanings in a language and try to go as far as possible to see what kind of effect they can get.

Semantic deviation is represented in a phrase containing a word whose meaning violates the expectations created by the surrounding words, e.g. a grief ago (expected to be a temporal noun) 'in the room loud to my own' (expect to be a spatial adjective). Examples of abstracted forms (3) like workaholic, readaholic, and shopaholic (from alcoholic) are not hard to find especially in modern English poetry. Patterned forms (4) such as nowanights (from nowadays), viewship (from readership) and narrowcasting (from broadcasting) are also occasionally seen.

#### 1.3.1. Personification

Personification, according to Wikipedia (5), "is an ontological metaphor in which a thing or abstraction is represented as a person". It is a type of metaphor in which distinctive human characteristics are given to an animal, object or idea. Personification and apostrophe are figures of speech whereby something inanimate is referred to as if it were animate. Sometimes it may be possible to translate these literally, if comprehension proves positive, and sometimes it may be necessary to make some adjustments in order to be able to abandon the figurative language.

#### 1.3.2. Pun

Punning occurs when a word is used in such a way as to have more than one meaning. From Robert Frost the 'fall of leaves' becomes the season named "the fall", consider the following line:

**And comes that other fall we name the fall.**

A pun may exploit confusion between two senses of the same written or spoken word, by means of homophony, homography, homonymy, and polysemy or metaphorical use. Puns are a source of dread for any translator. In some cases it is impossible to translate a pun, even by wrapping it considerably.

وقالت رح بربك من أمامي فقلت لها بربك أنت رحي

you go, my soul.

كأن للمجاورة اقتسمنا فقلبي جارهم والدمع جاري

pouring, my neighbor.

يقولون ان الشوق نار ولو عة فما بال شوقي أصبح اليوم باردا

my yearning, Shawqi (the poets' prince)

رفقا بخل ناصح أبليته صدا وهجرا

وافاك سائل دمعته فرددته في الحال نهرا

reproach, river.

#### 1.4. Cultural Devices

The difference and remoteness in culture is one of the thorny problems encountered by translators. Arabic and English are of remote cultures, which makes the process so hard as "the closer the language and culture, the closer the translation and the original." (Newmark, 1982:8). Each has its own distinctive properties that are, more or less, opposed to the other. The cultural gap between Arabic and English in addition to the poetic structure of both languages makes loss even greater.

The words and expressions that are deeply rooted in the culture of a certain nation can hardly be transferred to the other. Abu Madhi, in his poem Al-anqaa' (translated by Arberry (1950:61), clarifies this point:

أنا لست بالعنقاء أول مغرم هي مطمع الدنيا كما هي مطمعي

Arberry's (6) translation of the title, "The Unattainable", is merely a paraphrase or an interpretation.

**Not first am I that ever dared aspire  
To win her, who is all the world's desire**

He could have translated Al-anqaa' into 'The Phoenix', but he did not, probably due to the different look of both cultures to 'phoenix', that is, while Abu Madhi likens Al-anqaa' to something fabulous and unobtainable, Shakespeare employs 'phoenix' to mean

"symbol of love", (Lu'lu'ah, 1983:240). Another instance that reflects the SL cultural environment is to be found in the ecological representations. In Shakespeare's sonnet 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?', summer represents the most beautiful season in England. In comparison with any of the Arab Gulf states, summer would look like hell on earth. So the whole image is distorted. In fact, an unavoidable loss of effect is expected when rendering 'summer' into 'صيف'. Would this difference give the translator a license to render 'summer' into 'ربيع', which might be an appropriate ecological equivalent? Some would agree, but probably many others would not.

In Arabic, poets cite quotations from the Holy Quran, Prophetic Traditions, or from other works by other poets, which is called 'tadhmin' (inclusion). This process is so well-established in Arabic and is so heavily employed that a poet boasts:

أضمن كل بيت فيه معنى فشعري نصفه من شعر غيري

(lit. Every meaningful line is allusive, for half of my poetry is from others' poetry)

Another example of tadhmin is:

ظننت بك الجميل فخاب ظني وقال الله بعض الظن اثم

(lit. I thought well of you, and God said 'some suspicion is a sin')

When such lines are translated into English, for instance, the effect is lost. In English this process is called 'allusion' and is defined as a reference to something or someone such as a quote from a famous source (like the Bible), or a famous work of art. Consider the following line by Ibn Al-Rumi which is translated by Arberry (1965:66-67)

أين فلك منها وفلك اليها منشآت في البحر كالأعلام

**Where is any ship sailing from her or to her  
Ships raised up in the sea like landmarks**

This quotation from the Holy Quran has a huge effect on Arab- Muslim readers who give this image a high status and sympathize with the poet who describes Basra after the invasion of Zinj. The effect-if any- is not equivalent in the translation, because the TL reader is not expected to be familiar with the Quran or Quranic style and verses. It is worth noting that the unavoidable causes of loss of meaning and effect that are inherent



in the nature of both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) are to be emphasized.

Indirect reference may also lead to loss of effect if it is culture-bound. Consider the line below where names of people and allusion to certain incidents that are culture specific constitute an integral part for understanding meaning and receiving the intended effect. It is clear that without necessary annotation the TL reader, who is expected to be unfamiliar with neither the names nor the allusion, will be at a loss.

ذو الفقار اللّحظ منها أبداً والحشا مني عمرو وحبي

This is translated by Arberry (1950:24):

**Dhu'l-Fiqar is ever the cutting glance of her,  
And my poor heart is 'Amr and Huyai**

Dhu'l-Fiqar was the name of the sword of Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib, while 'Amr and Huyai are names of two of the Ali's victims in war.

## 2. Approaches to Translating Poetry

Many theorists, translators and translation critics believe that the translation of poetry should as much as possible reflect the meaning, structure and style of the SL poem. They argue that the most appropriate way for translating poetry is to translate it into prose. Others, however, believe in the correlation between meaning and sound, matter and manner, content and form. For them, sound and meaning are inseparable, and for this and other reasons the translation of poetry into poetry is the preferable method. Both contradictory views are to be discussed briefly in order to see to what extent they are faithful or efficient and to what extent they can help to reduce inevitable loss of effect.

### 2.1. Prose- Translation

Some practitioners (like Jebra I. Jebra) see that translation must, for the most part, reflect the structural and semantic aspects of the original text in order that the author's voice be heard in the ear of the reader. This is true of what is called the invariable core of a text which emphasizes the shared elements between the SL and TL and which are translated almost in the same way by all translators. To those practitioners poetry

should be translated into prose. In prose-translation, certain aspects of SL sound and stylistic elements are sacrificed in favour of meaning. Accordingly, the referential meaning will be almost fully achieved at the expense of the poetic charge of the text.

Sound and meaning are complementary for tasting poetry. Nevertheless, owing to the fact that no two languages have the same phonological systems, which is true of Arabic and English, and owing to the different language families of both languages, sound equivalence is impossible in translation from Arabic into English or vice versa. Being aware of this fact, Arberry (1965:12) says:

**All western translations of Arabic poetry, however artfully contrived fail utterly to convey the immense range of moods expressed in his rhythmic incantations by the Arab poet.**

The different metre systems of both languages are also of importance. In this respect, Al-Najjar (1987:108-109) asserts that

**The shortest Arabic meter 'al-hazaj' is of 16 syllables whose counterpart in English is of 2 or 3 syllables called monometer; the longest is 'al-kamil' consists of 30 syllables opposed by octameter which is of 16-24 syllables.**

The English traditional line is generally made up of an inseparable unit, whereas the traditional Arabic line consists, typically, of two halves: 'sadr' (first hemistich) and '?ajz'(second hemistich). Thus,

**"what seems an Arabic line according to the Arabic analysis is like two English lines, and some translators, yet, divide the Arabic line into four lines in English"(ibid)**

While the two halves of the first line rhyme together, the same rhyme is repeated once in the second, third, and every following line to the end of the poem. Blank verse is alien to the Arabs, who regarded rhyme not as pleasing ornament or troublesome bondage, but as a vital element of poetry.

Another frequently mentioned factor that makes defenders of this method believe in prose translation is that when translating a text into verse, the translator pays greater attention to rhyme than meaning, which results in a poem that is, to some extent, far from the original. He would insert, delete, and substitute words so as to meet the need of putting the SL poem into verse. Accordingly, he loses much of the meaning let alone

changing the architecture of the poem. With regard to this assumption, Savory (1968:86) states:

**Why should a translator wish to omit anything that his author has said... and why, as less, should a translator... put into his mouth words that he never spoken? The only answer ... is that the translator has been forced to do so because he has handicapped himself with tyranny of rhyme.**

For this and other reasons proponents of this method resort to prose translation in order to gain fidelity and faithfulness to the original at the expense of rhyme and musicality which is, to their opponents, a very expensive cost.

## **2.2. Verse- translation**

Hatim and Mason (1990:12) justifiably advocate the idea that translation is a matter of alternatives and preferences. Choice, however, is often motivated: omissions, additions, and alterations may indeed be justified, but can be true only in relation to intended meaning.

Whether the original spirit and feeling of the SL poem is preserved or not seems to be a highly subjective issue.

Harvey and Higgins (1992:24) state that

**the challenge to the translator is thus not to eliminate translation loss altogether , but to reduce it by deciding which of the relevant features in the ST is most important to preserve, and which can most legitimately be sacrificed in preserving them.**

If the SL style is adulterated for the sake of the TL reader, the translator must look for a new reference point within the work itself.

Advocates of this approach see that when translating poetry into prose much of the effect is lost. Such argument is based on the idea that music and meaning are inseparable. The proponents of this approach believe that this is the only way to get the original effect (the one attained on the SL reader) conveyed into the TL and this is what fidelity and faithfulness stand for. When a poet writes, he pays attention not only to the meaning of words and expressions, constructions and symbols, but also to the value of each sound within context. A poem is, thus, like a coin when translated into prose only

one face is reflected, that is, meaning. But a poem is not only meaning, they say so, it should be translated into verse to get both faces.

Edward Fitzgerald published the *Rubaeyyat* of Omar Khayyam in 1859. He expressed the conviction that it would be much better to have a live sparrow than a stuffed eagle. He envisaged the SL poem as the rough clay from which the translator could mould the TL text as a living entity. (see Ilyas, 1989: 15). Arberry (1945)(cited in Dastjerdi 2004), likened rhymed translation to an acrobatic performance of "setting an elephant to walk a tightrope". The French poet Paul Valery said once that prose was walking, poetry dancing. In other words, the two are as different as dancing is from walking. Is one, therefore, still talking about translation or rather transcreation?

Wright (1974:361-368) classifies the Arabic meters into five groups:

1. **Iambic** : rajaz, sari', kamil, wafer
2. **Antispastic** : hazaj
3. **Amphibrachic**: mutaqarib, tawil, mudhari'
4. **Anapaestic** : mutadarik, basit, munsharih, muqtadhab
5. **Ionic** : ramal, madid, khafif, mujtath

By employing this classification one will not be certain whether the new poem has the same effect attained on the SL reader. Some Arabic meters have specific purposes that may not be in conformity with the English counterparts, which raises a new problem. Another obstacle faced in this respect is attributed to the fact that English is an analytic language while Arabic is a synthetic one. The former uses words separately to express various functions in the sentence, while the latter frequently employs a simple compound word to express more than one function. This affects" the general effect because a text translated into Arabic usually seems shorter, that is, has less lexical items than the original.( Aziz,1981:77), as is the case in :

سخرت بأنات شعب ضعيف      وكفك مخضوبة في دماه  
وعشت تدنس سحر الوجود      وتبذر شوك الأسي في رباه

These lines are translated into English as:

**You mock the anguish of an impotent land  
Whose people's blood has stained your tyrant land,  
And desecrate the magic of this earth;  
Showing your thorns, to bring despair to birth**

### 3. Is Mission Impossible?!

Opinions swing between inherent impossibility and absolute necessity. Many writers and critics consider the translation of poetry as a distortion of the original and describe translators of poetry as traitors who turn the living SL poems into ruins of soulless bodies.

The translator who attempts to render a poem into another tongue, according to Morris (2010), is "walking on a thin shell of ice above a lake of criticism." It is considered legitimate for a translator of poetry into poetry to make some amendments to suit his needs. To some, the outcome of a translator's work in this case would be a distorted text and a deceived reader. The Russian-born American linguist Roman Jakobson, who vehemently objects to the translation of poetry, argues that **"poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible"** (Cited in Ilyas, 1989:75). When reading a translated poem, one only reads a blurred vision of the ST, a vision that might be clear in the translator's mind. Aiwei (2005) sees that poetry is translatable, if translation is regarded as a purposeful act rather than a sterile irrational pursuit of exact duplication.

Others consider untranslatability (7) a myth that looks upon poetry as beauty itself which is untouchable for once it is touched it is destroyed. If a translator fails to perform the aesthetic function it is meant to convey, it turns into an inappropriate meaning, no matter how well the form is preserved. The question is whether an item is transparent, opaque or misleading.

Catford (1965) argues that linguistic untranslatability is due to the differences between the SL and the TL, whereas cultural untranslatability is due to the absence in the TL of relevant situational features.

Many of those who have undertaken translation do not only support the idea that the translation of poetry is impossible, but also provide living proof by their many well-received and highly-acclimated translated works. They assert that poetic images are often repainted by the translator in a way that often leads to loss of the ST identity.

Catford (1965:99) believes that cultural untranslatability is usually less 'absolute' than linguistic untranslatability.

In his book *Al-Haywan*, Al-Jahidh (1949) says that “poetry is untranslatable, impossible to transfer, and when transferred, its arrangement is broken, its beauty is gone and will not be admired”. Others say that the gleam of poetry will faint and its embers turn into ashes when translated. Nevertheless, translators have, for centuries, worked on rendering works of literature from and into different tongues due to their vital role in reflecting people's literary personality and genius. This opinion seems to have prevailed all over the Arab world for centuries. Perhaps this is the reason why, when the Arabs translated Greek scientific and philosophical books they did not even attempt to translate their literature, let alone their poetry. The Modern translator might have a different view on this issue, however. Many modern translators see that by translating poetry the Arabs get a better picture of the poet's culture, means of expression and even way of thinking since poetry is a mirror of people's highest literary production.

#### 4. Loss of Effect

##### 4.1. Preliminaries

Some parts of poems cannot be rendered in English without losing all traces of the original's syntactic meaning. In many cases poetry is difficult to translate into the TL because of the lack of convergence between the ST and the TT. We are only viewing a misty image of the original through the lenses of the translator's mind.

To deal with the inevitable loss of effect is to deal with the characteristics and properties of poetic language. Such loss is related to various factors that are mainly connected with the nature of both the SL and the TL. An efficient translator has to have a wide acquaintance with the idiosyncrasies of both tongues on all levels, so that he could determine to what extent a poet deviates from the norms of language. It is known that deviation is a widely seen practice in poetic language. The translator, accordingly, must try as hard as possible to reproduce such deviation in his version provided that such effort does not make his text syntactically or referentially inaccurate or unacceptable. This section aims at highlighting the sources of loss so as to identify the

causes beyond which this loss of effect lies. The loss in question is due to a bunch of reasons.

#### 4.1.1. Figures of Speech

This section deals with the figures of speech that lead to loss of effect in the process of translation.

##### 1.4.4.1. Assonance

Assonance is a similarity of sounds in words, where vowels or consonants agree but not both rhyme. (Row and Webb, 1945:346), as in

**To begird the Almighty thorn,  
Beseeching or besieging**

The counterpart of assonance in Arabic is called " tasrii' ", as in :

أنعم وأكرم بقوم طاب محتدهم معروفهم في البرايا غير منكور

The line above is rendered by Arberry (1965:146-147) into English as follows:

**What an honourable and generous people are they!  
Whose goodness is acknowledged by all other nations**

##### 1.4.4.2. Alliteration

In alliteration the first sound is repeated in more than one word, as in Tennyson's *Recollection of the Arabian Nights* (Peakock, 1974:68),

**Full of the city's stilly sound**

or in Al-Dailami's

خذ يا حسودي بين جنبيك جوى يرمي الى قلبك بالضرائم

**You who envy me, receive a grief between your sides**

(translated by Arberry (1965:110-111)

It is obvious that the alliteration is lost in the translated text. A gain, though might not be intended, is achieved, that is, the assonance in **grief** and **receive**.

##### 1.4.4.3. Jinaas (homophony)

The use of a certain word or words that have the same, or almost the same, orthographical and phonological properties but different meanings (homophony) in one

language can never be restored when conveyed to another language. The correspondent term in English is homophony. Homophones, as defined by Richards (1985:130) are “words which sound alike but are written differently and often have different meanings”. Consider the following lines (cited in Al-Alousi et al, 1959:14):

عضنا الدهر بنا به      ليت ما حل بنا به  
كل من مال اليه      غافل ليس بنا به

In the lines above two types of jinaas are employed: complete as in the first and third occurrences of بنا به which consist of one word preceded by a preposition, and compound which is represented in the second occurrence of بنا به which is made up of two words. It is beyond doubt that no translation, however efficient the translator may be, will be equivalent to the splendid jinaas in the SL lines and the loss is, thus, inevitable. Consider the following line with Arberry's translation (1965:22)

أهلا بما لم أكن      أهلا لموقعه

**Welcome I cry to the hap I was never worthy should chance to me**

It can be noticed here that the sound effect is totally lost but alliteration is created between **welcome, was** and **worthy**.

The lines below by Khalil Mutran which were translated by John Haywood (1971), further consolidate the inevitable loss of effect in rendering jinaas into another language.

لو أن ما نتمنى      يكون منا بطاقة  
أهديت جنة ورد      وما رضيت بطاقة  
لكنني من دمائي      نظمت هذه البطاقة

**If only what we wished to  
Were in our power to do,  
Arose-garden I'd send you-  
No mere bouquet would do;  
But this card, written for you  
In rhymes of blood must do**

It can be seen that the beautiful homophony of the original text is completely lost in translation, not because of the inefficiency of the translator, but rather because of the nature of both languages.



#### 1.4.4.4. Pun

When pun is translated, there is an unavoidable loss of both meaning and effect, as when Jamal (1978:28) translated Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" A mender of bad soles into مرقع الأنعال البالية. Here, the cobbler makes a pun; he means 'soles' but leads the listener to think that he means 'souls', the pun is lost in translation. In such cases, the best way is to have a footnote to be on the safe side and to be faithful to the TL reader as well as to the SL writer. Footnotes, however, raise another problem. It is really hard to tell how many footnotes one needs, what the necessary footnotes are, whether too many are used or whether the TL reader's knowledge is disregarded. It is left to the translator himself. He is the one to decide, (see Lu'lu'a, 1987:11).

In the above mentioned discussion the essential sources of loss have been dealt with. A translator has to reflect as much of the SL figures, intentional deviations, structures... as he can- by deep analysis and repeated readings of the SL text, as well as wide knowledge of the cultural background of both tongues.

#### 1.5. An Assessment of Translated Texts

Having dealt with the sources behind which meaning and effect are lost in the process of translation, a number of translations of the same text will be discussed and analyzed in order to see to what extent the translators have committed themselves to the SL text and to detect loss in both poetry-into-poetry and poetry-into-prose translation. The text referred to is a famous poem by Iliya Abu Madhi entitled *Attalaasim* (The Riddles or Puzzles). This poem was translated into poetry by John A. Haywood (1971) and into prose by Andrew Ghareeb (2000) and by Mostafa Malaekah (2004) (8). The translations are given in chronological order, after the SL text.

جئت , لا اعلم من أين , ولكني أتيت  
ولقد أبصرت قدامي طريقا فمشيت  
وسأبقى ماشيا ان شئت هذا أم أبيت  
كيف جئت ؟ كيف أبصرت طريقي  
لست أدري

أجدد أم قديم أنا في هذا الوجود  
 هل أنا حر طليق أم أسير في قيود  
 هل أنا قائد نفسي في حياتي أم مقود  
 أتمنى أنني أدري ولكن .....  
 لست أدري

**I came, I know not whence, yet came this way;  
 I saw a path-along it made my way;  
 I must go on – or say I yea or nay;  
 How have I come? How did I find the way?  
 I do not know.**

**Am I new here, or have I been before?  
 Completely free, or a bound servitor?  
 My own soul's master, or inferior?  
 Oh! Would that I were bless'd with knowledge, for...  
 I do not know**

\*\*\*\*\*

**I came not knowing from where,  
 but I came  
 And I saw a pathway in front of  
 me, so I walked.  
 And I will remain walking ,  
 whether I want this or not.  
 How did I come? How did I see my pathway?  
 I do not know!**

**Am I new or old in this existence?  
 Am I free and unrestrained, or do I walk in chains?  
 Do I lead myself in my life, or am I being led?  
 I wish I know, but ...**

**I do not know!**

\*\*\*\*\*

**I came,**

**Not knowing**

**My feet saw the way,**

**And I walked there,**

**And I shall continue**

**Whether I so desire or not.**

**How did I come?**

**How did I see the path?**

**I know not**

**Old or new,**

**Is this existence?**

**Am I free**

**Or fettered?**

**Do I lead myself**

**Or am I led?**

**I wish I knew.**

**I don't know.**

In the first line 'this way' is added to suit the rhyme chosen by the translator. In the third line, 'say I yea or nay' is given as a rendition for "ان شئت هذا أم أبيت"، which is not an exact correspondent of the original. The comparison of the two antonyms 'new' جديد and 'old' قديم in the original is lost. 'New' is there in the TT but 'old' is not. Two adjectives طليق and حر, which are almost synonymous, are rendered into an adjective modified by an adverb, '-completely'. The word 'being led' مقود is translated into 'inferior' which is not exactly an equivalent to the original. The fourth line consists of four words in Arabic but of nine in the English version. The translator is not really successful in dealing with it. It is seen like, in Newmark's (1982) terms, a case of undertranslation where the level of the original is higher than that of the translation. The concept of 'wish' in the SL text is lexicalized- 'أتمنى'-(I wish), but it is grammaticalized in the TL version.

There is an unjustifiable manipulation in the second translation. In the first stanza, the translator goes a little bit far from the original when he says, 'My feet saw the way', which does not exist in the original. The last line *لست أدري*, which is almost a refrain, is rendered in the first stanza into 'I know not', which is too much for the simple structure of the original. In the second stanza, the question in the Arabic text is about the poet's existence, not existence itself, as the translation shows. In Arabic, two successive adjectives are used in *'حرٌّ طليق'*, which is simply translated as 'free'. Moreover, the word *'أسير'* and the expression *'في حياتي'* are given zero equivalents in the translation. Another instance of inconsistency can be clearly seen in the different renderings of *'لست أدري'*. This phrase is first rendered into 'I know not' then into 'I don't know', and, yet, somewhere else into the more formal 'I do not know'. Adhering to one version is very important here, since the expression *'لسب أدري'* constitutes a cornerstone of the overall theme of the poem. As concerns form, the translator divides the original into parts in spite of the fact that they are not long, and keeping the original form might have given a more faithful rendition.

In the third translation, the translator seems to be successful in rendering all the semantic elements of the ST. There is, however, an instance of mistranslation in the second line of the second stanza, where the word *'أسير'* in *'هل أنا حر طليق أم أسير في قيود؟'* is rendered into 'walks' instead of 'prisoner'. The two words in Arabic are homonyms but would give a mistranslation if the wrong sense is selected.

The rhyme scheme of the Arabic text is AAABC, whereas it is AAAAB in the English poetic rendition. Moreover, when reading the three translations, one gets the impression that both the poetic quality and the poetic effect of the original are, on the whole, retained but that is not the case with the prose versions. On the other hand, in the prose translations, not much of the semantic elements is lost, but in the verse version such loss appears to be large and substantial. Furthermore, the artistic charge in the second and third translations is not as weighty as it is in the first. Obviously, the prose translations are instances of literal or semantic translation, whereas the first is an

example of free or communicative translation. In other words, one can say that the prose translations are instances of undertranslation where the level of the translation is lower than that of the original.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Poetic images are often reproduced by the translator in a way that might either distort the original image or create a new one. The problem is how to reach a translation that is not only faithful to the semantic content of the source text, but also to the poetic spirit of that text. A faithful poetic translation is one that lies in no-man's land, i.e. between faithfulness to sense and word, and faithfulness to spirit, a balance- between form and content, manner and matter- that seems to be beyond the bounds of possibility. Moreover, poetic diction is deeply-rooted in any language and it can hardly survive literal translation. However, the core of texts must be literal in order to enable the author's voice to be heard by the reader.

It is worth noting here that some theorists speak of gain and loss in translation arguing that compensation for loss can be achieved in a number of ways, sometimes even unintentionally on the part of the translator, (Hatim and Mason, 1990). In this respect, Harvey and Higgins (1992:24) suggest that a translator is not expected to avoid loss completely, but he is expected to minimize it by deciding which parts of the text are to be kept intact and which ones can be sacrificed. Others, like Aiwei (2010) are against the idea of untranslatability and opine that the translation of poetry is not fiction but a down-to-earth fact, which can be true "if translation is regarded as a purposeful art rather than a sterile irrational pursuit of exact duplication".

## NOTES

1. Poetry is a form of literary art in which language is used for its aesthetic and evocative qualities in addition to, or in lieu of, its apparent meaning. Retrieved May 28, 2009 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/poetry>
2. Blank verse is “unrhymed iambic pentameter, common in Shakespeare’s plays and many longer poems, such as John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. For more details see <http://www.leattern.com/Poetry/poetryterms.htm> as of 18-11-2008
3. According to Grambs (1984:2) an abstracted word is “A word suffix or element of a familiar expression that is borrowed to form analogous words, to which it carries an evident meaning or connotation.”
4. A patterned word is “a word or idiom modeled on or inspired by another word, (Grambs, 1984:272).
5. An example of personification is "The sun shone brightly down on me as if she were shining for me alone". In this example the sun is depicted as if capable of intent, and is referenced with the pronoun "she" rather than "it". Retrieved May 29, 2010 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personification>
6. Arabic owes an incalculable debt to John Arberry (1905-1969) for the great efforts in serving the language. His translation of the Holy Quran is widely respected as one of the most prominent written by a non-Muslim scholar. He is also well-known for his translation of the Seven Odes.
7. “Untranslatability is a property of a text or of any utterance, in one language, for which no equivalent text or utterance can be found.” Retrieved May29, 2010 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Untranslatability>
8. Copyright 2004 Rabie Abdel-Halim. Retrieved May29, 2010 <http://www.freewebs.com/poetrytranslation/cluesEnglishNew.htm>

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