

Translating dialect in Algerian literary works: promoting the Algerian Identity

ترجمة اللهجة في الأعمال الأدبية: ترويج للهوية الجزائرية

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Abstract

The present research aims at shedding light on the methods that can be used to render “dialect”, a highly cultural item, in literary works through analytical and critical study of the French translation of dialectal elements used in Abdelhamid Benhadouga’s novel “*Rih El-janoub*”. The study reveals that a full rendering of dialect, linguistically, culturally and psychologically, seems to be hard due to the simple fact that dialects are the fruit of a unique experience in a culture that is not necessarily experienced in another culture, or not necessarily expressed in the same way. Besides, the use of different translation techniques to render may preserve some aspects of these dialectal elements and lose others.

Keywords: translation, dialect, literary works, identity, Algeria.

المخلص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على الأساليب الممكن استخدامها في نقل مضمون ثقافي محض والمتمثل في "اللهجة" من لغة إلى أخرى في الأعمال الأدبية، وذلك من خلال دراسة تحليلية ونقدية لترجمة اللهجة المستخدمة في رواية عبد الحميد بن هدوقة "ريح الجنوب" إلى اللغة الفرنسية "le vent du sud". وقد كشفت الدراسة أن الحصول على ترجمة كاملة ودقيقة للهجة: لغوياً وثقافياً ونفسياً تبدو من الصعوبة بمكان وذلك بسبب أن اللهجات ما هي إلا نتاج تجربة فريدة في ثقافة معينة لا يتم حوضها أو معاشتها بالضرورة في ثقافة أخرى أو لا يتم التعبير عنها بذات الطريقة، وبالتالي فإن الترجمة باستخدام مختلف التقنيات ستحتفظ بالضرورة في أغلب الحالات بأجزاء من الخصوصيات وستفقد أجزاء أخرى.

الكلمات مفتاحية: ترجمة، اللهجة، الأعمال الأدبية، الهوية، الجزائر

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language, in all its forms, is the major means of communication created by community members to express various needs that ensure the continuity of their life together. However, the way of expression is dissimilar between communities, which raises a call for translation in order to bridge cultures and promote their components. Dialect is an impartial part of culture that needs a special consideration since it refers to a deep peculiarity that even linguistic competence remains insufficient to deal with the loads that it carries. Our study comes to join previous works on the possible ways to tackle dialects in the translation framework and to highlight this aspect through theoretical assumptions and practical findings, and our main objective is to uncover the way the translator of the novel “Rih El-janoub” dealt with dialectical items and if these techniques were effective to promote the Algerian culture.

2. Literature review

2.1 On dialect, language and identity

Language is simply an expression of the thoughts that stir the mind of the speaker, which he uses in conveying his messages to others and in preserving the system of ideas that abounds in the human mind regarding everything that revolves around him. Michel Tournier in this context, in one of his novels, on the lips of the protagonist who was alone on an island: « J’ai beau parlé sans cesse à haute voix...ne jamais laisser passer une réflexion, une idée sans aussitôt la proférer à l’adresse des arbres ou des nuages, je vois de jour en jour s’effondrer des pans entiers de la citadelle verbale dans laquelle notre pensée s’abrite» (Tournier, 1972, p. 68).

I talked aloud endlessly ...never let a reflection or an idea pass without immediately pronouncing it to the address of the trees or the clouds, day by day I see entire sections of the verbal citadel, in which our thoughts take shelter, collapsing. Accordingly, the disappearance of language means the disappearance of thoughts (our translation)

Since dialect is a subordinate category of language and thus of human communication, then its definition is by all means multidimensional because it involves linguistic, social and human perspectives to make sure the definition is comprehensive. Basically, dialects are similar to languages in using various ways to express the same meaning with a slight difference: dialects spoken in a specific region, like the Arab region, belong to the same language and derive from it, so they reflect the same situation in Arabic using different expressions which are often understood by this language’s users, or sometimes they are even

the same such as the expression “it’s fine” which is in Arabic: حسنا/لا عليك (hassanan/la’alayk)

In Algeria we say: ماعليش/ماعليه (ma’lich/ma’lih)

In Tunisia they say: باهي (behi)

In Syria they say: شو عليه (chou a’lih)

In Egypt they say : ماشي/ومالو (mechi/wemalou)

In the Gulf region they say: زين (zein) which is similar to the Tunisian expression.

Yet when it comes to languages, the way of referring to the aforementioned expression is not always understood by the users of a different linguistic system, such is the case of Arabic and English when saying for example: what did he do? Which is in Arabic ماذا فعل؟

Linguists such as David Crystal (1997) define dialect as a language variety that is constituted of grammatical and vocabulary systems that disclose the regional and social background of the user. On the other hand, he sheds light on a pejorative way of defining dialect which is considered by some language experts as an inferior variety of language used only by low-status people, and they use some comments for this by saying for instance: “someone speaks English with no trace of dialect”, in addition to underestimating the dialects or ways of expression used in isolated regions in the world or in tribal conventions (Crystal, 1997, p. 24) knowing that this diversity makes the richness of the world either linguistic or even cultural since language is a part of culture.

Peter Patrick, on a different note, focuses when tackling the dialect, on the fact that it is the signs’ system that creates ‘a common meaning’ for a group of people who share it in a specific geographical region, then he defines the common sense as a linguistic product based on historical and cultural background relative to a socially particular community, period of time and/or place, it is the way of expression that everybody belonging to this community is familiar with and, therefore, cannot easily disagree with, whereas outsiders have no clue about what makes them appear collectively deficient (Cited in Garcia & Sghir, 2016, p. 49).

Dialects represent a large linguistic variety not only in large geographical zones such as countries but also across smaller communities. As far as Algeria is concerned in this study, we notice that in one province only, various dialect’s sub-types manifest allowing the listeners to identify the origin of a speaker or at least the area where he/she comes from; they are mutually intelligible in spite of the differences in phonetics and phonology and sometimes in semantics, yet a set of physical clues and social context help in understanding the ambiguous items

(Flores, 2006, p. 2361). Hence, the close relationship between dialect, which is a means of communication, and identity is manifest. In the process of communication, dialect remains the speaker's mirror that reflects his identity and affiliation. Therefore, colonizers have always strived to obliterate and replace it with their own language, because they were firmly convinced that it consolidates the feeling of belonging and strengthens the unity of the group, they believed that the loss of a language impacts the presence of consciousness, knowledge, intellectual value, artwork and culture brought about by that language and spiritual heritage.

Thus, the existence of a language is largely influenced by the attitudes of its speakers; the feeling of pride that language speakers have when they use their own language significantly impacts the survival of a language (Subarkah, 2015, p. 124). Unfortunately, it is useless to deny the fact that the obliteration was successful because long years of colonialism have not been easy; the dialect used in Algeria's different regions to the present day is not devoid of some foreign words that are used spontaneously as if they were deeply entrenched in the subconscious, so the individual feels his ability to easily convey his message using these foreign words and therefore it is difficult to get rid of them in his daily use. Nevertheless, it is important to point out as well that individuals from other regions of the country still resist the use of French owing to historical and colonial reasons, and use instead a French-free dialect. Not only that, some of them even resist the fact that it should be taught in educational institutions, which influences their acquisitions and grades directly.

Based on the foregoing, a strong link between dialect and identity is brought to light. In fact, the specificity of a dialect and thus of an identity does not stand only on words or general expressions of daily life, it is extended to a key identical aspect, which is idiomatic expressions.

Idiomatic expressions being a part of identity on the one hand and a part of the dialect on the other hand, are used to reflect a social, cultural, historical or even religious background or belonging of the group of individuals using them; for instance, saying *بين حانا ومانا راحت لhana* (bin Hana w Mana rahet lehana), which means that one's beard disappears because of two women, is an expression that portrays an Arabic identity and a cultural background. In fact, this expression dates back to an old Arabic story of a man who had two wives; a young woman who used to pluck white hair from the beard to make him look younger, and an old woman who used to pluck black hair to keep him looking old until his beard disappeared completely.

A more specific one is *اللي استحو ماتوا/اللي اختشوا ماتوا* (elli estahou matou/elli ekhtachou metou), which means that those who were ashamed died. This expression is used in the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula and in some countries in North Africa, namely Egypt, which goes back to a story of a fire that broke out inside a public women's bathroom while they were bathing, so a part of them ran out and saved their souls and the others who were ashamed to go out undressed died inside. Hence, we notice that this dialectical expression introduces a cultural peculiarity of the public baths or as they are called in the above-mentioned regions "Hammam".

On the same note, the Algerian expression *رخستي يا الزرقة وركبوك بني عداس* (rkhesti ya zerga w rekbouk Bani Adas) includes a historical specific background which talks about valuable things that lose their value when used by unworthy people. This expression dates back to the period of the French colonialism in Algeria that made tireless efforts to subdue people, but only could make it with weak souls such as –according to historical narratives- members of the tribes of Beni Adas, who colluded with the colonial power for money, pure horses and decent clothes. Thus, whenever they saw a member of those tribes riding a horse, they said this expression to show that the horse lost its value when it is ridden by unworthy people.

It is worth mentioning that the use of dialectical features in literary works is increasingly present, which helps to spread some particularities of a given culture via literature since literature is the fruit of a nation's experiences, thoughts, feelings portrayed by a form of a language, for instance: dialect, even if this linguistic aspect is still considered for some specialists as minor and marginal, which needs to be conveyed using particular strategies when it comes to translating them into a different language such as *Rih el-Janoub* (le vent du sud) which will be the case study of our research.,

2.2 Dialects and literary translation

The use of dialectical expressions or words in literary works is not arbitrary, it has a psychological motivation because literature reflects the conception of the writer to the world and the events according to his own experience which refers to his identity and belonging, thus he feels more expressive when using his mother tongue on one hand, and he highlights the fact that this tongue is highly capable to reveal his hidden being (Bunaffini, 1997, p. 279) through reflective and genuine words.

Bunaffi on a deeper scale assumes that the use of dialects for some writers goes beyond being an aesthetic literary aspect that portrays the reality of a nation, it is rather "the painful conscience of history...it can bear witness to the

injustices of history and give voice to the excluded and the oppressed” (Bunaffini, 1997, p. 279). Indeed, writing using dialect was a way to express the sufferance of colonized peoples in their colonies, a way to say we are decent human beings, we have a tongue, we have a life, we have a culture and a history and we should not be excluded or obliterated, the dialect for them was a weapon to resist and stand against the colonizer.

Regarding the rendition of linguistic varieties included in literary works, it entails a set of challenges that the translator should deal with using different strategies according to the receiver’s cognitive environment. In fact, it is recognized that the process of rendering dialectical items lies under the scope of untranslatability especially with the predominant mismatch between the source and the target language as with Arabic and French. In this context, Wojtasiewicz assumes that untranslatability in the case of dialects does not arise exclusively from the linguistic divergences between the systems involved, “but also from differences in the associations activated in SL and TL readers by specific lexical item” (Berezowski, 1997, p. 28). For instance, in the Algerian society and during the period of El-Hirak, many dialectical expressions came out to refer to particular situations of which the meaning can probably be ambiguous and needs a certain background to be clearly understood: يتنحوا قاع (yetnahaw gaa) which implies a people demand to the authorities to remove all the members of the government that were under the previous regime of Abdul-Aziz Bouteflika instead of sacrificing only a few of them to soothe tensions in the society at that time of manifestations. The same is with the expression of الجيش الشعب خاوة خاوة (jaych chaab khawa khawa) which means that the army and the members of the society are brothers and sisters in reference to the deep ties. In fact, this expression includes a set of meanings regarding the historical background of Algerian people in dealing with their political choices in terms of governments and presidents as was the case of the nineties (black decade): emphasizing that the protests are peaceful and that people are not in a conflict with the army but with a particular political situation.

Furthermore, the untranslatability of dialects stems from the fact that they are still considered by some ideologies subaltern (Bunaffini, 1997, p. 280) to larger linguistic systems being used by minorities, which raises again the difficulty inherent to their translation if the translator has a scant knowledge of the circumstances and contexts of their use. Thus, dealing with dialects in translation implies inevitably a wider extra-linguistic knowledge in combination with the context in which they are used. Moreover, as far as reception in translation is concerned, Balma states that the receiver of the target text involving

dialectal features needs to make more efforts to understand the intended meaning, same as most of the readers of the source text (Szymanska, 2017, p. 64) involving the same features which highlights the importance of comprehensibility for the translator's decisions in rendering them.

Peter Newmark states that the translation of dialects is an ultimate impossibility. In fact, dialects are usually produced following a certain situation or background that took place particularly in the source culture, so reproducing them in the target culture using the same register of the target culture (dialect) and achieving the same effect on the recipient is likely to be impossible most of the time. Consequently, most translators, when facing such a linguistic feature, opt either for neutralization of the dialect in the source language by rendering its meaning instead of its stylistic aspect which leads to the obliteration of a major style in literature and literary translation, for literal translation followed by explanations of the utterances into their original context or background, which allows the promotion of the source culture, or in fewer cases, for colloquialization, which means providing an equivalent in the target culture for a specific item in the source culture so that the receiver feels familiar with it because it reflects something known for him.

3. Tracing Algerian dialectal features in Rih El-janoub translated into French (le vent du sud) –Data Analysis-

This novel was chosen because it reflects the Algerian culture via various cultural specificities and items embodied in a literary work and highlighted in the local dialect. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the choice of the novel translated into French is motivated by two main reasons; the unavailability of Algerian novels translated into English in local bookstores, and since we can always find a blessing in disguise we opted for the French version to make our study diverse in terms of languages.

The novel "Rih El-janoub" or "South Wind" and "le vent du sud" in French is a novel of Abdelhamid Benhedouga that was translated into many languages and is considered as one of the Algerian Classics since it was the first Algerian novel written in Arabic and was ranked among the best Arabic literary works. It tackles among others the issues of properties and power after the independence of Algeria, love and loss, rebellion on social conditions, traditional conventions and economic life in a part of the Algerian society in a certain period of time.

In the following part, we present some selected parts of the novel that contain dialect and we compare them to their suggested equivalents by Marcel Bois into French.

المثل يقول: "مايدري بالمزود غير اللي ضرب به وإلا انضرب به" ص16

« Seul l'arbre battu des vents connait réellement la tempête ». p18

In this sample, the translator opted for the technique of neutralization; he translated one of the aspects of the dialect which is the proverb into an expression devoid of the cultural load contained in the source text; he replaced the word “El-Mezwed (المزود)” (a container made of leather in which we preserve food during trips) with a general word which is “l'arbre (the tree)” using the beginning of another idiomatic expression that has a different meaning in French. This may be due to the absence of an equivalent bearing the same cultural load and having the intended impact on the receiver in the source language, or because of the translator's intention to avoid any possible distortion in the translation that would make it difficult for the recipient to understand. However, he significantly tried to present the translation in a pattern similar to that of an idiomatic expression, albeit relatively.

It is worth noting in this sense that the meaning of the proverb is that only those who experience pain can feel others, and it has another equivalent in the colloquial language, which is “ما يحس بالجمرة غير لي كواتو” « only who stands on ember burns.”

كما يقول المثل: "ناكلو في القوت ونستنو الموت" ص17

« Nous vivons au jour le jour en attendant la mort ». p19

In this sample, the translator has rendered the meaning into French through adopting the technique of neutralization; he translated one of the aspects of the dialect which is the proverb into a phrase devoid of the cultural load contained in the source text. This may be due to the absence of an accurate equivalent in the source language able to ensure the same impact on the recipient or because of the translator's intention to avoid any possible distortion in the translation that would make it difficult for the recipient to understand, but he remarkably tried to render the expression in a familiar way for the recipient, replacing the phrase “we eat food(ناكلو في القوت)” with the phrase “Nous vivons au jour le jour,” which means we live day to day in an indication that the meaning here is not food in itself, but rather it is a metaphor for living, so he compensated it appropriately.

مات في عام "البون" (تفسيط المواد الغذائية) ص28

Il est mort l'année des « bons ». p27

The translator has rendered this example literally, due to the fact that the word was originally taken from the French language and was only phonetically adapted to the Algerian dialect, so he only mentioned the word between inverted commas “Albon” without translating the explanation that followed between parentheses, yet he added another designation in the footnote which is “cartes d'alimentation (nutrition cards)” because the writer mentioned later that these

cards were distributed to families and included the number of family members in order to deliver to them the adequate quantity of food subsidized by the state, and this translation was appropriate.

أعددت الفطير وقسول (رفاق يطبخ في مرق الطماطم والبصل) ص45

J'ai préparé des beignets aux tomates et aux oignons. P39

The translator opted in the transmission of this cultural characteristic of "Ftir Oukessoul" for the colloquialization technique. He chose an equivalent known to the French recipient, which is "les beignets" that has no similarities with the dish mentioned in the source text, since this latter is an Amazigh traditional dish of which the main component is dough cooked in a broth of onions, tomatoes, and vegetables, as the writer explained between brackets, while the target meal does not depend on broth and is prepared in a completely different way. The translator attempted to bring the image closer to the recipient, but he did not pan out, as it was more appropriate to keep the dish name as was mentioned in the source text, and to add a brief definition that "Ftir Oukessoul" (feuilles de pate cuites dans une sauce rouge à base de tomates et oignons), (Ftir Oukessoul, dough chips done in red broth made of tomatoes and onions).

يقول المثل عندنا: "إذا شبع الكرش تقول للراس غني لي" ص67

« Le ventre bien rempli s'adresse à la tête : chante-moi une chanson ». P57

The translator opted for literal translation in rendering this example, but even if it did not carry the same load as the original expression, it took into account the context; basically the meaning of the expression is that a person is always happy when he/she is satisfied and does not lack anything, he is happy, and its equivalent in French is "ventre plein sonne bien", except that its meaning in this context is the meaning mentioned in the translation which is the literal one.

قهوة "موز". ص 90

Le café amer. P75

The translation of the word "موز(mooz)" in this example was not correct because, in the Algerian dialect, « mooz » means medium coffee; neither sweet nor bitter and in which the measures of coffee and sugar are equal, as the author explained in the source text, thus, it is more correct to translate it as "café demi sucre" so that the particularity of the word "mooz" is preserved.

" مقفولة. بلا. بلا." ص97

Le jeu est bloqué ! p81

The translator used neutralization; he translated the meaning of the expression appropriately, yet it was free of the cultural specificity. The “dominoes” is a famous popular game in Algeria, played especially in the evenings in coffee-shops, in the parks and even in the streets, and the word “bla bla” is actually French and means “blanc. blanc” (white.white) in reference to the side of a domino or dice that does not carry any points and which, placing it on both sides of the game, closes it if all the stones that contain it are used up.

“الزميتة”. ص145

« Zemmita ». p121

Zemmita is the name of a dish and in translating this dish, the translator relied on phonetic transcription, unlike what he did with “Ftir Oukessoul”. However, the reason why he did not add an explanation is that what proceeded in the paragraph was in itself an explanation of the recipe, its preparation and its ingredients when aunt Rahma prepared it for the goatherd. Yet if it was not in this context, it would be necessary to add an explanation in the footnote, in order to introduce this Algerian specific dish to the recipient.

“الزردة”. ص152

« Zerda ». p127

In translating this word, the translator opted for transliteration, and added an explanation in the footnote in an attempt to clarify the image for the recipient, describing it as a banquet with which people get close to God at the tomb of a righteous person “marabout”, a practice that is still popular to the present day in some regions, it is also called “al-Waadah” or “al-Nachra”, which means spreading offerings near the tomb of a righteous person to fulfill their wishes and be a mediator to ensure that God answers their prayers.

“ماذا تدي يا تراب من الزينين- يادراق وجوه الأحباب خسارة”. ص191

« Que fais-tu de la beauté, terre de malheur, toi qui nous dérobes le visage des êtres aimés ». p158

The translator used literal translation to transfer this passage from the folk poetry that characterizes the Algerian society, and it is a popular poetry that relies on the colloquial dialect for the most part. The translation was appropriate, yet the word “beauté” in the Algerian dialect does not mean only physical beauty, it rather means good people with good morals, and it is more appropriate to translate it as “que fais-tu de la bonté” or “que fais-tu de la bienveillance”.

4. CONCLUSION

The theoretical and practical parts of this study reveal that a rigorous rendering of dialectical items in literary works remains a hard or sometimes an impossible task, since it shows a deficit in keeping the same cultural loads that

exist in the source ones, and consequently it lends itself to multiple techniques of incomplete renderings in most of the cases. The challenge of translating these dialectal aspects in contrast sheds light as well on the bright side of the process of translation because it raises the cultural diversity in which the writer and the receiver live and rises the need to work more on suitable methods that facilitate communication between them.

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