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Translation as a cultural bridge between the Arabs and the Occidentals

Translation as a cultural bridge between the Arabs and the Occidentals: The case of " Beit El Hikma " and "Toledo School of translators"

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الترجمة باعتبارها جسرا ثقافيا بين العرب والغرب

مدرستا " بيت الحكمة" و"توليدو" للمترجمين نموذجا

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التركيز على أهمية المثاقفة في ضمان السلام وتحقيق التعايش في العالم ،خاصة في ظل الظروف السياسية والاجتماعية الراهنة. ولقد أكد كثير من الباحثين على دور الترجمة الأساسي في سد الفجوة بين العرب و الغرب ، باعتبار أن لكل منهما فكرا وثقافات و لغات وحضارات متباينة. فما كان للحضارة العربية أن تتأسس و تزدهر ما لم تدرك أهمية نقل التراث اليوناني واللاتيني والهندي إلى اللغة العربية. ولقد بذلوا وقتا وجهدا كبيرين في سبيل

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ذلك . وتظهر الدراسة جليا الحاجة دور وتأثير «بيت الحكمة» الذي أنشأه الخليفة العباسي «المأمون» ومدرسة «توليدو» للمترجمين-التي تأسست في القرن الثاني عشر في عهد ألفونسو السابع-بحيث كانتا شاهدين تاريخيين على همية الترجمة في تعزيز الانسجام والتعايش بين العرب والغرب.

الكلمات المفتاحية:الترجمة ؛ المثاقفة ؛ التعايش؛ العرب ؛ الغرب

Abstract:

The current study aims to shed light on the importance of acculturation in creating peace and coexistence in the globalized world especially within the actual political and social conditions. The researchers shed light on the role of translation in bridging the gap between the two banks, the occident and the orient, each representing a given culture, language, a nation's thought, or a civilization. The Arab civilization would not be founded unless they realized the importance of transporting the Greek, Latin, and Indian heritage to Arabic. Thus, they spent a good deal of time and effort to do so. The study shows the need for acknowledging the impact of "Beit el hikma" that was established by the Abbasid caliph"El Maamoun" and Toledo school of translators. The latterwas founded in the twelfth century during the reign of Alfonso VII. They were historical

witnesses of the importance of translation as a process that strengthens harmony and coexistence between Arabs and Occidentals.

Keywords: translation; acculturation; coexistence; Arabs; Occidentals.

Introduction:

Allah has created human beings in varied tongues, colors, and cultures with an intended purpose, mercy and wisdom from Him. Thus, He made mankind in nations and tribes to coexist and get acquainted with each other and to learn and impact one another. For this, knowledge is no more the monopoly of a given people; yet, it is Allah's law that people acquire knowledge through accumulation and collaboration. This is clearly illustrated in Allah's statement: 'O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that you may despise (each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)' (Al-Hujuraat, verse 13).

Allah Explains in this noble verse the reason behind race and ethnic diversity for He made the acquaintance and communication among people a natural disposition. Man always seeks the exploration of the other through communication in the different scientific, cultural, religious, economic dealing and the likes. And there is no way to know

what has the other reached except through translation from his language especially if he is more advanced.

A lot of translation schools were founded to transfer other nations' pearls from the different types of knowledge including medicine, philosophy, astronomy, physics and the likes. "Beit el hikma" that was established by the Abbasid caliph"El Maamoun" and managed by the translator «Isaac Ibn Honein" witnessed that golden era of the Arab Muslim world. Translation was then the reason behind the Arab scientific boom.

Translation movement evolved in human's history. It was then in war, peace, in agreements and disagreements; its consequences differ as well as the reasons behind it. It was once scientific and sometimes religious, at times objective while at others loaded with political and ideological motives.

Translation became an independent science during the second half of the20th century. Its types, branches and areas of interest were enriched to cope with the material being transferred from one language to another for sciences tend to specialty, especially within the scientific improvements. It thereby necessitates for each domain several branches which require a thorough understanding of the field the translator needs to deal with. The current studyaims to shed a good deal of light on the special place that translation occupies and its role in preserving cultural identities and at the same time promoting coexistence among humans.For this the researchers tried to answer the following research questions:

How did translation contribute to the transfer of thoughts between the Arabs and the occidentals?

In what ways did translation create acculturation between the two civilizations?

1. Acculturation and translation studies:

The Muslim western interactions during the medieval era called for an imperative need of coexistence between two different cultural as well as linguistic identities. This created a hybrid atmosphere that changed the actual contextual thoughts. Acculturation

> ***"acculturation a process, voluntary or involuntary, by which an individual or group adopts one or more of another group's cultural or linguistic traits, resulting in new or blended cultural or linguistic patterns."*** Tavakoli (2012: 8)

Acculturation thereby played an important role in understanding the other. It is then the duty of translators to aid people uncover any misunderstanding by transferring the different cultural aspects to ease communication.

Translation is the act of transferring a text from its source language into a target language keeping the meaning and the form trying to adapt the cultural as well as the contextual qualities. It, thus, goes in tandem with acculturation which aim is to save the cultural and social identity from death.

> ***"Unlike ASSIMILATION, which results in the loss of a person's original cultural or linguistic identity, acculturation involves adaptation and change."*** (Tavakoli, 2012: 8)

Islam encourages interactions and dealings with people from other cultural and religious background. The prophet acquired many technical as well as administrative tactics from foreigners to teach humanity the importance of cultural exchange with respect to Muslim values through mastering other languages especially the most popular and scientific such as Syriac, Greek, Coptic and Hebrew (al-baladhuri, 1932: 32-40).

> ***"Acculturation is frequently an additive process, which can result in two or more identities that coexist harmoniously. The ability to function in a bicultural or even multicultural context is known as situational ethnicity." (Tavakoli 2012: 8)***

2. The role of the Arabs in the transmission of the Greek cultural background:

Allah ordered Muslims to seek knowledge everywhere for it strengthens their faith. The first command from heaven to the prophet peace be upon him is to "read". Reading in Islam is the key to uncover reality and hence to establish a systematic way of living. For this, Muslims, in the past,

encouraged knowledge and eminent scholars of several religions because Islam promoted a peaceful atmosphere for each positive deed to humanity. Donald Campbell (2002: 60-137) explains clearly how did Muslims encourage scholarship and protect the Greek cultural heritage from certain lost. For

> ***"in Europe, the unsettled conditions led to the discouragement of scholarship, while the Caliphs of Baghdad, on the other hand, afforded protection and encouragement to the scholars of all religions"***

Within the rise of Islam and the Muslim interactions with foreigners, the caliphs started to invest in science and education in general. The Arabs researched, commented, refreshed, and developed any scientific knowledge. The translation of the Greek sciences took a first seat and major concern as they were perceived as the most fruitful wealth due to their sophisticated and well organized studies. For instance,

> ***"The history of Greek medicine after the rise of Islam and the development of the Arabic scholars of the East as a people under a single ruler, is but the history of Galenism"***
> Campbell (2002: 60- 137)

According to Cambra (2016: 422-426) there were mainly two schools of translation in charge of transferring the Greek cultural heritage: the Christian Nestorians in Syria and the

Sabeans of Harran. They were interested specifically in astronomy and mathematics.

One of the pioneers to translate from greek into Arabic was Abu Yahya Said Ibn Al-Bitriq (796-806). He translated the Hippocrates, Galen, and Ptolomy's writing. Another gifted translator Abu Zakaria Yuhanna Ibn Masawayh (777-857) who belonged to the caliphate court and was the head director of "Beit el Hikma" (the House of Wisdom)was interested in science for he combined the Hellenistic elements, Christian ideas and practical recipes from the Orient to create an accumulation of alchemy, medicine, and astrology.

Hunayn Ben Ishaq Al-Ibadi (Johannitius) was the great mediator between the two civilizations because he translated from medicine, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, and even magic and oneiromancy. His translation of the Old Testament was considered as the best. Thanks to his finest translation that preserved even some Greek writings that were lost, the Arabs became the meritious successors of the Greeks. He became the director of Beit el Hikma in the era of Al-Mutawakkil.

Hunayn Ben Ishaq's group of scholars, including his son Ishaq ben Hunayn and his nephew Hubaysh ben Al-Hassan, at that time translated many Greek works. To name but a few, the Hippocratic corpus, the writings of Galen and Oribasius, the seven books of Paul of Egina, the Republic of Plato, physics and Magna Moralia of Aristotle, Materia Medica which was the basis of the medieval Islamic Pharmacopoeia. The philosopher Qusta Ben Luqa (860-912) also translated

many Greek works in astronomy, mathematics, mechanics, and natural science.

Though the contributions of Muslims were numerous, many Westerners tried to minimize and even distort the impact of Arabs and their attempt to save human scientific achievements. Bertrand Russell (1987: 390-398) for instance criticized the Arabic touch as being more primitive and lacking authenticity stating that***"Arabic philosophy is not important as original thought. Men like Avicenna and Averroes are essentially commentators."***

He mainly emphasized the idea that the Arabs deeds are but imitations and collections of Greek, Indian and Persian sciences and arts.Russell (1987: 390-398) also viewed the Muslim role from a pessimistic light stating that most of their knowledge and scientific research

> ***"come from Aristotle and the Neoplatonists in logic and metaphysics, from Galen in medicine from Greek and Indian sources in mathematics and astronomy, and among mystics religious philosophy has also an admixture of old Persian beliefs"***

One needs to stress the importance of hybrid race in the development of the human mind. Instead of encouraging harmony, westerns started a series of crusades and devastating wars against Muslims and Arabs in the region leading the

world to stagnation and even created hatred between the two nations. Indeed the Islamic culture stimulus produced new thoughts better than the already existing one and opened up new perspectives as well as aspirations for the humanity.

The Arabs preserved the works of the Greek authors, and finally brought them to Iberia, a peninsula situated in the southern west of Europe, nowadays Spain, Italy, and Portugal along with a huge cultural baggage that they had generated. Toledo was the first great Muslim city conquered by the Christians, in 1085. As in other capitals of al-Andalus, there were libraries and wise men who knew the culture that the Arabs had brought from the East and that aided them in the administration of the region. Owing to this huge background, Muslims were considered as the most dominant, thriving, and powerful nation in the world which merited special respect. The Europeans were keen on imitating the Arabs in the way they learn, speak, and dress.

The influence of Mohammedan civilization on the western civilization in different fields is simply manifested in Sicily and its history. The history of the region reflects the observable touch of the Islamic civilization and its discoveriesin medicine, mathematics, natural sciences, theology, astronomy, and even philosophy. Westerns were fascinated by the Arab achievement whether in Spain or in other places in Europe.

> ***"Writers in Arabic showed some originality in mathematics and in chemistry… in the latter case, as an intellectual result of alchemical researches."***

They were eager to know more about these astonishing advancements in several areas of interest and to acquire more knowledge through direct contact (Russell, 1990: 390-398). Among the European scholars who learned from Arabs we name, the monk John of Lorraine who stayed in Cordoba to study astrology and astrophysics, Gerbert of Aurillac learned el-khawarizmi's numerology, Pedro Alfonso studies astrophysics and medicine to write a book on astrophysics as he was interested in geography (Campbell, 2002: 12).

The Europeans zeal was reflected in their establishment of translation bureaus in Toledo in 1135, in Seville, and in Salerno (during the 11th century and it was specialized in the translation of Muslim medical books). Its aim was to transfer Muslim sciences to their mother Tongues. To name but a few, Gerard of Cremona, Adelard of Bath, Peter de Gallego, Michael Scot, and Hermann Contractus were the best known translators who transmitted many Arab books to their languagesmainly Latin and Greek for the original versions were lost (Campbell, 2002: 6). This in fact shows the importance of Muslim contributions to save the Greek and Latin sciences from certain lost besides their improvement and introduction of new sophisticated branches and so many important disciplines (Mirza &Siddiqui, 1988: 36).

These translations spread over Portugal and Italy where the Renaissance took a first seat. And within the establishment of institutions and universities in Europe, knowledge and learning flourished. The Europeans benefited greatly from the scientific knowledge introduced by the Arabs in the region. In addition to the local languages, Arabic was used as a medium of Instruction that had also a deep influence on many European languages, particularly Portuguese and Spanish that borrowed hundreds of Arabic words (Dunlop, 1988).

3. Transferring the Arab Muslim heritage through Toledo school of translators :

Translation from Arabic into Latin started in the 11th century when the Arabic science was translated to be transferred to Europe. A school was founded in the twelfth century during the reign of Alfonso VII 1126-1157 to pass a wealth of scientific books. It required researchers to translate their great scientific value, as well as the emigration of a large number of Jews scholars. Between the 12th and 13th centuries, a cultural phenomenon known as the School of Translators developed in Toledo and sponsored by the Archbishop Raymond of Toledo (Cambra 2016: 422-426). This denomination should not lead to think of an educational center with professors and students, who worked together or followed common methods to transfer to Europe the wisdom of the East and –in particular- the Arabs.

The Arabs, in their expansion through the lands of Byzantium, inheritor of Greek antiquity, assimilated, translated, studied, commented and preserved the works of those authors, and finally brought them to the Iberian Peninsula along with a huge cultural baggage that they had generated.As in other capitals of al-Andalus, there were libraries and wise men who knew the Arabic culture and from which they had made themselves flourish in the Iberian Peninsula.

With the presence in the city of an important community of Hebrew scholars and the arrival of European Christian intellectuals in the favorable atmosphere created for Toledo that became the cultural mediator between the East and the West.

This Andalusian School played the same role between the 10th and 12th centuries, when the Arabic and Hebrew versions returned to Latin and Castilian, which contributed to the rehabilitation of European thought out of the dormancy of the Middle Ages and to the battle of Renaissance. It is true that this development took place before the reign of Alfonso X, and almost a century before Martin came, but it can be said that Alfonso X and Martin helped a great deal in its development and progress, giving it the care of her scientists, and what they add to this school of interest and care (Center for the Studies of Andalusia and Dialogue of Civilizations)

One of the most important men of this period was Raymond (1126-1157 AD), who realized that there was no escape from acknowledging that the mothers of Arabic books had to be translated by the elite of The Arabs who came to Spain and settled namely the Jews and Muslim scholars of various Islamic sciences.This was a decisive event that had the greatest impact on the fate of Europe.

Alfonso the Tenth played a major role in the promotion of the school and the revival of translations where European science was translated in the Middle Ages in the twelfth century by transferring Arabic, Greek and Jewish knowledge in astronomy, medicine and other sciences, and making it available to everyone who reads and writes in Europe.

The book of the seven parts (in Spanish: Siete Partidas) is one of the most famous books translated from Arabic to Spanish in the reign of Alfonso X (Sadaune, 2006: 44-224). It is the first set of modern laws written in Castile, where it has dealt with and examined many aspects of civil, criminal and other life. It was aimed at reaching some of the Kingdom's unified laws. His original name was the Book of Law, but changed to his current name in the fourteenth century, and it was through the part that was divided. The Arabic-Islamic literature on minerals and stones received special attention by Alfonso X in the late 13th century, where he was credited with translating the book of gems (in Spanish: Lapidario), which was a color image of the original.

The school of Translators of Toledo had two periods separated by a phase of transition. The first was that of Archbishop Raymond, who, in the 12th century, promoted the translation of works of philosophy and religion from Arabic to Latin. Aristotle's books were translated by Arab philosopher such as Avicenna and Alfarabi, by Spanish-Jewish authors such as Ibn Gibril, and the Koran and the Old Testament Psalms were also translated.

On the other hand, in this phase one begins to receive Eastern science in Europe through translations of works that served as textbooks for university students up to the sixteenth century: the Canon of Avicenna and the Art of Galen. Astrology, astronomy, and arithmetic are equally enriched when the works of Al-Razi, Ptolemy, or Al-khawarizmi are poured into Latin. With the arrival of King Alfonso X, already in the thirteenth century, begins the stage of translations of treaties of astronomy, physics, alchemy and mathematics.

The translation movement of Toledo of the twelfth- and thirteenth-centuries thus parallels the translation movement of Baghdad of the ninth- and tenth-centuries. The Arabs translated the classics from Greek into Arabic, and now the same texts were translated from Arabic into Latin. From Toledo the classical texts continued straight into a new European institution – the university. This is how Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas came to read Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina, how Roger Bacon was inspired by the scientific

methods of Ibn al-Haytham, and how Nicolaus Copernicus read the works of Greek and Arabic astronomers.

Renaissance means “rebirth” and what was reborn was more than anything the scholarship of classical antiquity – as saved, translated and elaborated on by the combined efforts of the scholars of Baghdad and Toledo. Europe and the Islamic lands had multiple points of contact during the Middle Ages. The main points of transmission of Islamic knowledge to Europe lay in Sicily and in Spain, particularly in Toledo (Ghazanfar, 2006).

Later Latin translations of these texts originated in multiple places. Toledo, Spain (with Gerard of Cremona's Almagest) and Sicily became the heart of transmission of knowledge from the Islamic world to Europe. (Herbermann, 1913: 39)

Islamic decorative arts were highly valued imports to Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Largely because of its survival, most surviving examples are those that were in the possession of the church. In the early period textiles were especially important, used for church investments, shrouds, hangings and clothing for the elite. Islamic pottery of everyday quality was still preferred to European wares. Medieval art in Sicily is interesting stylistically because combines the Norman, Arab and Byzantine influences in areas such as mosaics and metal inlays, sculpture, and bronze-working (Aubé, 2006: 150-172).

Raymond the Archbishop of Toledo from1126 to 1151, started the first translation efforts at the library of the Cathedral of Toledo, where he led a team of translators who included Arabic Toledans, Jewish scholars, Madrasah teachers, and monks from the Order of Cluny. They translated many works, usually from Arabic into Castilian, and then from Castilian into Latin, as it was the official church language. In some cases, the translator could work directly from Arabic into Latin or Greek. Gerard of Cremona was the most productive of the Toledo translators at the time, translating more than 87 books in Arabic science (Haskins, 1924: 3-8). His translated books include the following:

1. Ptolemy 's Almagest
2. Aristotle's Posterior Analytics, Physics, On the Heavens and the World, On Generation and Corruption, and Meteorology, Nicomachean ;
3. al-Khwarizmi 's On Algebra and Almucabala
4. Archimedes ' On the Measurement of the Circle
5. Euclid 's Elements of Geometry,
6. Jabir ibn Aflah's Elementaastronomica
7. Al-Kindi'sOn Optics
8. al-Farghani's On Elements of Astronomy on the Celestial Motions
9. al-Farabi's On the Classification of the sciences
10. al-Razi (Rhazes) chemical and medical works

11. Thabit ibn Qurra and Hunayn ibn Ishaq (Campbell,
2002: 14-17)

Another important translator was John of Seville. Together with Dominicus Gundissalinus during the early days of the School, he was the main translator from Arabic into Castilian. Mark of Toledo, a Spanish physician and Canon of Toledo, translated the Qur'anand various medical works.

Conclusion:

If we take for granted that science and human epistemology is inherited from one nation to another, it would not be decreed to any nation whatever dominant and powerful an eternal existence. Life is but an alteration among people and sciences are acquired through accumulation, development, and improvement. Therefore, among the means for achieving knowledge is translating that patrimony which is the basis of another civilization.

It goes without saying that translation from the early days is a necessity in the globalized that brought to light the neck breaking change and the need for acculturation to create harmony and thereby lead humanity to progress and prosperity. There are several reasons and motives that make from translation an indispensable ingredient in the developmental plans of many countries and the institutions.

However, the inescapable fact is the actuality and continuousness of the translational act for we translate more every day whether it would be at the level of individuals,

institutions or countries. When scrutinizing ancient or contemporary history we uncover that mutual relationship between sciences, translation, and development.

The current research also shed light on the contributions of both Beit El Hikma and Toledo School to the creation of a harmonized atmosphere between the two cultures. Muslims, who invest in science and opened the doors for researcher from different religions,preserved the Greek heritage from certain lost while Europeans translated the Greek Arabic heritage to improve the sciences. Toledo translators translatedmore than 87 books in Arabic scienceand theholly Quran. They were interested in studying every single detail related to the Islamic civilization through direct contact.

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