



Aspects of Untranslatability in Literary Translation

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ABSTRACT-

Untranslatability is a problem facing those who are involved in the translation studies then and ever. Meanwhile, it is still debatable whether translation is a skillful art or an independent science. Translation is divided into technical and literary. The first was agreed upon that it is accurate while the latter is still being involved in another debate to the extent that some theorists believe in the untranslatability; which means that translation is limited and cannot transfer all kinds of literary texts. The present research paper classifies the phenomenon of untranslatability into three categories each of which will be illustrated through clear examples, from some masterpieces of literature to poetic examples reaching sacred texts. The purpose of this study is to show the lack of an overall theory that might cover these specific texts and send readers back to read the source text - wherever the untranslatability is there - to fully and perfectly understand the meaning, and it will urge authors, poets and professionals to learn source languages in order to deeply understand the source texts.

KEYWORDS-

Untranslatability, Challenge, Literary Translation, English/ Arabic Source Texts.

ملخص باللغة العربية

تعتبر استحالة الترجمة مشكلة عويصة تواجه أولئك الذين يهتمون بدراسات الترجمة والمتخصصين في الميدان. في غضون ذلك، لا يزال النقاش حول ما إذا كانت الترجمة فناً مبدعاً أم علماً مستقلاً. والترجمة مقسمة إلى علمية وأدبية. تم الاتفاق على الأولى على أنها دقيقة بينما لا تزال الثانية تخضع لجدال كبير إلى حد جعل المنظرين يعتقدون باستحالة الترجمة؛ مما يعني أن الترجمة محدودة ولا يمكنها نقل جميع أنواع النصوص الأدبية. تُصنف هذه الورقة البحثية ظاهرة استحالة الترجمة إلى ثلاث فئات، سيتم توضيح كل منها من خلال أمثلة بيّنة، من بعض روائع الأدب والأمثلة الشعرية وصولاً إلى النصوص المقدسة. الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو إظهار عدم وجود نظرية شاملة قد تغطي هذه النصوص المميزة وتعيد القراء مرة أخرى لقراءة النص المصدر – في حالة تعذر الترجمة – لفهم المعنى بشكل كامل ومثالي، وسوف تحث المؤلفين والشعراء والخبراء أيضاً لتعلم لغات المصدر من أجل فهم تلك النصوص بدقة وعمق.

الكلمات الدالة-

استحالة الترجمة، التحدي، الترجمة الأدبية، نصوص المصدر الإنجليزية / العربية.

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to show examples of absolute untranslatability in literary translation. It is widely known that translation is the communication of meaning from one language into another. A pertinent question could be raised here. Do we always need to translate the meaning? Many theories in translation are based on transferring the meaning; only few of them have focused on the importance of the form and the meaning all-together. Nevertheless, what if the intended message is not about the meaning?

Sometimes, the writer of the text intends to convey a challenge, a secret or a code nested in the message. In these cases, the meaning does not matter. In addition, translating the meaning is like going the wrong address. It is when translation deals with another dimension, neither the form, nor the sense, nor the function, it is the challenge, the unique artfulness, the inimitable fingerprint of the writer. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) underline the intrinsic function; it is when the writer does not aim to deliver information “messages could have an intrinsic function independent of their primary informative function. Such a

state can probably be assumed to exist for some modern poetry and it is then the absence of an informative function which makes a text untranslatable.”. (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995, p. 180). In poetry, if we have the meaning without the situation we cannot translate. In many cases, the meaning cannot be in the first position, and the message could be a combination of structure, meaning, context and situation. They added: “There are cases in which the translation depends neither on the structure nor on the context but where the global meaning can only be grasped by someone who knows the situation. (ibid.).

Untranslatability can be defined as the property of a text in a language that has no equivalent in the target language. “Untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the TL for an SL item. (Bassnett, 2002, P.39). According to this definition, we notice that each time the equivalence is absent in the target text, it is considered as a case of untranslatability. As a matter-of-fact, translatability and untranslatability have been a hot debate so far. Hence, it is not a new subject to be discussed hereinafter, but our point here is to show some aspects where the absolute untranslatability appears and even where the techniques devoted to solve similar cases do not work. Catford has defined and classified untranslatability as follows” ... Translation fails—or untranslatability occurs—when it is impossible to build functionally relevant features of the situation into the contextual meaning of the TL text ... Those where the difficulty is *linguistic*, and those where it is *cultural*”, (Catford, 1965, pp. 52-53). Mainly we have two categories of untranslatability which are linguistic and cultural; linguistic is what related to languages i.e. grammar, style, lexis and phonology, which seems to be more difficult and more absolute due to the differences between languages especially if they are not of the same family. Therefore, on the linguistic level settles a lot of translation problems. The cultural untranslatability appears “when a situational feature, functionally relevant for the SL text, is completely *absent* from the culture of which the T L is a part. This may lead to what we have called *cultural untranslatability*.” (Ibid p. 99). This belongs to cultural untranslatability when the target culture cannot afford the situation in the source one. Since, different nations perceive their world and their environment differently and, of course, they do not have the same needs, since people who live in the north pole do not need a camel in their environment while people living in the heart of the desert do not need a polar bear regardless whether or not he can survive a temperature as high as 50 degrees

Celsius. Consequently, the cultural gap is always there, as commented Bassnet; “Catford’s conception of linguistic untranslatability is deemed straightforward in comparison with cultural untranslatability, which is more problematic”, (Bassnett, 2002, p. 39-50). As far as the literary translation is concerned, it is hard to separate a text from its language or even sometimes it is impossible, the more the text is related to its source language, the more the untranslatability occurs. Cultural untranslatability is related to specificities of culture, society and communicative tasks, everything related to the history of the text to its environment and its intertextuality “Texts which are exclusively source-language oriented: Relatively untranslatable.” (Neubert, 1973 in De Pedro, 1999, p. 553), if we go deeper in the matter, we find other impossibilities, but this time is related to the medium used; i.e., phonology or graphology or the medium level used i.e., the levels of grammar and lexis, and there are two limits of untranslatability for restricted translation as stated by Catford;

- (i) *Translation between media is impossible* (i.e. one cannot 'translate' from the *spoken* to the *written* form of a text or vice-versa), (Catford, 1965, p. 54)

It is obvious that we cannot translate directly from a sound system into a written system because we have some sounds that cannot be rendered into written one,

- (ii) (ii) *Translation between either of the medium-levels (phonology and graphology) and the levels of grammar and lexis is impossible* (i.e., one cannot 'translate' from SL *phonology* to TL *grammar*, or from SL *lexis* to TL *graphology* . . . etc.). (ibid.).

As well, one cannot translate from one group into another group; from the lexis of the source text to the graphology of the target text, but this set of impossibilities is widely known to be not practical even by those who are not really professionals in translation.

However, some cases fall into other dimensions out of the abovementioned categories or somewhere in between. Some cases may be found in other dimensions rather than the language and the culture. For example, the uniqueness of individuality and artistic skills; a piece of music in Beethoven symphony cannot be recreated by someone else or Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliette as well cannot be rewritten by another one even if he has the same linguistic

capacities and the same cultural features. This is what we call the uniqueness of art.

Based on some theorists' opinions, who believe in this phenomenon, such as; Catford, Popovic, Von Humboldt, Mounin and George Steiner and many more (e.g., Von Humboldt, Quine, Virginia Woolf, among others) insist that translation is ultimately impossible (Aldahesh, 2014, p.25), but the idea of untranslatability is seen from two different points. The first one, is seen as "absolute" i.e. the equivalence cannot be reached between the two texts, and the latter is "solvable" i.e. when the translator can solve the problem by using some techniques such as adaptation, borrowing, compensation and translator's notes ...etc. Moreover, De Pedro suggested that 'it is assumed that the perfect translation, i.e., one which does not entail any losses from the original is unattainable, especially when dealing with literary translation.' (De Pedro, 1999, pp. 556-557). She also added that not everything can be translated from source text to target text and potential losses are unavoidable "A practical approach to translation must accept that, since not everything that appears in the source text can be reproduced in the target text, an evaluation of potential losses has to be carried out" (ibid, p. 556).

knowing that the concept of equivalence in translation is very essential key concept, many scholars have been working hard to propose a variety of equivalences among formal, dynamic, functional, situational and contextual in order to reach the same effect on target language and approaching a generally accepted translation, "The translator searches for correspondences (formal, **semantic** and/or **functional**) and achieves these at various levels of text organization." (Hatim, 2014, p. 66).

2- Study:

We proceed in our methodology to work on examples because examples are the best to illustrate things; they are presented according to the order of their difficulty in terms of translation i.e. from partially translatable to untranslatable which are prose, poetry and sacred texts respectively:

2-1 Aspects of untranslatability in prose...

A text in literature cannot be read, and perfectly understood without its context, especially its cultural framework and historical background or its linguistic container; otherwise, it could be exposed

to a personal and subjective interpretation in these same regards. Steiner states, “Any thorough reading of a text out of the past of one's own language and literature is a manifold act of interpretation”. (Steiner, 1975, p.17). We cannot take a text out of its cultural or environmental dimensions. Those dimensions are contributing in the definition of the meaning; in other words, the meaning is embedded in language which is bound to culture; the latter, is related to history. For the same idea, Bassnett says “separating language from culture is like the old debate about which came first – the chicken or the egg. Language is embedded in culture; linguistic acts take place in a context and texts are created in a continuum not in a vacuum.” (Bassnett, 2007, p. 23). Therefore, having the cultural dimension into account while translating is a very important step. Consequently, the task of the translator became very hard in these cultural-bound texts; one should trace the whole history and circumstances in which the text in subject was produced such as; the author, the genre, the history of its interpretation and the literary trend era in which the text was first written. So, the history is extremely important in order to better understand the text at hand, “It is, at least it almost always is, impossible to approximate all the dimensions of the original text at the same time.” (José Ortega y Gasset, in Vinuti, 2004, p. 62). The fact that some dimensions are out of reach some are out of control, some are still variable and dynamic. It is impossible to approximate all the dimensions which means impossible to translate.

Steiner added: “One thing is clear: every language-act has a temporal determinant. No semantic form is timeless. When using a word, we wake into resonance, as it were, its entire previous history. A text is embedded in specific historical time; it has what linguists call a diachronic structure.” (Steiner, 1975, p. 24). We cannot ignore space and time. through which the text had been travelling before reaching our era, nor can we ignore the cultural and social container that vehicles that text in a constant –changing environment.

Even in the same society if that one uses two different languages, they express themselves in very distinctive ways while having the same culture and sharing the same values, “No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached”, quoted in (Bassnett, 2002, p. 22).

The idea of synonymy is not always accepted to help translating in the same language; accordingly, when translating into another language, the gap is much larger. Moreover, the synonymy affects the understanding and the reaction of the reader/listener to a given message. "No word in one language is completely equivalent to a word in another language", and that "each language expresses a concept in a slightly different manner, with such and such a denotation, and each language places it on a rung that is higher or lower on the ladder of feeling." (Von Humboldt, in Proshina, 2008, p. 27).

According to De Pedro, aesthetic function is too difficult to be rendered into the target text, and the reason behind is that aesthetic is bound to the form of the source text. Compared to other functions such as informative function, which is bound to the content of the source text, "A text with an aesthetic function will contain elements which will make its reproduction in a different language difficult, whereas a text with a merely informative function will be easier to translate" (De Pedro, 1999, p. 552). Mainly, aesthetic functions can be found in prose and poetry, where rhetorical devices and figures of speech are widely used, where the meaning is hidden somewhere behind the words and needs to be traced. Nevertheless, when the meaning is closely bound to these words, they become inseparable, which constitutes a problematic in translation "The sense may be translated, while the form often cannot. And the point where form begins to contribute to sense is where we approach untranslatability" (Hatim and Munday, 2004, p.10).

George Steiner claims that all translations are attempts to find a solution and somehow an approximation to get the reader closer to the original text, so there is no translation perfect one hundred per cent. Sometimes, translation is hard even in the same language especially what concerns old texts as stated Steiner "much of Western literature, from Villon to Genet is only partly legible". (Steiner, 1975, p. 24), due to the fact that languages are not alike in structure and lexis. It is almost impossible to render the subtle meanings and the cultural and aesthetic connotations hidden in literary works which are, most of the time, written in a high language level till it becomes a linguistic bound material. The latter produces the phenomenon of untranslatability as confirmed again by Steiner; "When literature seeks to break its public linguistic mould and become idiolect, when it seeks untranslatability, we have entered a new world of feeling." (Ibid p.183).

Another proof of untranslatability is the retranslation of an old text repeatedly. A proof that the translation is not convincing. We need to create a new translation version to meet new needs. Since each generation has a different vision, a new point of view and a modern understanding perspective. As well, the critics that might be granted to each version urges translators to make some improvements. One cannot repeat the same work twice, what if that work is translated repeatedly; in other words, we cannot repeat the same work in the same language. Can we repeat it in a new language? “A repetition of a work is impossible and that the translation is only an apparatus that carries us to it, it stands to reason that diverse translations are fitting for the same text.” (José Ortega y Gasset, in Vinuti, 2004, p. 62).

Examples of Prose are some literary masterpieces that they are believed impossible to be translated due to challenge they have while the meaning comes in lower position.

Example 1: A speech delivered more than one thousand years ago to show one's linguistic and elocution skills

• الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الْمَلِكِ الْمَحْمُودِ ، الْمَالِكِ الْوَدُودِ ، مُصَوِّرِ كُلِّ مَوْتُودٍ ، وَمَوْثِلِ كُلِّ مَطْرُودٍ ، وَسَاطِحِ الْمَهَادِ ، وَمَوْطِدِ الْأَطْوَادِ ، وَمُرْسِلِ الْأَمْطَارِ ، وَمُسَهِّلِ الْأَوْطَارِ ، عَالِمِ الْأَسْرَارِ وَمُدْرِكِهَا ، وَمُدَمِّرِ الْأَمْلاَكِ وَمَهْلِكِهَا ، وَمَكْوِرِ الدُّهُورِ وَمُكَبِّرِهَا ، وَمَوْرِدِ الْأُمُورِ وَمُصَدِّرِهَا ، عَمَّ سَمَاءَهُ ، وَكَمَّلَ رُكَامَهُ وَهَمَلَ ، وَطَاوَعَ السُّؤَالَ وَالْأَمَلَ ، وَأَوْسَعَ الرِّمْلَ وَأَزْمَلَ ، أَحْمَدَهُ حَمْدًا مَمْدُودًا ، وَأَوْحَدَهُ كَمَا وَحَدَ الْأَوَاهِ ، وَهُوَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ، وَلَا صَادِعَ لِمَا عَدَلَ لَهُ وَسِوَاهُ ، أَرْسَلَ مُحَمَّدًا عَلِمًا لِلْإِسْلَامِ ، وَإِمَامًا لِلْحُكْمِ ، مُسْتَدِيدًا لِلرِّعَايَةِ ، وَمَعْطَلًا أَحْكَامِ وَدِ وَ سِوَايَ ، أَعْلَمَ وَعَلِمَ ، وَحَكَمَ وَأَحْكَمَ ، وَأَصَلَ الْأَصُولَ ، وَمَهَّدَ وَأَكَّدَ الْمَوْعُودَ وَأَوْعَدَ ، أَوْصَلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ الْإِكْرَامَ ، وَأَوْدَعَ رُوحَهُ الْإِسْلَامَ ، وَرَحِمَ آلَهُ وَأَهْلَهُ الْكِرَامَ ، مَا لَمَعَ رَائِلٌ وَمَلَعَ دَالٌ ، وَطَلَعَ هِلَالٌ وَسَمِعَ إِهْلَالٌ .

إِعْمَلُوا رَحِمَكُمُ اللَّهُ أَصْلِحَ الْأَعْمَالَ ، وَأَسْلُكُوا مَصَالِحَ الْحَلَالِ ، وَأَطْرَحُوا الْحَرَامَ وَدَعَوْهُ ، وَأَسْمَعُوا أَمْرَ اللَّهِ وَعَوَّهُ ، وَصَلُّوا الْأَرْحَامَ وَرَاعَوْهَا ، وَعَاصُوا الْأَهْوَاءَ وَأَرْدَعَوْهَا ، وَصَاحَرُوا أَهْلَ الصَّلَاحِ وَالْوَرَعِ ، وَصَارَمُوا رَهْطَ اللَّهْوِ وَالطَّمَعِ ، وَمَصَاهَرَكُمُ أَطْهَرَ الْأَحْرَارِ مَوْلِدًا ، وَأَسْرَاهُمُ سَوْدَدًا ، وَأَحْلَامَكُمُ مَوْرِدًا ، وَهِيَ هِيَ أَمَّكُمْ وَحَلَّ حَرَمَكُمُ مَمْلَكًا عَرُوسَكُمُ الْمَكْرَمَةَ ، وَمَا مَهْرُ لَهَا كَمَا مَهْرُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُمَّ سَلَمَةَ ، وَهُوَ أَكْرَمُ صَهْرٍ أَوْدَعَ الْأَوْلَادِ ، وَمَلِكٌ مَا أَرَادَ ، وَمَا سَهْلٌ مَمْلَكَةٍ ، وَلَا هَمٌّ وَلَا وَكْسٌ مَلَاحِمَةٍ وَلَا وَصْمٌ ، أَسْأَلَ اللَّهُ حَكْمَ أَحْمَادٍ وَصَالَةَ ، وَدَوَامَ إِسْعَادِهِ ، وَأَهْلِهِمْ كِلَا إِصْلَاحِ حَالِهِ ، وَالْأَعْدَادَ لِمَا لَهُ وَمَعَادَهُ ، وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ السَّرْمَدُ ، وَالْمَدْحُ لِرَسُولِهِ أَحْمَدَ (توفيق، 2012، ص.

(34)

A proposed Translation of the first few lines as an illustration that the content is translatable whatever the level and the perfection of the translation, is:

Praise to Allah Who is the Praiseworthy, the Affectionate, the Owner of everything, the One Who brings into being every creature. The Ultimate end of everyone who is excluded. the One Who spreads flat the earth, Who sets up the mountains, Who sends down the rain, Who facilitates the attainment of goals, Who knows the secrets and realizes them, Who destroys the possessions and annihilates them, Who folds out times and repeats them, Who causes matters and creates them...

The above text is a sermon. This sermon is composed of 250 words so it is a complete discourse, a normal speech. At the level of formal equivalence or the dynamic equivalence according to Nida's it is translatable though it was perfectly rhymed and well-tooled with rhetorical devices, but the key issue here is not at these levels, it is what I called the challenge. The writer, here, challenged his rivals and his readers to produce something similar while showing off his linguistic capacities and his artistic uniqueness. The fact that this speech is only written by forty-five per cent of the Arabic language alphabet, so fifty-five per cent is deleted, so this was a challenge at that time to write articles using only the half of the alphabets showing writing skills as well as the flexibility of Arabic language.

Example 2:

The same author wrote another speech but this time the challenge is different.

" حمدت من عظمت منته، وسبغت وسبقت رحمته غضبه، وتمت كلمته، ونفذت مشيئته، وبلغت قضيته حمدت حمد مقرر بريوبيته، متخضع لعبوديته، متنصل من خطيئته، متفرد بتوحيده، مؤمل منه مغفرة تنجيه يوم يشغل عن فصيلته وبنيه، ونستعينه ونسترشده ونستهديه، ونؤمن به ونتوكل عليه. وشهدت له شهود مخلص موقن، وفردته تفريد مؤمن متيقن، ووحدته توحيد عبد مدعن، ليس له شريك في ملكه، ولم يكن له ولي في صنعه، جل عن مشير ووزير، وعن عون ومعين ونصير ونظير علم ولن يزول كمثلته شيء، وهو بعد كل شيء. رب معتز بعزته، متمكن بقوته، متقدس بعلوه، متكبر بسموه، ليس يدركه بصر، ولم يحط به نظر قوي منبع، بصير سميع، رؤوف رحيم، عجز عن وصفه من يصفه، وضل عن نعته من يعرفه، قرب فبعد وبعد فقرب، يجيب دعوة من يدعوه،

ويزقه ويحبوه، ذو لطف خفي، ويطش قوي، ورحمة موسعة، وعقوبة موجعة، رحمته جنة عريضة موقنة، وعقوبته جحيم ممدودة موبقة، وشهدت بيعت محمد رسوله وعبداه وصفيه ونبيه ونجيه وحبيبه وخليه". (توفيق، 2012، ص. 33).

Another Challenge by the same writer where he wrote a one hundred- and sixty-six-word sermon without using the 'Alif'; the Arabic alphabet first letter, which is considered essential and no one can write without using it. It is an equivalent in position to the letter 'A' in English, but in frequency the Arabic one is more crucial and widely used. The result is that no one could imitate this writer in producing similar texts in a similar system. In other words, they could not translate it into the same language preserving the same conditions. This speech came as a challenge and it is unique in its kind.

2-2 Aspects of untranslatability in poetry.

It is widely known that the translation of poetry is extremely hard if not impossible. Due to many parameters, namely the strong relationship between the meaning and the matched sound to the extent that once we lose the sound, we lose the meaning, and we have the rhyme and the metre that go side by side. A debate has been raised so far. If we cannot work on both, should we opt for metrical or rhymed translation? Should we keep the metre and lose the rhyme or vice versa? Anyway, a great part of the verse flavour would be lost as if by Oscar Wilde's play "*The Importance of Being Earnest*" that encapsulates a pun that refers at the same time to proper name Ernest and the quality of being *earnest*.

One of the most linguists that objects the translatability of poetry is Jacobson who declared openly that poetry is technically untranslatable "because complete equivalence (in the sense of synonymy or sameness) cannot take place in any of his categories, Jacobson declares that all poetic art is therefore technically untranslatable" (Basnett, 2002, p.24). In poetry, the meaning is embedded in the form and the sound of a poetic text as well; consequently, one cannot separate the three parts from one another without damaging the overall structure. Steiner puts forward "Traditionally, the weight of the argument bears on poetry. Here the welding of matter and form is so close that no dissociation is admissible." (Steiner, 1975, p. 241). The meaning itself can be multifold; that is, one word gives a plethora of meanings, and the meaning that we get first is according to our schemata and according to our desire. Meanwhile, the one left out

might be the intended one. Meanings could be superimposed as stated Vinay and Darbelnet “It is what Bally refers to as an accumulation of meanings. In such cases; the translation may be able to retain only one signified, preferably that which in the context has priority” (Hatim and Munday, 2004, p. 138). According to that, accumulation of meaning is when the translator could choose only one, Vinay and Darbelnet concluded that “This is the reason why it is almost impossible to fully translate poetry.” (ibid).

There have been plenty of practical cases which have proven the untranslatability of poetry, and this is a witness signed by Nabokov “So here are three conclusions I have arrived at: 1. It is impossible to translate *Onegin* in rhyme...”. (Vladimir Nabokov, in Vinuti, 2004, p. 83). Nabokov confessed here the impossibility to translate *Onegin*’s poems in rhyme even though the other two points were possible; that is, to describe rhymes with footnotes, and the third one was the possibility to translate *Onegin* with reasonable accuracy by changing many poetic parameters. In conclusion, it is impossible since one dimension is collapsed.

Poetry:

Examples of poetry are some verses miraculously composed. Unusually, if we read the verse from right to left it means eulogy when reversed, it would mean invective poetry, totally the opposite, and other verses can be read without moving our lips; another collection of verses without moving our tongues, some when reversed, they mean the same thing without any changes and so on.

Before starting the set of ten proposed examples from Arabic into English, let us have this illustrative example purely in English written some time ago by Carroll Lewis

I often wondered when I cursed,
 Often feared where I would be
 Wondered where she’d yield her love,
 When I yield, so will she.
 I would her will be pitied!
 Cursed be love! She pitied me (Gardner, 1996, p. 19)

I often wondered when I cursed,
 Often feared where I would be
 Wondered where she ’d yield her love,

When	I	yield,	so	will	she.
I	would	her	will	be	pitied!
Cursed	be	love!	She	pitied	me

It is called a square poem. It seems like a perfect matrix that can be read horizontally and vertically, and it is more unlikely to be translated into another language.

I do not think Carroll Lewis wrote the above-mentioned short poem to deliver the meaning or the content rather than delivering the challenge, the uniqueness and the idea of inimitability. He wanted to show his artistry to his readers. Certainly, this kind of material cannot be translated into another language. This is the absolute impossibility to render this into a new language, even though, this poem is not of great literature.

Example 1: The following verses can be read from right to left to show Eulogy, and from left to right to show satire or invective poetry (by reversing words)

Eulogy when read from right to left

طلبوا الذي نالوا فما حرموا ❖ ❖ ❖ رفعت فما حطت لهم رتب

وهبوا وما تمت لهم خلق ❖ ❖ ❖ سلموا فما أودى بهم عطب (توفيق، 2012، ص. 27)

Eulogy verses in English, a proposed translation only to show that its content is translatable nevertheless, what I called the challenge of the writer; this is what is intended by the message.

They were granted what they asked for
 So they were highly ranked for good positions
 They were gifted good manners and characters
 So they lived peacefully nothing to hurt them

Satire or invective when read from left to right on the level of words

رتب لهم حطت فما رفعت ❖ ❖ ❖ حرموا فما نالوا الذي طلبوا

عطب بهم أودى فما سلموا ❖ ❖ ❖ خلق لهم تمت وما وهبوا (توفيق، 2012، ص. 28)

This is a close translation into English to prove that the meaning is translatable.

Ranks for them were lowered not to being higher any more

They were deprived from reaching what they have asked for
Calamity upon them was descended and cannot be avoided
A complete degradation for them was set nothing to be gained

Example 2: This time, the reverse occurred on the level of letters and not words
Eulogy:

باهي المراحم ، لابس كرما ، قدير مسند
باب لكل مؤمل ، غنم لعمرك مرفدُ (توفيق، 2012. ص. 31)

When letters are reversed, they can be seen as Invective Poetry

دنس مرید قامر ❖❖❖ كسب المحارم لا يهاب
دفر، مكر، معلم ❖❖❖ نغل، مؤمل كل باب (توفيق، 2012. ص. 31)

Example 3: A poem of eulogy: if we read only the first half of each verse, it will be meaning a satire or invective

إذا أتيت نوفل بن دارم ❖❖❖ أمير مخزوم وسيف هاشم
وجدته أظلم كل ظالم ❖❖❖ على الدنانير أو الدراهم
وأبخل الأعراب والأعاجم ❖❖❖ بعرضه وسره المكاتم
لا يستحي من لوم كل لائم ❖❖❖ إذا قضى بالحق في الجرائم
ولا يراعي جانب المكارم * ❖❖❖ في جانب الحق وعدل المحاكم
يقرع من يأتيه سن نادم ❖❖❖ إذا لم يكن من قدم بقادم (توفيق، 2012. ص. 28)

The reading of the first half of each verse

إذا أتيت نوفل بن دارم ❖❖❖❖❖❖ وجدته أظلم كل ظالم
وأبخل الأعراب والأعاجم ❖❖❖❖❖❖ لا يستحي من لوم كل لائم
ولا يراعي جانب المكارم ❖❖❖❖❖❖ يقرع من يأتيه سن نادم

Example 4: The following verses can be read from right to left and vice versa without any change in the meaning at the level of letters

قمر يضطر عمدا مشرق ❖❖❖ رش ماء دمع طرف يرمق
قد حلا كاذب وعد تابع ❖❖❖ لعبا تدعوا بذاك الحدق
قبس يدعوا سناء ، إن جفا ❖❖❖ فجنناه انس وعد يسبق
قرا في لف نداها قلبه ❖❖❖ بلقاها دنف لا يفرق (توفيق، 2012. ص. 31)

Example 5: We can read the following verse without moving our lips

قطعنا على قطع القطا قطع ليلة ❖ ❖ ❖ سراعاً على الخيل العتاق اللاحق

Example 6: We can read the following verse without moving our tongues

آب همي وهم باحبابي ❖ ❖ ❖ همهم ما بهم وهمي ما بي

Example 7: A stanza of four lines, all their letters without dotted letters, which means forty-five percent of Arabic alphabet, is used.

الحمد لله الصمد حال السرور والكمد

الله لا اله إلا الله مولك الأحد

أول كل أول أصل الأصول والعمد

الحوال والطول له لا درع إلا ما سرد (توفيق، 2012، ص. 28)

Example 8: Verses in which each word containing the letter « SHIN » in English « Ch » or « Sh »

فأشعاره مشهورة ومشاعره وعشترته مشكورة وعشائره

شماثله معشوقة كشمولة ومشهده ومستبشر ومعاشره

شكور ومشكور وحشو مشاشه شهامة 'شمير يطيش' مشاجره (توفيق، 2012، ص. 27)

Example 9: The following verse lines can be read vertically or horizontally

ألوم صديقي ❖ ❖ ❖ وهذا محال

صديق أحبه ❖ ❖ ❖ كلام يقال

وهذا كلام ❖ ❖ ❖ بليغ الجمال

محال يقال ❖ ❖ ❖ الجمال خيال (توفيق، 2012، ص. 26)

Example 10: two lines of four verses of Eulogy when their words reversed they become Invective poetry

Eulogy:

حلموا فما ساء لهم شيم ❖ ❖ ❖ سمحوا فما شحت لهم منن

سلموا فما زلت لهم قدم ❖ ❖ ❖ رشدوا فما ضلت لهم سنن (توفيق، 2012، ص. 30)

Invective :

منن لهم شحت فما سمحوا ❖ ❖ ❖ شيم لهم ساءت، فما حلموا
سنن لهم ضلت فما رشدوا ❖ ❖ ❖ قدم لهم زلت فما سلموا (توفيق، 2012. ص. 30).

2-3 Aspects of Untranslatability in Sacred Texts

No one can deny that the sacred text is a highly precise and perfectly composed and organized. From a hermeneutic point of view reading a text or understanding it or even translating it cannot be one hundred percent guaranteed whatever we do, no matter we try as stated Chau:

- a) there is no truly 'objective' understanding;
- b) prejudices' are unavoidable and can be positive;
- c) there is no final or definitive reading;
- d) the interpreter cannot but change the meaning of the SL;
- e) no translation can represent its source text fully;
- f) understanding is not always explicable. (Chau 1984b :74-6, in Shaheen, 1991, p. 34)

“...context cannot be denied. It pays attention not only to the cultural and the pragmatic context, but also to the reader's 'emotional' context, i.e. his interaction with and reaction to the SLT” (Ibid, p.35). He added about the reaction of the reader that where and when the reading process took place, all these factors combined together can determine the meaning: “This is a subjective process where no final reading is definitive, and no fixed context can be identified. The result of this subjectivity is a kind of free translating ...”. (Ibid, p.35). Also, uniqueness in arts is obviously clear as it is said “you cannot wash your feet in the same river twice”. For example, a given novel cannot be repeated by the same author; hence, what about by another author in the same language or by a translator in a different language as long as translation is sometimes seen as a matter of rewriting? George Mounin presented three facts illustrating the phenomenon of untranslatability based on modern linguistics as follows:

- (1) Personal experience in its uniqueness is untranslatable.
- (2) In theory the base units of any two languages (e.g., phonemes, monemes, etc.) are not always comparable.
- (3) Communication is possible when account is taken of the respective situations of speaker and hearer, or author and translator. (Bassnett, 2002, p. 43-44)

Concerning a sacred text can be even more sensitive, more precise and more specific, which needs to be treated carefully. It needs a special way to dealing with them, they might be falsified by trying to explain, interpret or translate them, “Historically, the social issues may well pre-date the linguistic ones, and be rooted in the belief that sacred texts containing arcane truths must not be profaned by explicating, disseminating or translating them” (Hermans, 2009, p. 300). The sacred text is, as well, a multidimensional text that goes beyond the human capacity. People of the book that is Jewish, Christians and Muslims believe in the same God, but in different ways. The common ground among them is that they believe that God is the Most Powerful, the All Knowing, the All Wise, the All-Hearing, the All-seeing. If so, His Word must be similar accordingly. Jeremy Munday sees that;

It is easy to see how, in the translation of sacred texts, where 'the Word of God' is paramount, there has been such an interconnection of fidelity (to both the words and the perceived sense), spirit (the energy of the words and the Holy Spirit) and truth (the 'content'). (Munday, 2001, p. 24)

We still do not have a general theory of translation that covers all sorts of texts in a constant way which makes of translating a likewise text a risky job that can lead to a grave and heavy loss “the same dichotomy is stated: as between 'letter' and 'spirit', 'word' and 'sense'. Though the rendition of sacred texts poses a problem which is at once special and central to the whole theory of translation.”. (Steiner, 1975, p.262).

Sacred Texts:

Examples of ‘sacred text’ are those which believed to be the word of God, and if so, it is incomparable with human speech; therefore, we cannot apply on them the same linguistic and translation theories applied on human speech. They are rhetorically unsurpassable, having an extra-ordinary eloquence, a unique stylist perfection; they are considered unmatched, unapproachable and inimitable high quality, We proceed with only one example because it is a little bit complicated and long enough to occupy a remarkable part in this research paper.

Example 01:

The following example is a verse containing 4 words and 19 letters. Its meaning can be translated easily, but once translated a big part is left behind, which is its mathematical dimension, so it is miraculously built into mathematical symmetry and sequences.

The sacred scripture is something different from human made texts; it is plenty of secrets, codes and even miracles. One of them is the code of 19. It is believed that this code exists in Torah, Bible and Quran.

A Jewish theologian called Gershom Kiprisci, the chairman of Leiden Institute is working on that project. To practice we need a system to convert letters into their numerical values in Arabic is called Abjad Numeral System. Similar systems were Gematria in Hebrew and Isopsephy in Greek (Mussin, 2012).

The following table shows the Abjad system where each letter corresponding its numerical value.

Table 01: Abjad Numeral System

Letter	أ	ب	ج	د	ه	و	ز	ح	ط
value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Letter	ى	ك	ل	م	ن	س	ع	ف	ص
value	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
Letter	ق	ر	ش	ت	ث	خ	ذ	ض	ظ
value	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900
Letter	غ								
value	1000								

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God the most Merciful the most Powerful

According to this translation, the meaning is closely translated; therefore, the problem here is that the text is based on mathematics, math is embedded in this text.

Table02: the verse with its numeral system

ا	ل	ر	ح	ي	م	ا	ل	ر	ح	م	ن	ا	ل	ل	ه	ي	س	م
01	30	200	08	10	40	01	30	200	08	40	60	01	30	30	05	02	60	4
289						329						66				102		
786																		

This is how to render the verse into its numerical values and put it to the test. It is above represented into four levels explained hereinafter

The first level is the verse in separated letters.

The second level containing the numerical values of each letter.

The third level containing the values of each word.

The fourth level is one value of the whole verse.

The verse contains 19 letters. The number 19 is divisible by 19 (Mussin, 2012).

Numerical value of each word and the total value is 786

$$102+66+329+289= 786$$

Remarkably we have 4, 19, 786 if we join them together, we will find 419786 a six-digit number divisible by 19 (Mussin, 2012).

Let's now write the sequence number of each word

1 2 3 4 then we add number of letters of each word

1 3 2 4 3 6 4 6 the sum value of that is divisible by 19 (Mussin, 2012).

-If we add the number of letters of each word

1 2 3 4 to the number of letters of next word

1 3 2 7 3 13 4 19 we get a ten-digit number divisible by 19 (Mussin, 2012).

-If we add the numerical value of each word to the number of letter to this word

1 105 2 70 3 335 4 295 we will have a fifteen-digit number divisible by 19 (Mussin, 2012).

-If we change one letter, shift it, or remove it. This mathematical entity will collapse, I wonder what would be happening if we translate it. No doubt that, this text is untranslatable, this cannot happen twice.

-If we write the number of letters in a word, then the numerical value of each word, then the numerical value of each letter in this word separately, we will get 48-digit number divisible by 19

3 10226040 4 66130305 632913020084050 628913020081040 (Mussin, 2012).

-If we write the numerical value of each letter then its sequence in the verse, we will get a 62-digit number d/19, this needs a super computer to make a similar calculation.

21 402 603 14 305 306 57 18 309 20010 811 4012 5013 114 3015 20016 817 1018 4019 the obtained result is divisible by 19 (Mussin, 2012).

It is obvious that it is absolutely untranslatable, and translation would be a destructive tool once we think it might help. We need a super computer or a high precision calculator to compute these numbers and handle these operations, knowing that 15-digit numbers are the maximum capacity in one's smart phone while in a personal computer calculator is 16-digit numbers; beyond that it is over loaded.

Not only this concerns that verse, also if we count the frequency of each word throughout the book the found number is divisible by 19 (Mussin, 2012).

First word is repeated 19 times 19 is divisible by 19

Second word is repeated 2698 times 2698 is divisible by 19

Third word is repeated 57 times 57 is divisible by 19

Fourth word is repeated 114 times 114 is divisible by 19

The sum of quotients as well is divisible by 19

$(1+ 142+ 3+6) = 152$ d/19 (Mussin, 2012).

3- Results:

3-1 Prose:

Examples concerning prose are considered masterpieces for the same reason; they were kept and preserved for ages in the Arabic language legacy. Otherwise, they would have been considered normal texts. Remarkably, in the first two examples, we can remark that they are very normal discourses in their form and in their meaning. Based on that, we can offer a close translation to make the reader understand what had been discussed over, but the problem is how to translate the challenge they represent which is writing a similar passage with only a 45 percent of the language alphabet. I tried to do this in English, but it seemed that it was impossible, especially if vowels are among the deleted letters, knowing that in English we can only write 20 words without vowels and the letter “y”, most of them are interjections and puzzle words by which it is impossible to make sentences.

The second example concerns another speech containing 160 words but the challenge this time is that it was written without the first and the most important letter in Arabic language, so imagine that we delete the letter A from English alphabet and try to translate the same speech.

3-2 Poetry:

Concerning poetry, it is widely known among translators and linguists that the translation of poetry is extremely difficult if not impossible. By adding to this difficulty another dimension which is the challenge made by some poets to compete each other, so his or her poem can be imitated. There is a wide range in Arabic poetry in Arabs' history in this field. The chosen examples are to illustrate that challenge.

The first example is a poem of two lines of four verses made specially to eulogize a certain tribe, but if we reverse these lines in the opposite word order, we will get an invective poetry to the same tribe, so it seems miraculous and clearly represents the impossibility of translation, the absolute untranslatability. I tried to translate it while preserving the meaning, the structure and the rhyme, but it was impossible to keep the unique artfulness of this poem, and I think that was the final aim of the poet.

The following example represents the same idea of the first example, but this time, we reverse letters not words as in the first one. Definitely, when letters are reversed, we got an invective poetry instead of Eulogy. Remarkably, it is from the extreme to the extreme, thanks to the flexibility in that language that allows this maneuver, with a quite sureness. If this kind of material had been produced into another language it could not have been translatable into Arabic.

In the third example, the same idea was kept but with a different strategy; i.e. to render an eulogy into a satire but through reading only the first half of each verse line, amazingly incredible unlikeness of artistry.

The fourth example contains a stanza of four verses, each verse is composed of two lines. When we reverse the direction of reading, we get exactly the same meaning, so eight verses can be read from right to left or left to right without any change in the meaning of that poetry.

What concerns the fifth example is to read two verses without moving one's lips. It seems quite impossible to keep the same reaction

or giving the same results once it is translated to another language, whatever this language is.

The sixth example, as well, is a line of two verses when we read them, we do not need to move our tongues. Obviously, this sequence of sounds and letters cannot occur twice in one language. What if we seek a corresponding one in another language using translation?

The example number seven is a stanza containing four verses written only with letters, which are not dotted which represents only forty-five per cent of the alphabets. Similar to the text above mentioned in the prose section, once again is this translatable?

The eighth example is composed of four verses well rhymed and beautifully expressed, composed of twenty words each one of them containing a specific letter “shin” equivalent to “Ch” in English, frequently repeated with its strong sounds marking the linguistic capacities of the poet.

Example number nine is a stanza of four line containing sixteen words well rhymed and perfectly connected, also it can be read horizontally and vertically with exactly the same meaning and same words, similar to Carroll Lewis’ square poem, which is horizontally and vertically readable.

The last example is again a two-line poem of four verses of Eulogy. When its words are reversed, they become Invective poetry. Certainly, we can translate their meaning, but never keep the artistry uniqueness the same.

4- Discussion:

What we can conclude after having read all these examples is that the absolute untranslatability does exist, it is where we cannot find the equivalent in the target languages even if through using some solutions suggested by many theorists to solve similar problems. As well, in most cases, we cannot recover what has been lost by implementing the so proposed techniques such as, adaptation, compensation, translator’s note and so on. Indefinitely, the phenomenon of untranslatability, here, is obvious because the main point is lost and cannot be recovered once these texts are rendered in a new language as these aspects are closely, tightly and intricately related to the language and culture they are embedded in. Once taken out they lose their flavour and their magic and become artless work.

- Translation in the field of poetry or sensitive texts is being taught only for a pedagogical necessity or cultural reasons.
- A lack of a general theory that covers every genre of texts in Literary translation, all the previous translation theories were made and based on human speech and cannot deal with the word of God that is beyond both linguistic capacity and artistic imagination of Man.
- Urging readers to go back to source texts to find out the real flavour of these works that would help people learn new languages and be opened to other cultures, knowing that the average of acquiring a new language could take no more than two years, thanks to nowadays-new teaching/learning methods and advanced technologies.
- Learning new languages strengthens effective communication amongst nations which might lead to settle peace in our world.
-

N.B. The pieces of above-mentioned poetry belong to the public domain since they were produced hundreds of years ago.

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