

Translating Dramatic Dialogues: Possible or Not?

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Introduction

Translating literary texts especially dramatic dialogues having nonstandard dialects in the source text is a real challenge to any translator no matter how competent he/ she is. This challenge is due to various factors related to different degrees of styles used by playwrights in a play, a short story or a novel. Playwrights present their characters by providing information about the kind of language or dialect being used by the characters. Moreover, portraying characters also reflect the source text's dialect forms as well as other important features such as their educational and regional/geographical backgrounds....etc.

Therefore, the Arab translator is faced with the challenge of having a limited choice of styles in Arabic, unlike other foreign languages as we know. He /She has only the classical Arabic variety to employ in translating from a foreign language into the Arabic target language .In other words, the problems are complicated further due to the diglossic situation of Arabic Diglossia, according to Ferguson (1964 p.435) is defined as:

“A relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language, there is a very divergent, highly codified superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation”.

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In other words, this is a description of what is usually referred to as classical or formal Arabic. This form of Arabic is contrasted with the other non-standard varieties of the language used in daily conversation among Arabs, who also have various forms of dialects according to their regional or geographical countries. Moreover, this non-standard variety of Arabic is not used in writing except by some Arab playwrights who resort to using it sometimes in addition to the standard classical Arabic in literary dramatic dialogues. It must also be mentioned that this non-standard variety of Arabic could be considered, when compared with the High standard variety of Arabic, as a “stigma” if it is distorted intentionally through phonological or syntactic manipulation by a writer. In fact, Hatim and Mason (1990, p. 43), made use of this term when they claimed that using non-standard dialects may cause some problems if used in translation even though there can be a purpose behind using such dialects. They said that, “The aim will be to bring out the user’s social/linguistic ‘stigma’, not necessarily by opting for a particular regional variety but by modifying the standard itself. The user’s status may have to be reflected not primarily through phonological features but through non-standard handling of grammar or deliberate variation of the lexis in the target language”. On the other hand, Asfour (2007) may not agree with this suggestion. That is modifying the standard form of Arabic, which does not have different levels of styles or variation as it is the case with other languages such as English. In fact, Newmark (1988, p. 14) suggested 7 “stylistic scales” that can be explained through the following English- Arabic translation (both varieties of Arabic will be used to demonstrate fus’ha or classical Arabic and the Algerian spoken Arabic):

1. Officialese: The consumption of any nutriments whatsoever is categorically prohibited in this establishment.

fus’ha Arabic:

يحرم قطعيا إستهلاك الطعام في هذه المؤسسة

/yuharam iqatiyan istihlak ataam fi hathi almoasasa/

2. Official: The consumption of nutriments is prohibited.

Fus’ha Arabic:

يمنع إستهلاك الطعام

/youmna istihlak attam/.

3. Formal: You are requested not to consume food in this establishment.

Fus’ha Arabic:

مطلوب منكم عدم تناول الطعام هنا

/matloob minkum adam tanawol attam huna/.

4. Neutral: Eating is not allowed here.

Algerian spoken Arabic:

المأكلة ممنوعة هنا

/Lmakla mamnuʕa hna/.

5. Informal: Please don't eat here.

Algerian spoken Arabic:

تعيش الله يرحم لوالدين متاكلش هنا، يرحم باباك متاكلش هنا و لبغيت ربي متاكلش هنا

/Tʕiʃ, ɪlah yərħəm waldik matakulʃ hna/, /yərħəm babak matakulʃ hna/, /labɣit rəbbi matakulʃ hna/.

6. Slang: Lay off the nosh.

Algerian spoken Arabic:

حبس تمهراس و باركا ما دك و باركا متاكلش

/ħəbbəs təhras/, /barka ma duk/, /barka matakulʃ/.

7. Taboo: Lay off (4 letters word+ing) nosh.

Algerian spoken Arabic:

حبس تمرهيج والرهج

/ħəbbəs təmərhidʒ/, /rahdʒ/.

The illustrations above show the presence of various styles starting from the highest to the least formal forms in Arabic. It is, therefore, easy to specify which situation is needed to use a certain variety.

A case in point is also, the play by Shaw, *Pygmalion*. This play is mainly about Lisa, the flower girl, who speaks a distorted or stigmatized dialect, and needs to improve her language. To do this, her teacher works on enhancing her speech and pronunciation in order to speak as well as any Standard English speaker. At the end of the play, her speech is improved greatly in such a way that she managed to speak a high form of a stand English dialect devoid of any stigmatized linguistic features.

The dilemma facing an Arab translator, therefore, involves two basic problems, firstly translating a non-standard dialect (as used by the flower girl) into a classical Arabic form, and in this case the translated speech text is not expressed well to reflect the speech of a character (see As-Saafi, 2016 on this point). In fact this form of the language will appear to be quite artificial in reflecting the language used by Lisa, the flower girl. The second problem is translating Lisa's speech into a local slang or non-classical variety of Arabic in a way similar to the Cockney dialect. This second problem is further complicated when deciding to choose a certain variety of colloquial Arabic out of several varieties used by Arabs in different countries.

What can be done in translation when facing this dilemma, i.e. the two linguistic choices? Some translators may find a way out by employing a

third compromising solution. This solution is, as mentioned earlier, achieved by possibly creating intentionally a form of a language which is distorted at various levels (phonological, morphological or syntactic) so that it becomes 'stigmatized' or highly non-standard. For illustration, let us look at the following example in which the play author, Shaw (1957: Act 1, 9) attempts to describe the flower girl's nonstandard Cockney dialect when asked by a mother a question:

"The Mother: How do you know that my son's name is Freddy, pray?

The Flower Girl: Ow, eez yo-oo san, is e? Wal ,fewd dan y'do-ooty bawmz a mather should, eed now betteren to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn then ran awy at hat pyin. Will – ye -oo py me f' them?"

In this short dialogue, the mother used her Standard English dialect when talking to the flower girl, who answered using a language that cannot be understood by readers. In fact, Shaw (1957: Act 1, 9), the playwright, provided his readers with an explanation to clarify what is said in a language which is not comprehensible, "Here, with apologies, this desperate attempt to represent her dialect with a phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside London".

However, an Arab translator resorted to classical Arabic in translating what the flower girl said:

بائعہ الزهور : هو إبنك. أليس كذلك؟ كان من الأفضل أن يعيد زهور فتاه مسكينه إلى حالتها الطبيعية بدلا من أن يهرب. هل ستعوضيني عن تلك الزهور ؟

The translation above, as we can observe, does not give any clue with regard to her character social status nor does it tell us anything about character representation when the standard form of Arabic is used.

Dialect translation strategies

It is important, to begin with, to explain what is meant by the concept of strategies, and to try to distinguish it from other related terms such as tactics, plans, rules, methods...etc. Lorsch (1991, pp. 67-81) defines a translation strategy as "a potentially conscious procedure for the solution of a problem which an individual is faced with when translating a text segment from one language to another". He further analyses the concept of strategies into four constituents (1) procedures carried out by an individual; (2) planning; (3) goals; and (4) a sequence of actions for reaching a goal. In other words, we think that translators, especially those with a limited experience, first need to identify a translation problem in order to solve it by considering strategies available to them. In order to determine on a strategy and to evaluate the result, a translator may need to consult a teacher, an editor, a publisher, or

potential readers of the target text. However, professional translators with a long experience may have attained the ability to automatize the use of strategies which are already available at their disposal. Competent translators, moreover, may use the existing strategies they have acquired over the years in fast and unconscious way in spite of the fact that their developed automation skill may not always result in optimal solutions to satisfy all target readers.

In this section, will be used data from English-Arabic translation in order to suggest some solutions to deal with dialect translation problems by offering different types of strategies for the problems. To begin with, the masterpiece classic novel, *Moby-Dick*, by Herman Melville, published in 1972 along with its translation into Arabic by Ihsan Abbas (1998) will be used for illustrating some strategies. Melville, the author, and Abbas, the translator are both well-known in English and Arabic literature. An analysis of some selected examples from the source text will be compared with the Arabic translation in order to identify the strategies adopted by the translator in dealing with dialect translation. Other examples will be also selected to suggest both additional and alternative strategies not employed by the translator for the sake of illustration. Chapter (64) of the novel describes the sailing life aboard a whaling ship, where, an old black character by the name of "Fleece" works as a cook. His boss, Stubb, talks to him about food, giving him some instructions about how to make good whale-steak, and to talk to sharks over the side of the ship in order to keep quiet and stop the noise they make. Addressing the black cook, Stubb says: "Away, cook, and deliver my message... go and preach to 'em" (1972, p. 400). The following is a dialogue first between "Fleece" and the sharks, and then with Stubb, followed by the Arabic translation:

Example:

Fleece: Fellow-critters:I'se ordered here to say dat you must stop dat dam noise dare.You hear?Stop dat dam smackin' ob de lip! Massa Stubb say dat you can fill your dam bellies up to de hatchings,but by Gor !you must stop dat dam racket !'

Stubb: ' Cook,' here interposed Stubb, accompanying the word with a sudden slap on the shoulder,'Cook !why ,damn your eyes, you mustn't swear that way when you're preaching. That's no way to convert sinners, Cook !'

Fleece:'Who dat? Den preach to him yourself,' sullenly turning to go.

Stubb: 'No, Cook;go on,go on.'

Fleece:' Well,den,Bellubed fellow-critters:'-

Stubb: 'Right! 'Exclaimed Stubb, approvingly, 'coax 'em to it; try that,' and Fleece continued.

'Dough you is all sharks,and by natur wery voracious,yet I zay to you,fellow-critters,dat dat voraciousness -'top dat dam slappin' ob de tail

!How you tink to hear, 'spose you keep up such a dam slappin' and bitin' dare?'

'Cook', cried Stubb, collaring him, 'I won't have that swearing. Talk to 'em gentlemanly.'

Once more the sermon proceeded (1972, p. 401).

The selected excerpt above clearly shows that Melville intentionally used the black English dialect of "Fleece", and this must have been done painstakingly in order to portray a character's personality through his nonstandard dialect, and also to place this character on the social ladder. The literary realization of this dialect, which deviates from the norm, was done through distinctive features of lexis, syntax, phonology and even spelling: "Fleece, the old black cook", makes use of a dialect which has certain social connotations reflecting his social status: numerous mispronunciations due to sound substitution such as "dat" instead of "that"; "ob" instead of "of"; "de" instead of "the"; "belubed" instead of "beloved"; "dough" instead of "though"; "den" instead of "then"; "zay" instead of "say"; "tink" instead of "think"; "dare" instead of "there". In terms of syntax, "I'se ordered" instead of "I am ordered"; questions without the auxiliary "do", "You hear?" instead of "do you hear?" or the omission of the auxiliary "be", "who dat?" instead of "who is that?"; lack of subject verb-agreement, "you is all sharks" instead of "you are all sharks". On the morphophonological level, notice also how the final realization of "smacking" is pronounced as "smack in"; and "slapping" is pronounced as "slappin".

Therefore, It is clear, that Melville used this dialect variety primarily for characterization, and if a translator decides not to translate this functional dialect, then he ignores portraying characters as intended by the author. A competent translator, then, needs to tackle the problem of translating this type of text by trying to find an equivalent variety in the target language. This is important because target readers of the translated text expect to associate a certain dialect with a social group. The following translation by Abbas was an attempt on his part to use a dialect he is well- conversant with, the rural Sudanese language variety in order to communicate the spirit of the dialogue and to give a natural tinge to the interaction between two speakers (Stubb and Fleece) representing two language varieties. Although Abbas was not a Sudanese himself, he lived in the Sudan teaching there for many years, and is well aware of how the rural Sudanese dialect functions.

Arabic dialect translation (Abbas, 1998, pp. 358-359):

" اكواني المكلوقات : انا مأمور ان أقول إنه توقفوا ديك الدوشة المثلثون هناك ، سمتمتوا ؟ اوقفوا ديك طق طق المثلثون من الشفتين . سي اسطب يقول انكوا تقدرؤا تملأؤا كردوش ملثونة بئاءكوا حتى فم الكروش . لكن وريتنا لازم توقفوا ديك الدوشة المثلثون ."

فقاطعه اسطب وهو يشفع خطابه بخبطة مفاجئة على كتفه : " طباخ يا طباخ ! أعى الله عينيك ، لا تشتم وأنت تلقى موعظة . ليست هذه طريقة صالحة لترد المذنبين الى التوبة والندم ، ايها الطباخ " .

فاستدار الطباخ متبرماً بهم بالذهاب وقال : " من دا ؟ مدام كده ، انت تقول وأظة بنفسك " .

- " لا يا طباخ ، بل امض انت في وعظك ، امض " .

- " جميل . ايها المكلوقات ، الإكوان المهبوبين ... " .

فصاح اسطب مستحسناً : " احسنت ! تملقها بمثل هذا ، جرب هذه الطريقة " فمضى فليس يكلمها :

" انتو هيوانات قرش وهو بطبئه شره كثير ، لكن بردة أقول لكم يا إكواني انه الشره داك – امنأوا اللطم بالدنب! كيف ممكن تسمأوا ان كان بقيتوا مستمرين في اللطم والأض الملنون هناك ؟ "

فصاح اسطب وهو يشد على رقبته : " أيها الطباخ لا احب ان اسمع تلك الشتائم . تحدث لها حسب الاصول " .

واستأنف الموعظة مرة أخرى .

Types of dialect translation strategies

Employing Amiya (Colloquial Arabic)

The strategy Abbas employed here is colloquialization. This strategy was important in depicting the character of "Fleece", since, as Aziz says (2000:2) "how a character speaks is an important part of the process of characterization and should be reflected in a translated text... and that a conversation in a novel or a short story should be written in the low variety if it is to imitate the style and the language of a natural conversation". Moreover, Aziz criticizes "the present practice among translators (and some writers) to render conversation in a formal (sometimes a high formal) style, which is a characteristic of the high variety". Colloquialization was, therefore, used to substitute the source Black dialect text associated with the underprivileged character in the novel. By adopting this strategy, Abbas tried to imitate, through rural Sudanese Arabic, the syntactic, phonological and morphological anomalies found in Black English: awkward constructions having similar features to the dialect of the source text.

Employing Fus'ha (Standard Arabic)

A second strategy used by Arab translators is standardization (or neutralization). This strategy decreases all stigmatized dialect markers of the source text by using a standard target language variety, and thus avoids using any equivalent dialect. In the following example, we provide an illustration of this strategy in some excerpts used in the example:

Example:

"Fellow-critters: I've ordered here to say dat you must stop dat dam noise dare. You hear? Stop dat dam smackin' ob de lip! Massa Stubb say dat you can fill your damn bellies up to de hatchings, but by Gor! You must stop dat dam racket. Dough you is all sharks, and by nature wery worracious, yet I zay to you, fellow-critters, dat dat woraciousness."

We offer the following Arabic translation using a neutralization strategy :

يا أخواني خلق الله، أنا مطلوب ميني أن أقول لكم أن توقفوا هذه الضجة المزعجة، هل تسمعون ؟ أوقفوا هذه الضوضاء المزعجة المنطلقة من الفم . سيدي اسطب يقول إنه بإمكانكم أن تملأوا بطونكم الشريرة . ولكن يجب عليكم أولاً إيقاف هذه الضجة المزعجة . كونكم أسماك قرش فإني أدرك أنكم بطبيعة الحال لديكم الكثير من الشره لتناول الطعام.

In this procedure, the number of all dialect markers in the English text was decreased at all linguistic levels. Neutralization, therefore, stripped the Black dialect text of the social connotations and the linguistic distortions. In other words, employing this strategy essentially eliminates the use of the marked Black dialect completely with the result that the characterization also lost its strength.

Employing Simplified Language

A third strategy suggested in this study is a simplified language or what can be called pidginization. This solution to dialect translation draws on using pidgin Arabic, usually used by the foreign labour force in different Arab countries, consisting of both skilled and unskilled manual workers and maids. Pidgin speakers (temporary immigrant workers) in this case, are held low esteem by their Arab masters. The speech varieties used by those speakers are simplified forms of Arabic both syntactically and semantically. The familiar term for pidgin among linguists can also be foreigner talk for such a simplified register. Below are some examples of pidgin Arabic. These examples are based on my informal observations in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan:

Example:

- We do not understand: nihna ma yifham.

- نحننا ما يفهم.

- I drive a taxi. I must work: ana su: g taxi. ana lazim yeshtghil.

- انا سوق تاكسي . انا لازم يشتغل.

- This person has a good brain: hadak fi: much zein.

- هذاك في مخ زين.

- No fasting. Ramadan has ended: sar ma fi sawm.Ramadan khlas ru:h.

- صارا ما في صوم. رمضان خلاص روح.

- There is a good restaurant to eat at: fi" matam zein mal akel.

- في مطعم زين مال اكل.

The examples above represent reduced forms of Arabic: loss of verb inflections, adjectives precede their nouns, lack of subject-verb agreement, among other anomalous structures. These features of pidgin seem to satisfy the criteria used by Hall (1966), Ferguson and De Bose (1977), and Muhlhausler (1986). Not all translators are necessarily familiar with Pidgin Arabic except those who had the chance of communicating with foreign workers in Arab countries especially in the Gulf countries where thousands of immigrant workers are found. We only offer this form of Arabic in translating dialects as an alternative choice to avoid using a particular Arabic dialect. The advantage of employing this strategy, moreover, is that it will not cause any negative prejudice against Arabic dialects since Pidgin does not usually have native speakers using it, and consequently it does not activate negative associations among its speakers.

Therefore, the pidginization strategy is the creation of an artificial variety or pseudo-dialect. This could be a fictitious, unspecified dialect made up by the translator. This artificial variety is devoid of standard language features. It differs from the pidgin form in that it does not exist in the target language. It can be called a 'broken dialect' since the translator intentionally distorts its form by using substandard patterns for the social purposes of language use in order to portray certain characters in the target dialect. However, translators who opt to use this strategy must be aware of making this contrived dialect accessible to the readers as much as possible. Features of the artificial dialect may include hesitations, pauses, false starts, anomalies in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and orthography. In brief, what a translator aims at when using a pseudo dialect strategy is mainly to produce incorrect language forms in order to capture the speech of certain characters. This could be done possibly by making appropriate types of errors such as identifiable syntactic errors : gender error, failure to use relative pronouns, missing indirect object or errors in using the plural system. In fact, creating this type of dialects will definitely pose special challenges to a translator who, at the end of the day, will either be credited or blamed with his attempt of dialect creation for a given target audience. It is natural for different readers to have different reactions to a translated text especially if it does not abide by the accepted norms in different countries. Zaltin (2005, p. 14), in

this respect, says that "Spain and the Caribbean countries are more open to the use of slang and obscenities than Chile and Argentina, where audiences will prefer more formal language". By the same token, we expect a similar situation in the Arab countries, where certain readers in certain countries of the Middle East may have different preferences, reacting positively or negatively to dialect translation in literary work. The division between the classicists and the colloquial proponents in this part of the world is characterized by an endless conflict: those who oppose dialect studies, and those are especially Arab sociolinguists who argue for including it in study and analysis. Dialect opponents base their argument on the premise that such an undertaking could weaken the classical language and give dialects more importance at the expense of the cultural and religious identity associated with the language. On the other hand, proponents of the colloquial argue that individuals using their native dialects can express themselves much better and more naturally than when using a formally learned language taught consciously at schools. It is beyond the scope of the present study to elaborate on this point of controversy (see Hussein, 1979).

Adding a comment

This strategy is suggested for marked dialect translation. It refers to what we may call "comment insertion". In this strategy, certain clarifying phrases are inserted to describe a character's dialect like the following:

"Fleece, the Black cook, speaks with a heavily marked Black English"(in this case, the problem is transferred to the actor if he is to perform on stage). Another inserted comment by the translator is: "Fleece said in a local vernacular".

Equivalent inserted comments in Arabic could be like the following:

And he said in a local dialect

وقال بلهجة محلية .

And he responded in a Bedouin dialect

وأجاب بلهجة بدوية.

And he added in a rural dialect

واضاف بلهجة ريفية.

And he said in a weak/poor dialect

وقال بلهجة ركيكة.

These inserted comments may help target readers get the intended impressions about dialect functions through describing a character's marked dialect and also to help them evaluate the social and emotional situation of the character, as well as the linguistic aspect of the local colour too. It must

be admitted, however, that the challenge in theatre (rather than in reading) may never be fully resolved in translation alone.

Non-standard orthography

A fifth type of strategies is non-standard orthography. This strategy makes use of non-standard spelling such as the omission or addition of certain letters to depict idiosyncratic dialects or the speech of foreigners. Kenny (2001, pp. 144-147), for instance, cites some examples of this strategy used first in the source text and then reproduced by translators, Pieke Biermann uses non-standard spelling to depict the Berlin dialect spoken by the prostitutes in her novel "Violetta" ; Eric Loest uses non-standard spelling to depict the Saxon dialect and the German of a Polish couple". Kenny, further explains that "such non-standard spellings are mostly used to provide information about speakers and/or other aspects of the context of the situation where readers are forced into alternative modes of interpretation". It should be mentioned here that a translator making use of this strategy may draw the attention of the source text readers, through a translator's note, about the motivation for using unconventional spelling forms in the translated text in order to avoid a possible reader intolerance of unusual orthography. In fact, some source text writers such as Shaw did write notes of this nature when he depicted through bad spelling the non-standard dialect of the flower girl by saying in a note during the first appearance of the flower girl in the first act of the play "Here, with apologies, this desperate attempt to represent her dialect without a phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside London" (Shaw, 1957, p. 9). Unfortunately, most Arab translators who translated this note did not inform target text readers about its intention since the dialect was rendered in classical Arabic, and therefore the note lost its value.

Conclusion

This study has shown through a variety of examples that the translation process may sometimes require a translator to be coauthor of the source text through his intervention by offering to the TL reader what translation theorists call the "Skobos" (purpose) of the target rather than the source text (Honig, 1998 ; Vermeer, 2000). In this respect, Farghal (2019, p. 2015) rightly describes this kind of translator's intervention as "extrinsic managing" when he superimposes certain directionality on the target language text by reorienting the target reader in presenting "thought-worlds that are different at varying degrees from those expounded in the source text". Moreover, extrinsic managing, according to Farghal (2019, p. 40) may manifest itself "at the levels of lexis, syntax, or globally at the levels of discourse and/or culture". We have already provided examples where translators changed both register and discourse when translating the substandard dialects used by

certain characters in dramatic dialogues. In such cases, as we have demonstrated, the translators attempted to adopt an equivalent dialect of their own choice in order to be able to portray a character through the kind of dialect he uses. Extrinsic managing, in this case, may be argued to be "condemnable" rather than "commendable", to use Farghal's terminology. It could be condemnable from the viewpoints of those who oppose employing a nonstandard dialect in Arabic translation and the other problems we have already discussed, which result from this kind of translation direction.

Competent translators of dramatic dialogues with marked/nonstandard dialects in literary work need to familiarize themselves with the peculiarities and connotations of certain marked dialects. It is difficult to avoid confronting the problems involved in such texts, i.e. the differentiation in register among characters of different social groups. Recreating substandard speech in dialogue translation naturally requires a linguistic sensitivity akin to the translation of poetic texts as we have tried to show when employing various types of translation strategies. Using some of these strategies in translation is meant to achieve an equivalent sociolinguistic /cultural impact on the target readers at the level of either dialect or idiolect (individual speech). However, it will be difficult to claim that such strategies will solve all problems of dialect translation. They are offered only to draw the attention to the fact that translators need to think of how it is possible to render important social features of the source text's nonstandard speech into the target text. Moreover, the tendency of bypassing dialect translation in Arabic translation for different reasons discussed earlier in this study is another consideration for offering the strategies. We, therefore, feel that if playwrights intentionally deviate from standard speech in order to convey certain social implications in developing characterization, then this deviation needs to be reflected in a parallel dialect translation recognized by the target readers. Our informal observation, moreover, also shows that the colloquial Egyptian dialect of both the educated and the uneducated has a good influence on the vernaculars of many Arabs (in terms of comprehension and sometimes production) in the Middle East and in the North African Arab countries.

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