# Antipathy towards Literary Translation and the Problematics of Change Reception

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*Abstract- Translation is approached from various theoretical frameworks and perceived as a field of knowledge dispersed across several disciplines. While it seems that the importance of literary translation in cultural communication and transplanting literary values is widely recognised, possibilities for the translated literary text to stand for the original is still under debate, sometimes turning to further provocative situations questioning if literary translation is possible at all. This starts with the original literary piece observed as inimitable and its content must be kept inviolate. This paper argues that antipathy towards literary translation and translated works start with hostility towards change; a metathesiophobic attitude still within linguistic and cultural ethnocentricities. The paper points out that translation is about making change to the original, it does not exist without upsetting its constructs, and that the sources of such antipathetic attitudes are our tolerance to change as well as our understanding of our own language and culture. The paper makes reference to the translation of Joseph Conrad's Falk as it stands as an example of multilayered change.*

*Keywords: change reception, literary translation, translation process.*

## Introduction

Translated works that brings novelties to the receiving audience are given more chances of welcoming by the intended audience, much more of that of the original when it proposes change. In other words, when a translated work breaks the cultural and linguistic rules of the receiving audience it is received with less hostility much less than if these violations are introduced directly by the original work. Therefore, writers of the original may decide to put their texts within a perhaps patterns known to be existing in translated works. Change, therefore, in both a work that has been translated as well as change in an original text that may, for example, contain elements that are not familiar to the readership such as using wording or raising issues never addressed in such way, and this is what translation really does, is met with antipathy with varying degrees. This notion of cloaking the original work within the outfit of translation is what Toury refers to as fictitious translations: 'translations which deviate from sanctioned patterns — which many of them certainly do — are often tolerated by a culture to a much higher extent than equally deviant original compositions' (Toury 2: 2005). In the following pages, the problematics of change reception in translation is examined. First, the notion of change is discussed which necessarily requires understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity. After examining these various inferences, the discussion moves on to explore the nature of change across languages and cultures and our own understanding of it, concluding with sampels from the translation of Joseph Conrad's Falk to Arabic.

1 Relation of the source text to the translated

Before shedding the light on the problematics of change reception by the audience of the translated text, an understanding of the relation of the original literary piece to the translated should be canvased. This is important for the understanding of the problematics of change reception as welcoming the translated literary text starts with the unequal appreciation for the original and the translated. To start, the different views on the process of translating and across several disciplines highlight the the difficult possibilities involved in the process. These possibilities share

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common attitudes towards translation and the translated works. Translating, as Gabriel Garcia Marquez (2002) so succinctly puts it, is not only the best and most rigorous kind of reading, it is of all literary activities also the most difficult, the least recognised and the worst paid (in Bassnett 2011: 16). Some views foster the impossibilities of translation being able to stand for the original, some others promote the unbridgeable gaps between the language and culture of the original and that of the translated. However, the major attitude within this context is that whether translation can hold resemblance, likeness or it can contain equivalent meaning intended by the original author and that is transferrable to the target readership. This means, therefore, that the quality of translation has been always fallen into the criteria of how faithful the translated work is to the original, how the meanings in the translated work are adequate to achieve the same reaction that of the original readership.

However, the departing point here is that it is usually a grotesque version is a translation that sought to achieve likeness to the original. The traditions of translation may evoke some kind of practical and theoretical fallacy; a case where the quality of the translation falls within criteria of degree of 'adequacy' and 'correctness.' A translation would never be like the original, and it should not be. They are traditionally viewed, with much concern, the differences between the original and the translated text as points of debates, always promoting the impossibility of the transfer from one language and culture to another. The translated text is seen as an imitation of the original with much distortion for what is originally offered to the audience of the source text. These differences between the original language and the target, the original text and the translated are valuable sources for initialising further attempt for 'discovery' of possible identity. As stated before, the translated text is always in search for identity, whether to belong to the cultural and linguistic sources or to set itself free and serve the valuable communicative aspects within the recipients' language and culture. This search for identity is the real value that translation offers, it is a discovery for what has never been available without translation. Thus, translation empowers migrating texts with the potentials to understand what our language can express what is written in another language, it provides it with a unique chance to revitalise what is seen as no longer valid or able to survive the change taking place within our own language (further explanation follows).

## 2. The work of empowering and revitalising

There is a kind of equilibrium that readership seeks to achieve between the original and the target. They do not like that equilibrium to be disturbed. Some aspects of this equilibrium is that he original has always a virtue of being the source, the original and the intact. Some kind of superiority that has to go untouched. Unfortunately, this is not always true, and there is an evidence that exemplifies in the function of empowering and revitalising that the translated literary work exercises. The work of empowering and revitalising can be seen as literary aspects, in essence they serve as evidence that translation is far from being a mere process of meaning transfer. If we are to argue that translation is primarily a process of meaning transfer, then meaning is just, as Toury argues about translation that it lacks a fixed identity (in Gentzler 1993: 128), far from having a fixed entailment to what it stands for. Meaning demonstrates a situation where the connection of the signifier to the signified is variable and dilematic within the scopes of understanding, interpretation, communication and code switching which can all be seen as subprocesses of translation.

Yet, translations that fail to leave the fallacies of the traditions of literalness and freeness sometimes before they are introduced to the receiving language would have shared a performative merit. Leila Vennewitz, states the following: "A moment comes in the translation of any important passage [...] where the author's intent hangs naked in the translator's mind. It has shed its original clothes and has not yet found new ones" (Varga 1997: 87). This clearly applies to translating verse, still it is also universally applicable to the process of translating all text types. However, the performative value for non-verse texts seems both intriguing and more subtle, as it involves a bit of metaphor. When translators read for reading, read for translating, translate or would rather re-write the original, all these acts are performative and in many aspects similar to what actors or any performers of interpretive art do. The performative merit of translation has another important contribution to translation if we are to admit its basic existence in translation, it reveals that translation is possible and it fends off antipathetic views of translatability, this statement also dives into further virulent views about translation in general.

In conclusion, translating a literary work implies that everything may undergo change. Every word or phrase; every syllable, for that matter, will be different from the original text. This means there will be addition, somehow, by the translator of some sort, but it will always remind the recipients to certain things in the original.

## 3. Problematics of change reception

Any translation can be viewed as an interpretative act, that is naturally inclusive of a creative processes. A translator reads the original piece and tries to estimate what role it has in the original text, why it is demonstrated in a particular way. While this process is operative, choices have to be made about preserving content and perhaps sacrificing others. Changes to the original start with the work of preserving and sacrificing, and debates about the losses and gains in a translation are in fact centred around such sceneries where a translation is weighed detrimentally by amounts of losses and gains. In what follows a further investigation of two layers of change in a translation are examined; problematics of change within the constructs of language, and the change to the system of values of the receiving audience.

### 3.1 Problematics of change within language constructs

Languages of the world are destined to be in constant change. This change, as described before, is multilayered in the sense that it occurs within various levels of discourse whether spoken or written. It is not limited to language, however, but it necessarily involves cultural aspects. Such being the case, and with the advances made in semantics and syntax, scholars in various fields, particularly in linguistics, philosophy and sociology, began to explore the phenomenon of language change and came to recognise that there is more to language than establishing a rather vague relationship between a word and a concept, and that the process is inclusive of the complex knowledge of structuring words and putting them together in order to compose sentences to express attitudes, emotions, thoughts, impressions etc. This knowledge necessary for the structuring of the words is always required to be nourished, having in mind the expansive development in the surrounding settings. However, the process of nourishing the language to allow change and implement it is complex if we accept the fact that language is more than words that constitute separate entities. In fact, theories of linguistics from the middle of the twentieth century showed that human languages comprise of complex objects: rules of semantics that govern the assignment of meanings to sentences and phrases and the rules of syntax that govern sentence formation are immensely complicated. And yet, users of various languages obviously apply these rules all the time with little or no effort and perhaps quite unconsciously. Introducing a change to these constructs manifest an alarm of threat to the users of language, simply because it disturbs the familiar. What is more is that in further situations in fermenting zones, change may disturb the value-system of a society, leading to a situation where translations are not only left out because of the linguistic novelties, but due to the unrivalled upsetting for the widely accepted beliefs by the receiving audience. Think of translating Satanic Verses for example and the resultant murders of translators.

Translation is more than a mere process of meaning transfer from one language to another. Meaning, as American linguists claim, is abstract, and when it is transferred it carries with it the reciprocality of its references to the signified. Meaning in most of its essential forms starts as a dichotomous form of reference; the signified and the signifier. While the former ranges in its nature, the latter represents a rather inherent link to language.

### 3.2 Problematics of change within system of beliefs of readership of the translated literary piece

We can look upon translation as a recognised social phenomenon, both an intellectual category and a cultural practice. The meaning of the term is codified in dictionaries, fixed by informal as well as professional activities called translation, constantly affirmed by translators' associations and by educational, scholarly, journalistic and other public and private discourses (Hermans 1999: 141). Perceived as a social phenomenon underlies further complexity with the attempt of understanding why change is usually received with antipathetic attitudes by the receiving audience. Nevertheless, translation can not, I argue, be a social phenomenon simply because it is not, or perhaps it could be a social phenomenon alongside many other things. Translation starts with being a cognitive process; solely received and processed by a range of cognitive subprocesses, and further when changed is introduced it is challenged starting with deeprooted rules in the cognitive constructs of the recipient. However, the focus here will be on translatorial possibilities where the role of the translator is immenent in bringing out the change to the receiving audience.

The standpoint here starts with translatorial possibilities as the text is under the process of translation. The image of the recipients of the text is always present in the translator's mind, finding the best way to demonstrate hospitality to the receiving language, culture and readership. Such possibilities are quite constrained as translation is destined to serve several masters. Walter Benjamin in 'Task of the Translator' (1921) demonstrates how the perception of the expectations of the receiver of work of art never proves fruitful, let alone the bleak interest of artists in such expectations: 'No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener.' Such being the case, translation expands on Benjamin's view on the subject to engage in further argument on the assumption of fallibility of the reader. Translators, within the overall framework of showing hospitality to the

recipients, forgivably assume that misunderstanding is their most fearful enemy when the work is fully translated and sent out for the target recipients to appreciate. Hospitality is  complex to conceptualise as it involves several parties and the reframing of various concepts such as faithfulness and fidelity to the original. However, it may refer to the necessary alternatives that compromise adherences to the original, commitments to the rules of the source culture and language, and the ones that 'abuses' what the original author said or wrote. This is all for the comfort of the readership of the translated work. Derrida says that 'a good translation must always commit abuses' (Lewis, 1985: 39), which can be seen as a source for shedding further light on the scopes that hospitality opens for the translator. Hospitality, as well as other things, interprets to the assumption that the readership would always misunderstand the intentions of the original author as they are conveyed by the translation, it serves as means of redefining what seems to the translator oblique, deviant from the expectations of the recipients.

Change and difference in receiving it across various languages and cultures has also an interlocutory aspect. Translation somehow widens our knowledge about how the other thinks and feels. It allows the experience of living change translation permits to proceed; an experience where we see the re-production of the unfamiliar, unknown and foreign to the familiar, the already-settled norms of our own. This unfamiliarity upsets us, it brings change that reflects on our conceptions and misconceptions. dDisturbing the norms, rules and traditions of literature, culture and language urges interlocutors to involve in vast dialog about the interpretation of meaning. This is not restricted to the academic and elite circles, but rather it would expand to us, the recepient of a translated work as we would be part of such arguments, but rather internally and behind the closed doors of ourselves. When we read a translation, we understand the other, and a comparison naturally initialises between what is offered to us in a translation and how it is different from what are already know about the other. It somehow widens our knowledge about how the other thinks and feels. It allows the experience of living change translation permits to proceed; an experience where we see the re-production of the unfamiliar, unknown and foreign to the familiar, the already-settled norms of our own. This unfamiliarity upsets us, it brings change that reflects on our conceptions and misconceptions.

Recognising the interlocutory role that translation empowers in us; the recipients of the translated work in particular, this aspect would not be available unless there is difference. This difference is nothing but the change translation transfers within meaning. However, interlocution urges for mediation in receiving the translated work within several contexts. The readership may recognise the value of difference that change proposes to their culture and language, and thus mediation starts as a repair tool, as a compensating device for what might be lost in the transfer process. Primarily, it is the translator who tries to conduct this process of mediation, still time also can be important to restructure the interlocution on reception of the change. Think of literature, for example. Literature may transcend time and place, it may go beyond the boundaries of political and social constraints. Although this notion that has its roots in humanism and marxism seems antiquated, we may here think back many prime examples to assert this, take Shakespeare for example.

Such being the case, meaning in translation should not be viewed in terms of translatability and the possibilities involved in the process of meaning transfer. Rather, problematics of meaning is a central issue of translation and before this it is a central issue of language, as they are fostered by the arguments on the differences between languages and the verbal expressions and what they stand for (the signified and the signifier, respectively). Views on interpreting meanings start with language and they also end up with language. Therefore, translation can be seen as a very useful device to clarify our knowledge about our language.

Great works of literature undergo change over time, and similarly change takes place to languages that of the writers in their time and that of the translator in later years or centuries. However, the original would still hold commitment to its significance and perhaps aura of norms in language, whereas translation has to be always in a state of obsequiousness to the growth dictated by changes in the mother-tongue of the translator. Through this process of transfer texts through time and place, changes happen, and they witness the renewal of the traditions of the receiving language.

However, the transient models of translation quality own legitimacy for representing somehow how much content has been transferred into the receiving culture, still the dilemmatics encountered while translating and losses and gains existing in the translated work are circumvallated by presuming the inevitability of transcribing the original. To conclude, such restrictive contexts make of the role of translator a process that is fraught with anxiety as he or she is in constant search for adapting the content of the original into the acceptable norms of the target, while at the same

time he or she must also show faithful as much as possible to the original. Problematics of change start with such polemics on translatability.

## 4. Translating Falk and the problematics of change

Falk (1903) could be one of Joseph Conrad's best pieces of short fiction. In terms of exploring situations in which man tries to represent unique extremes of human passion it is as effective as Heart of Darkness, Youth, Lord Jim, and other writings. It was first published in the collection Typhoon and Other Tales (1903) and is the only one of Conrad's stories that did not first appear serialised in a magazine publication. This was because the editor objected to the fact that the central female character, constructed very powerfully, never speaks.

Making of a literary piece so distinctive of its own or refraining any such endeavours and adhering to the content of the literary text are two traditional options a translator is unfortunately assumed to decide between. Sometimes the decision is quite confusing so the translator has, and in fact should, implement both. Speaking of faithfulness or bringing novelties to the literary work and introducing them to the receiving readership has been an ocupation for translation scholars for centuries. Considerations from the discipline of translation can present themselves as anxious scenarios to the translator. In fact, several issues such as translatability and the accompanying concept of equivalence are at the centre of theorising about translation, and they are in the profession of translation the ultimate goal the translator seeks to achieve. Even in more flexible and relatively recent application of such concepts, we see that equivalence has become a myth, and in further developments it has been replaced with other concepts such as approximation. These theoretical considerations by translation scholars were responses to the everlasting questions of translation, and their reaction to the basic problems of it were blocking the progress of the theorisation progress. They even sometimes turned to be sterilising the debate which was criticised by other translation scholars such as George Steiner referring to what he calls a "sterile" debate over the "triad" of "literal" "free" and "faithful" translation (Steiner 1998: 319). The discussion of equivalence and equivalent effect, for example, has dominated the discussions of translation theories since 1959 and for over twenty years. Further, the questions of meaning, equivalence and translatability became a constant theme of translation studies in the 1960s and were tackled by a new 'scientific' model followed by one of the most important figures in translation studies, the American translation scholar Eugene Nida.

The question now is how does translating Falk into Arabic serve the effort to understand the nature of change and the possibilities involved in the process of adding or removing something from the original text? To answer this question, it is necessary to point out that there is a kind of exchange of benefit between translation of a literary text and the receiving readership; the audience may be might be enlightened, entertained, or may understand more about the other.

The culture of the sea is clearly shown as a world of experiences in which the audience of the target culture has not been really involved; a culture that might be so deviant from the norms of the audience of the Arab World where a large portion of its lands is suffering constant desertification. Still, with the flow of thoughts Conrad throws into his characters and that found their way in the Arabic output and is eventually perceived by the Arab audience, I assume that we know more about the other in all of its aspects. We know about how hunger, a scourge that has historically been known by the Arabs, may find a different presence in literature in the sea, and how it could be so tragic as one may turn to eat human flesh to survive. This is how translation reflects on the possibility of gaining something new by the audience whom we suppose have nothing or little to know about the culture we are translating the input from. Now, this kind of knowledge just enriches our understanding of translation; we set the norms from which we adapt the translated literary piece and understand how that original text might be received by the audience, that may not exclude a minimum or maximum change in the content to please the audience since translation may aim at mutual understanding between the receptors of the output and the culture where the original literary piece has germinated.

## 5. Samples from the translation

English Text:

[Several of us, all more or less connected with the sea, were dining in a small river-hostelry not more than thirty miles from London, and less than twenty from that shallow and dangerous puddle to which our coasting men give the grandiose name of "German Ocean." And through the wide windows we had a view of the Thames; an enfilading view down the Lower Hope Reach. But the dinner was execrable, and all the feast was for the eyes.

That flavour of salt-water which for so many of us had been the very water of life permeated our talk. He who hath known the bitterness of the Ocean shall have its taste forever in his mouth. But one or two of us, pampered by the life of the land, complained of hunger. It was impossible to swallow any of that stuff.]

Arabic translation (adapted):

اجتمعَ لنا من الطعام ما اجتمع بخيمة أنزلناها, فارتفقنا الأرض في خيمةٍ على مسيرة أيامٍ ثلاثةٍ من مِسيارةَ ومسيرةَ يومين من الكثيبة الوحشية والتي أسماها أفاضل جمّالينا بكثيب مَرجم. وكان لنا أن تراءت صحراء سوداء الجب وكأنما مُدَّتْ أمام نواظرنا مدّ امُشْرَّعةً من أسفل أطرافها. ما كان ما اجتمع إلينا من الطعام إلا بمقيت، وما كان ذلك إلى لنواظرنا.

استقرَّ إلى حديثنا رمل الصحراء الحار والذي ما كان لنا إلا لباسا ومُستَكَنا. من عَهدَ حُمَّياتِ الصحراء لن يعرف بدنه تركا لها. تَبَرَّمَ رجل أو رجلين جوعا ممن تداعت عليهم حياة المدينة. عَصِيَ أكلُ الطعام.

Arabic translation (no adaptation):

كنا نتناول غداءنا في فندق نهري صغير فيما لا يزيد عن ثلاثين ميلا من لندن، وما لا يزيد عن عشرين عن تلك الأنقوعة الضحلة الخطرة التي أسماها بحّارتنا بذلك الاسم المهيب المحيط الألماني. وكان لنا أن تراءى عبر النوافذ العريضة التايمز وكأنما مُدَّ أمام نواظرنا مدا من أدنى امتداد غود هوب السفلي. ما كان الغداء إلا بمقيت، وما كانت الوليمة بأكملها سوى لنواظرنا.

كانت نكهة الماء المالح والتي ما فتئت أن تكون إلا ماء الحياة بعينه لنا طاغيةٌ على حديثنا. من عرف مرارات المحيط لن يعرف فمه تركا لها قط. اشتكى واحد أو اثنان من أولئك الذين أفسدتهم حياة البر من الجوع. كان من المستحيل أن يؤكل أيٍّ من ذلك الطعام .

## 6. Conclusion

Assuming the faithfulness a translator is aiming for in translating a literary work is a sort of fidelity to something more than just literal meaning, then any attempt at being faithful to the original piece of writing should entail making something that can survive the change incurred by the translation. Change is not a replacement for something else in the translation, it can stand by its own to serve a goal. Some may find it beyond compensation a loss that is there in translation, still few would contest to the fact that change to the original and that one actualised in the translated can add value to the literary original text; a value of empowering, revitalising and perhaps being understood and welcomed by the 'other'. Terry Eagleton's Literary Theory: An Introduction, and he is quoting from a lecture given by Prof George Gordon:

England is sick, and [...] English literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State (in Eagleton 1983: 23).

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