

8. A WORD ON TRANSLATING

The next Section of this Thesis (Chapter 9), entitled A Description of the Results of the Survey of Emotional Appeals, is basically a translation of the Transliterated Alphabetical Listing of Emotional Appeals (Appendix IV).¹ Since the bulk of this survey consists of the translation of the emotional appeals encountered in the Corpus into English, a few words about translating from Arabic, may be in order, even if the relevance of ‘an exposition on the art of translation’ to the immediate topic could be questioned. The reason I have inclined towards providing the information and remarks which follow is twofold: Since this Thesis is, above all, as has been stated before, a survey, and as such, provides very little if any interpretations of the material; discussions, conclusions and analyses are likely to suggest themselves to the reader, based merely on a reading of the translation. It is precisely for the lack of scientific deliberation in this Thesis that it cannot be overemphasized how important it is to understand that many of the nuances and culturally determined implications of Arabic words and phrases, cannot simply be switched from the source language to the target language. So, providing some insight, into some of the pitfalls of translating from Arabic to English, however removed from the main theme of this Thesis, can serve to equip the reader with the necessary caution that must be exercised when one is drawing conclusions about a culture, based on a translation of its phraseology.

The translation I have produced is what is referred to in translation theory as a ‘gist’ translation² or communicative translation. That is, when obvious standard equivalents exist in the target language, they have been used. Such an approach is virtually mandatory in many culturally conventional formulae ‘that do not invite literal translation’ such as public notices, proverbs and conversational clichés. In other kinds of texts, ‘this degree of freedom is no more useful as standard practice than interlinear translation, because potentially important details of message content are bound to be lost’ [see previous footnote, p. ...]. As discussed above, in a ‘semantic exercise’ of the sort I have undertaken, intuition plays a big role. It must, therefore, be kept in mind, that once the first bridge has been safely crossed – namely, that of avoiding misunderstanding – the second one must be straddled – which is that of not giving oneself a carte blanche for excessive freedom when ‘dynamic equivalence’ seems to be the natural choice, on the basis of mother-tongue facility and linguistic aptitude [see previous footnote, p. 19. Degrees of freedom in translation is discussed in more detail on p. 27]. Translation loss is inevitable, whichever way one goes about the task, and this is compensated for by additions or omission [see previous footnote, p. 21-25). The connotative rather than the denotative meanings have been sought in the translation [p. 52-76]. The Chapter on Metaphors in *Thinking Arabic Translation* [p. 147-161] was particularly helpful when a decision had to be made as to when to highlight and when to downtone a metaphor.

From this point onwards, this Chapter points out some general aspects of translation, which are not directly related to this Thesis, but which are not totally irrelevant either, considering what has been said above.

¹ The first footnote of Chapter 9. is a detailed explanation of how the Chapter is organized and contains a further elaboration of the approach used in the translation.

² See *Dickins, Hervey & Higgins, Thinking Arabic Translation: a course in translation method; Arabic to English*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 15. Note that all the quotations in this paragraph are of from this same source, with which I familiarized myself as thoroughly as possible, basing my translation on the guidelines it provides, as described in this paragraph.

To Ibn Faris, Arabic was the best and richest of all languages, which could not be translated into any other language, nor could non-Arabs compete with Arabs in the use of the metaphor.³

Any text – especially more complex ones laden with acoustic or semantic effects – no doubt, tends to lose much of its essence in a translation.⁴ A thorough understanding and analysis of the source material is needed in order, first, to appreciate the specific traits of each text, style and genre, and second, to be able to convey that understanding in a second language. To me, it seems that the second task is the more demanding and challenging one. Luckily, excellent expositions have already been made and many models set for arriving at this goal, especially in the field of translation theories.⁵

The practice of quoting source materials verbatim, with the translation, however masterful in brackets, is one which I have generally found to be the most enlightening.⁶ A case in point is Beeston's⁷ analysis of an oration delivered by cUthman on his appointment as successor-designate to the caliphate. The breakdown of this oration is excellent for study purposes and the study itself is conducted in a perceptive, learned manner. However, as Beeston is obliged to point out, it is the associations that the words have for the speaker/reader of Arabic upon which the author plays, to write 'artistically'. So, any parallels to be found in other languages fall a bit short of depicting the whole force (or weakness, as the case may be) of a source text, making a judgment based on a translated version of it, quite untenable. For, each association that the used words conjure, pair with or suggest by virtue of familiarity from certain other connections, has a bearing on determining the nature, quality and place of any given piece of literature. Beeston mentions a few, such as *tawa*, *mucammar*, and so on. Relying on the source text is, therefore, essential, in order to be able to arrive at any conclusions at all.

³ Norris, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, p. 44. See also Bonebakker, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, p. 23, who states that: Eloquence has been deemed an Arab characteristic *par excellence*. (The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language. 1989, p. 7: "A belief that some languages are intrinsically superior to others is widespread, but it has no basis in linguistic fact." Many languages, such as Latin, Greek, Chinese, German, French, English, etc. have been considered superior to others at some point in time. "Perhaps one day some kind of objective linguistic evaluation measure will be devised; but until then, the thesis that some languages are intrinsically better than others has to be denied.")

⁴ See examples given by Beeston, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p. 181 (including the loss of complex patterns in English renderings of the Bible).

⁵ As mentioned previously, the coursebook *Thinking Arabic Translation*, James Dickins, Sándor Hervey & Ian Higgins, Routledge, 2002, has acted as a guidebook for me, the guidelines of which I have tried to follow and apply in the translation of the 'emotional appeals' that I picked out from my corpus. I would like to reiterate that particularly helpful were the sections on 'gist translation' (see p. 13), 'dynamic equivalence' (see p. 19) and the chapter entitled *Connotative meaning and translation issues* (see p. 66-74), which explains 'attitudinal meaning', 'associative meaning', 'affective meaning', 'allusive meaning' and 'collocation and collocative meaning'. For lack of space, I will let my translation speak for itself, and will forgo any further deliberation on the process of producing it. Albeit, I will mention another coursebook, which proved immensely helpful, namely, *Arabic Stylistics – A coursebook*, Hussein Abdul-Raof, Harrasowitz Verlag, 2001. Chapter Two, in which collocation, especially of emotive words (p. 26-32) is handled, and Chapter Five, *Rhetorical Description of Arabic*, were particularly helpful.

⁶ Time and space permitting, I would have preferred Appendix IV to contain both the transliteration of the appeal and its translation right behind it. In that case, I would have been obliged to reconsider including all the appeals that have now been screened and concentrating on only a few of them. That would have entailed a major revision of the entire Thesis, which I decided against, in favour of the present form, which owing to its comprehensiveness as a survey, can attempt to make no more than a 'sweeping statement' in the end. Each one of the 72 appeals could be the subject of a monograph. To attempt dealing with all of them under one heading, is impossible. Merely listing them, was barely manageable.

⁷ Beeston, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p 182-3. The practice I mentioned being very much in favour of is also used systematically by E.El Tayib in chapter 18 of *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*.

One generalization that can be safely made, is that the development, and especially the maintenance of classical Arabic highly unchanged in its essence, from early times until today, is the consensus that Arabic is the language of Qur'an, which must be preserved as it is. Both the language and the culture find a reference point in the Holy Book of Islam. Believers, non-believers and 'infidels' alike, are aware of the overall directives issued by, or in the name of this religion, and express this awareness, consciously or subconsciously whenever they are communicating, if their mother-tongue is Arabic. One look at the Table of Contents of this Thesis serves to confirm, that however secular or mundane a side of life is in question, religion has a way of surfacing and making its 'dictates' felt. During the era of the writer in question and in the circles of 'song and merriment' he moved in, a guise of piety and 'religious phraseology' gave a cover and a respectable face to the otherwise quite unrestrained, unrestricted and uninhibited 'jocundity' with which life, on a daily basis, was embraced. It could be closer to the truth than to a fallacy to presume that some sort of 'silent agreement' exists in the Arab culture, that whatever goes on *actually*, must be mollified by an apparent subservience to religion when relating it *factually*.

Since the religion and culture are so intertwined, and since the Qur'an occupies such a focal place in the lives of Muslim and non-Muslim Arabic speakers alike, by virtue of its 'dominance over the culture', it seems appropriate to bring up the most controversial of all issues to do with translating from Arabic to any other language, namely, that of the acceptability of translating the Qur'an, at all!

Translating the Qur'an has been a taboo in the past and is not regarded favourably even nowadays. When discussing images, similes and parables in the Qur'an, Paret, for example, has to explain many words with a sentence or more, such as pointing out that the word for lion implies powerful and is a metaphor in itself,⁸ to cite only the simplest example. The fact that the same applies to translating from any language to another, does not seem widely recognized or appreciated, however. So, let us say, that for the sake of intellectual integrity, it is simply beneficial to keep in mind, that particular qualities and peculiarities of a 'source' and 'target' language, may interfere greatly with and even dictate much of what we presume and conclude.

Paret's discussion of the mental acrobatics that one must perform in order to understand much of the language of the Qur'an is an interesting one. In spite of the complexity of the issue, he does argue that the mental effort that needs to be exercised in order to comprehend the notions being put forward (which results in the translator having to add a fair number of meanings that are hidden between the lines) need not be a disadvantage. To him, as an orientalist, the whole question is an academic one, and unshackled by any obligations to 'defend the faith', he gives a review of Theodor Nöldeke's research results, mentioning another prominent orientalist, who finds even much room for criticism – using such adjectives as: clumsy, inappropriate, ugly, very unusual, very hard, rough, and so forth – in the language of the Qur'an.⁹ How objective any such or contrary conclusions can ever be, is probably a futile debate. Human standards of excellence are not divine, but they are all that human beings can base their judgments on, and they must be considered as having been developed 'in good faith'. Whatever the case may be, they cannot be disallowed, for the alternative is to become dogmatic and pull down the blinds on any penetrating analysis. And since interpretations are not incapable of evolving – quite the contrary, that is what they do – one has to start somewhere. This, however, it must be kept in mind, is not an attitude which is necessarily applauded by 'a native'.

⁸ Paret, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p. 201.

⁹ Paret, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p. 204-5.

Now, what about the characteristics of the Arabic language (which has been influenced by the Qur'an to a large degree¹⁰) in general?¹¹

A feature of Arabic, Beeston states,¹² is to strive to make sentences more acceptable rhythmically. He describes this as a pervasive tendency and states that it is done at the expense of inserting verbiage, that is not a prerequisite for the substantial message. This proclivity clings tight. It is noteworthy that, nowadays, it is not uncommon for Arabs of distinction to write in a wholly modern style modeled on European scientific writing about, let's say the physiological causes of grey hair, using no linguistic adornments whatsoever, and in the next paragraph, dealing, for example with the emotionally charged subject of the psychological impact of the appearance of gray hair, to revert to parallelism of the most traditional kind – with or without rhyme.¹³

The figures of speech that Arabs are said to have preferred in their early writings are: pun (*tajnis*) and antithesis (*tibaq, mutabaqah*). Other favoured figures of speech, somewhat later on, were hyperbole and metaphor (*isticarah*).¹⁴ These, and many more literary tools used in Arabic writing seek to evoke amazement, surpass reality and impress by being as far-fetched as possible. Needless to say, a translation which attempts to capture such imagery, might fall into the pitfall of bringing out the ridiculous in the magnificent. This is not to say that great renderings of the original cannot be made. "Writing in which the main point resides in a display of linguistic skill poses some intractable problems for a translator; yet most of Hamadh.ani's *Maqamat* can be read with pleasure even in a version which perforce does not reproduce that feature."¹⁵ An example of such a translation, which although stripped of the allure of the original language, is still enjoyable, is the rendering of the so-called *Maqamah of Armenia*.¹⁶ As for the *maqamahs* of al-Hariri, they are almost untranslatable, since he uses puns to inculcate, for example, the differentiation in sense

¹⁰ The Qur'an was mentioned here as the most extreme example of a) the complexity of the hermeneutics that must be exercised in the exegesis of any source text, b) the debates which any translation can arouse.

¹¹ Paret, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p. 214, states about the impact of the Qur'an on literature: "We may surmise at the outset that, just as the Arabs owed their nationhood and their world-historical importance to Islam, so too the Arabic tongue owed its literary development to the Qur'an." He adds, that the Qur'an, as the Holy Scripture revealed to the Arabs in their own tongue, provided the impetus for the development of an Arabic literary language. Zubaidi, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p. 323-333 and Badawi, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, e.g. p. 148, give a detailed account of the impact of the Qur'an on poetry. As for its impact on prose, Zubaidi, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p. 334, mentions that: early prose works consisted almost exclusively of orations, sermons and epistles; and that the formula for arousing the emotions of the audience was resorting to quotations from the Qur'an. On p. 334 he states: "... the use of Quranic idioms, verses, ideas and images, and the emulation of Quranic rhythms and stylistic features, had become at the time [of the Umayyads] an essential part of the tradition of literary writings." In *Grundriss der Arabischen Philologie*, esp. p. 5 (Einleitung), it is explained that Islam became and remained the reference point of all types of literature. Latham, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, Chapter 4 (esp. p. 155, 177-179) discusses the external influences (Greek, Persian, etc.) on the development of the religion and literary activities of the Arabs. Paret, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p. 186-227, discusses the nature of the Qur'an as a text, in great detail (in the tradition of such orientalists as Gustav Weil, Richard Bell and Theodor Nöldeke, etc.), stating on p. 209, that it is the product of "a psychologically fascinating process of assimilation." This statement is preceded by many examples of how biblical influences, for example, (e.g. on p. 188) became part and parcel of Prophet Muhammad's ideas. Suffice it here, to remark that some background knowledge of pre-Islamic Arabia, Islam, the Qur'an and the development of the new religion over a period of ca. two centuries, is necessary, for an adequate understanding of a medieval text, such as the one under study. As the Discussion sections will reflect, religious awareness is an ever-present factor in even the most mundane of statements.

¹² *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p. 183.

¹³ See examples given by Beeston, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 1*, p. 184-5.

¹⁴ Schoeler, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, p. 285 states that a Freudian view of the use of either device leads us to surmise that the aim of their user is to gain acceptance, by showing off cleverness.

¹⁵ Beeston, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, p. 130.

¹⁶ Beeston, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, (until p. 132)

between two words that differ only in vowelings. His aim seems to have been rather pedagogic, including the pinpointing of grammatical cruxes.¹⁷

On the difficulty of translation, Hayakawa states that it is the affective connotations which all words usually have, which cannot be divorced from their informative connotations, which pose the biggest problem in translating. He says: “This, incidentally, is the reason literature is so difficult to translate from one language to another: a translation that follows informative connotations will often falsify the affective connotations, and vice versa, so that readers who know both the language of the original and the language of the translation are almost sure to be dissatisfied, feeling either that the “spirit of the original has been sacrificed” or else that the translation is “full of inaccuracies.” ”¹⁸

Thus, less successful translations are also released into circulation. Beeston gives the example of an English rendering of Hariri's *Maqamah of Damascus*, stating that, in spite of being a “delightfully rollicking praise of bacchic antimonianism ...” the English rendering lacks the allure of the rhymes and the puns present in Arabic.¹⁹ To mention one of the most lamentably unsuccessful renderings of poetry into another language – considering the force and ingenuity of the original – is the example given of Abu Tammam's great *Amorium* poem in translation.²⁰ Yet, may I hasten to add, that none of the examples I could cite of ‘poor reflections’ reflect the faults of the aspiring or masterful translator from Arabic into the mother-tongue of the translator, as much as they divulge the simply impossible tasks some people challenge themselves with pursuing.

As for the translations provided in this Thesis, I have called them ‘descriptions’, because they are merely meant to give some idea of the context in which the appeals are met with and of their style. I have provided as many alternative ‘renderings’ as possible, separated by slanting lines. Emphasis in the ‘description’ has been laid on finding a degree of equivalence, so the translations are far from literal. It must be kept in mind that “Arabic and English are linguistically and culturally incongruous languages.”²¹ Therefore, the English rendering is merely a very rough ‘replica’ of the original. The numbers preceding each translated lexical item point to the corresponding transliterated entry in Appendix II (which, in turn, gives the exact page and line on which the entry is to be found in the Corpus.²²) The associations that a translation produces, are of course, entirely different from the ones that the original text produces, and the attitudes the original text convey are impossible to reproduce in a translation. This cannot be helped. The only point that can be made here, in closing, is that one must not forget that to rely on translations is like relying on mirror images instead of touching an extended hand with one's own.

¹⁷ Beeston, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, p. 133.

¹⁸ Hayakawa, 1989, p. 109.

¹⁹ Beeston, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, p. 133.

²⁰ See Badawi, *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Vol. 2*, p. 159-61. (The above statement expresses my personal opinion. Other examples I might feel inclined to give could be the translation of the *Tardiyyas* – mainly – of Abu Nuwas given on pages 176-183, etc.)

²¹ Hussein Abdul-Raof, 2001, p. 138.

²² See first footnote of next Chapter.