LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL ASPECTS NEEDED FOR NEWS TRANSLATORS WHEN REFERRING TO THE ARAB WORLD

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Abstract: Language is essential for human communication. It is a perfect way of finding out about discursive practices and cultural patterns. It enables people to define their identity and show to the world their sense of unity. Translations are used by so many journalists every day and newspaper articles, with the information comprised in them, get to the people, sometimes influencing their attitudes and mentalities. The aim of this paper is to draw attention on the challenge of translating news referring to the Arab world nowadays. Every cultural or linguistic environment has specific symbols which are, most of the times, known by the speakers of a certain language. In the translation process they should not be overlooked because confusing or quite opposing ideas may result. Moreover, understanding the most frequent aspects that influence the accuracy of the materials which get to the readers should lead to improving the translation performance.

Keywords: Arabic, translation, culture, news, language.

Translation facilitates communication, enabling sharing information about human values, scientific advances, great literary works, having the role of cultural and linguistic mediation, crossing the boundaries of space and time.

Most journalists/ news translators should strive for improving the quality of their work because higher standards have to be established. When covering events that refer to the Arab countries and international politics, readership's expectations or knowledge should be anticipated. Therefore, it is more than obvious that understanding some important aspects are more than needed because proper and accurate materials should be provided.

Arabic language is used by millions of people from many countries. It is a good illustration of "diglossia" because, in addition to the standard language, dialects are being used. Charles Ferguson distinguished between two varieties of the language: H (High) for "the superposed variety in diglosias" and L (Low) for "regional dialects" and chose four languages as examples for illustrating his views about the topic. Moreover, the former category can appear in: "sermon in church or mosque", "personal letter", "speech in parliament, political speech", "university lecture", "news broadcast", "newspaper editorial, news story, caption on picture" and "poetry". (Ferguson 1959: 236)

He also noted some important aspects that may raise difficulties as referred to using standard language vs. colloquial:

It is instructive to note the problems involved in citing words of these languages in a consistent and accurate manner. First, should the words be listed in their H form or in their L

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form, or in both? Second, if words are cited in their L form, what kind of L should be chosen? (…) Third, what kind of spelling should be used to represent L? (234)

Arabic language can be divided in two categories: Standard Arabic also called Fusha or Modern Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic or Eamyia. The former is the language of the news. Frequently, Arab politicians choose to address to the people by using Fusha in order to show how well-educated they are and also because their speeches appear in the media, reaching larger audiences. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali decided to have his last speech (from 13 January 2011) as president of Tunisia using dialect. Although he had ruled for almost 24 years, it was the first time he did that when addressing publically. It was an attempt to get closer to the people's hearts, to show them that there were not two opposing sides: upper and lower class.

Arabs are very fond of their language. It is part of their cultural heritage. Clarification is needed when referring to Arabs and Iranians because seldom a lot of confusion appears in the media.

(…) Iranians are Persians. They are not Semites, as Arabs are. But nearly everyone I interviewed thought Iranians are Arabs. Iranians are primarily Aryans who moved onto the Persian plateau in the 17th century B.C. Persia was renamed Iran in the 1930s when the former Shah Reza Pahlavi's family seized power. Iranians do not speak Arabic, but they speak Farsi, an Indo-European tongue that shares several common characteristics with Western European languages. (Shaheen 1984: 15)

For a Romanian, it takes a lot of years to study it. Arabic vocabulary is extensive and many times needs to be looked up in the dictionary. Practice is required for correct pronunciation of the words or for using transliteration.

Arabic is the language of the Quran, enabling Muslims to understand God's message. It is part of the Semitic language family and it is very distinct from either Romanian or English. It has only two tenses: Present ("Imperfective") and Past ("Perfective"), whereas Future is expressed by means of a particle.

In the case of English, apart from simple tenses, there are also compound ones: perfect, progressive and perfect progressive. Journalists that take materials already translated into English may fail to grasp some of these important aspects. For instance, a Past Tense verb in Arabic may be translated into English in two ways: either by Past Tense Simple or Present Perfect Simple. A sentence with a meaning in Arabic like "He worked there" عمل هناك would appear in English "He worked there" or "He has worked there".

Arabic language distinguishes between the second person singular and the second person plural. Many times, the latter category is used for expressing politeness to only a person, thus making discourse highly formal. As referred to the number, Arabic has singular, plural and dual and it includes gender delimitation (masculine and feminine).

"English is more analytical than is Arabic. Thus in English one needs three words to say 'I killed him'. In Arabic, one word rendered this sentence/ qatalthuhu." (Kaye 2009: 575)

In Arabic, by attaching prefixes and suffixes to the verb, indications about number, gender and person can result; mentioning separately the personal pronouns as subjects of the sentences is, in most of the cases, unnecessary.

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In Mubarak's speech transcript from 10 February 2011[1], the pronoun "I" appeared a lot of times, giving the feeling of excessiveness. Definitely, the former Egyptian president did not use the personal pronoun I (أنا) to the same extent in Arabic. It was just a matter of following English grammar rules during translation.

The Arabic alphabet comprises 28 consonant sounds with four possible shapes for every letter. In children books or in writings for specific purposes, the texts are fully vocalized, but in the news, short vowels (a,i,u) do not appear, making it difficult, even for an Arabic translator, to understand proper nouns correctly. Therefore, when it comes to correct transliteration of Arabic script into Latin, we can discuss about variation. Even though there are attempts of standardization as referred to the pronunciation and spelling of some letters, there is disparity between phonemic charts. Moreover, the Colloquial influence makes it difficult to keep a unitary system. Transliterating Arabic proper nouns is neither an easy task to be carried out nor generally accepted.

Thus, we can understand why so many different ways for spelling the name of the same person can appear (as in the case of the former Libyan president: Gadhafi, Al-Qadhafi , Gaddafi, Khadafi).

When somebody introduces himself to an Arab Muslim, after pronouncing his name, he may be asked what his name means. Apart from the fact that the names we have distinguish us from the others, in all the Islamic countries they contain distinctive messages, because all of them signify something, contributing to better knowing a person.

Arab Muslims choose their children' given names, which are usually connected to Islam and reflect worship of Allah's virtues and, on the other hand, the qualities that parents want their children to have, for example: Muhammad, Said (happy), Abdullah (servant of God), Latifah (gentle), Karima (generous).

It is not a common practice to have more than one given name. In conversation, a man/ woman may be addressed, instead of his/her given name, by using the name of the first born son (e.g. Umm Said meaning Said's mother or Abu Said as Said's father).

The family name may be preceded by the definite article *al* or *el* (dialectal influence), for example al-Abadi or simply Ahmad Abadi. In the case of a longer name, this may include the father's and/or grandfather's names, but preceded by *ibn* or *bin* (for a son) and *bint* (for a daughter).

It must be clearly understood that not all Muslims are Arabs and not all the Arabs are Muslims.

Many educated people confuse the Arab world with the Moslem world. Geographically, Arab countries stretch along Northern Africa and into the Middle East. But the Moslem world overlaps the Arab world and stretches far beyond to most of Africa continuing eastward through India, Indonesia and the Philippines. Not all of the Arab world's 150 million people are Moslem, though many, of course are both. (Shaheen 1984: 15)

In order to distinguish Arab Muslims from non-Muslims, the first name can help in this direction. Therefore, if a person's first name has French, Italian, English influence, he is a

[1] www.bbc.com. 2011. Accessed on 14 July 2014. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12427091

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non-Muslim Arab (e.g. George), but, if his name has connection with Islam, then that person most likely is an Arab Muslim. However, it is not a criterion that can be generally used.

Last names are very important because they enable associations with the other members of the family and the values they believe in: loyalty and respect.

A significant cultural aspect for the Arab world is the concept of family because Arabs pay attention to the fame and prestige. When combined with hierarchy or power relation aspects, it is obvious that more efforts should be made in this direction. Inside the family, people learn how to communicate, how to deal with different situations, which influence their behavior throughout their entire lives. The image is very important and all the members must work to preserve it and even improve it. Unfortunately, many journalists/ translators disregard the above mentioned construct when they select the materials for writing a summary from a presidential speech.

Family means unity, security, support and honor. Commitment and devotement exist among individuals and they are prevailing for any kind of activity they get involved in. When certain political leaders choose to address to the public by using words connected to the concept of family, they do so in order to give the people the feeling that they belong to the same group or side, that they have common problems which can be solved together, by joining efforts. The elders are highly respected by the others and they are considered as being full of wisdom. Values are transmitted from one generation to another and most of the times in an unchanged form.

When analyzing political speeches, special attention should be paid to the rhetoric, because, for Arabs, it is an art to address properly to the people, proving their level of education. If some words are repeated, it is because the speaker intends, in most of the cases, to do so. The importance of words is very high. Many times a spoken agreement would gain more value than a written one.

Eloquence is highly appreciated in the Arab world. It seems to be the key to successful communication, for making business and bringing prestige. Tone of the voice, lexical choices, repetitions and exaggerations have their part in getting the message across to the audience.

Hussein Abdul-Raof in the Preface to his book called "Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis" stated:

Based upon human communication, Arabic rhetoric pays attention to the addressee's psychological and ideological state so that the communicator's message is driven home and received well by the audience. Arabic rhetoric takes into consideration the communicative context of a given discourse activity and accounts for the pragmatic functions of word order change in the Arabic sentence. Arabic rhetoric provides a pragmatic account of linguistic deviation, linguistic structuring and conversational implicature. (2006: Xiii)

Literary Arabic was used in the past for public recitations and poetry, its beauty reflecting the true culture and its people. Moral, artistic and spiritual values gained new dimensions, because by means of refined language, Arabs found ways to better express and define themselves. Many of these characteristics are still kept today. When somebody chooses to hold a speech, it will be more than just correct use of the language. Elements of pathos and logos will be present, making the speech close to perfect. Words will indicate pride, character, prestige, history, trust, sense of duty and so on.

When addressing publically, Arab leaders make use of any possible ways to convince people of their intentions, so everything should be perfect, errors not being allowed,

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remembering us of Aristotle's words: "of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third, on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible."

Thus, a wide range of discursive practices is used by Arabs in political discourse. People communicate differently. The sooner we are aware of these differences, the better we can interpret the meanings of their communication as well as the cultural characteristics. In the same way that people tend to define themselves by comparison with others, cultural awareness can exist by interaction. There are individuals that are prone to considering their value systems as being better than the other ones, but these tendencies should be minimized as much as possible. Ethnocentric attitudes should be avoided because success in communication (either written or oral) may be based on recognizing and accepting that cultural differences exist. This is a normal characteristic and the approaches to them should be neither biased nor judgmental.

The history of the contemporary Arab world is often treated as an anomaly within the international system. Following an approach inherited from Orientalism, already denounced by Edward Said, this region and its inhabitants continue to be analyzed as an exotic, complex and surprising reality adjudged not to fit the 'usual' parameters. (Brichs 2013: 3)

Edward T. Hall in his book "Beyond Culture" made a distinction between high and low context cultures. The former ones involve at a larger extent concepts like trust, friendship and they take much more time, whereas in the latter category there is not a significant level of human interaction.

A high-context communication message is one in which most of the information is either the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context communication is just the opposite, i.e. the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. (Hall 1976: 91)

For Arab countries which have high-context culture, communication is considered more as an art, meaning that when someone delivers a speech, it can take a lot of time to prepare it as well as for the audience to react to it. On the other hand, a low-context culture involves among others, direct and very clear messages in communication. They contain factual and concrete information. Discursive strategies differ from one culture to another and understanding the patterns which are frequently used enables the translator to accurately convey the meanings of the words. The message is not a direct one and it usually has a symbolic value.

"Other speech communities, such as certain Arabic cultures, are equally imprecise, but for exactly the opposite reason; that is, they engage in overassertion, exaggeration and repetition. The Arabic language is filled with forms of verbal exaggeration." (Ferraro 2002: 61)

Pursuit of honor and people's dignity influence the way they carry out their actions and the manner in which they perceive the others. Men are considered dominant figures in the Arab society and they want to give and receive respect. Therefore, Arab political speeches may include references to past successful actions as well as words/ phrases that give the idea of commitment, readiness for action, status and the unity of family.

"I am addressing you all from the heart, a father's dialogue with his sons and daughters (…) I tell the families of those innocent victims that I suffered plenty for them, as much as they

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did. My heart was in pain because of what happened to them, as much as it pained their hearts." (from Mubarak's speech, 10 February 2011)

The way in which people use the language gives indications of the cultural norms. Albeit hard to anticipate how communication takes place at different levels or circumstances, it is useful to know at least what is acceptable or not.

Arabs prefer an indirect style of communication, which means that their messages may be perceived sometimes as ambiguous. Rather than explicitly stating something, there is a tendency towards complicating the message out on grounds that if they request something directly, they may be considered as having improper behavior. Although for some people certain information may seem irrelevant, for Arabs there are definitely links between the communication codes that they use. However, in a balance between exactness and emotion, the latter category prevails. According to Almaney and Alwan (1982: 84) "an Arab feels compelled to over assert in almost all types of communication because others expect him [or her] to" or there is the chance of failing to grasp the meaning in case the language that is used is too "simple".

Hofstede (2010) discussed about five cultural components: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculine vs. feminine, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint.

Arab culture is characterized by collectivistic values meaning that people will do all they can in the best interest of the group. In political speeches, these aspects may be reflected in the use of the personal pronoun "we" and verbs of inclusion or words that indicate collective actions. It is important for the Arabs to know that they belong to a group, which, in most of the cases, is preferable to be a respectable one. Thus, the priorities of an individual become of the entire group. Arabs encourage interpersonal communication, socializing, keeping close family ties as well as establishing connections, as parts of their daily lives.

Hatim and Mason (2005: 106) distinguished between through-argumentation and counter-argumentation.

"The statement and subsequent substantiation of an initial thesis characterize through-argumentative texts. Citing an opponent's thesis, rebutting this and substantiating the point of the rebuttal characterize counter-argumentative texts."

By using examples, their research indicated that Arabic has a preference for the former category, whereas English for the latter one.

Recognizing some cultural aspects can lead to understanding why some newspaper articles are different from others. Materials from the Arab world and translated into a target language preserve a great part of the original intentions of the speaker/ writer rather than if they come by means of an intermediate language or "philtered" by the own culture of every translator.

"Information that passes between cultures through news agencies is not only 'translated' in the interlingual sense, it is reshaped, edited, synthesized and transformed for the consumption of a new set of readers." (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 2)

If we compare Arabic, Romanian and English linguistic and cultural patterns, there are definitely differences that may cause problems in translation and therefore the translator's experience and constant practice are mandatory.

The more accurate the images about Arabs and their values are, the better they can be reflected in other writings. Systematic analysis is needed in order to identify the communication preferences, patterns and even avoidances. A journalist or translator that does not have at least

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minimal awareness about the cultural and linguistic features which can be identified as prevailing in certain contexts, he can hardly comprehend all dimensions, practices, rules and guiding principles so as to further transfer them to others.

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