TRANSLATION OF ARAB SPRING NEWS INTO ROMANIAN- A BRIDGE FOR CULTURES

Valentina-Magdalena Drocan

PhD Student, University of Bucharest

Abstract: Every language is characterized, up to a certain extent, by uniqueness reflecting the way people refer to their culture, history and even every day realities. Translation opens the way to another world, enabling people to find out about places, which are more or less similar to the ones they belong to and it is up to the translator's skills how s/he succeeds in mediating the information from source to target text as well as between cultures. Newspaper articles that appeared in Romania, referring to the Arab Spring, greatly varied in content and form, leading to differences in point of knowledge and understanding. Attitude towards specific topics was reflected in the semantic preferences which were obvious indicators of the translators' cultural levels. Given the rapidness of the events and the multitude of materials that covered the uprisings, newspaper articles had to refer to the facts and comprise references to the Arab culture, in order to enable the readership understand the characteristics of the realities presented, coupled with long-standing traditions and values.

Keywords: Arab Spring, translation, culture, news, language

Language facilitates communication among individuals, helping them to express their feelings, ideas and desires. It is part of the cultural heritage, comprising all the symbols and values of a nation. It enables people to define and maintain their identities.

Our societies have a remarkable capacity for conserving their distinctive culture through generations of successive members and despite varied and numerous forces of change. While change sweeps the surface, the deep layers remain stable, and the culture rises from its ashes like a phoenix. (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010: 26)

New information that is received is interpreted by comparison with the already assimilated one, establishing similarities and differences. If materials come from two different languages or cultures, a process of mediation is needed in order to bridge all the gaps that may

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

appear and avoid hindering the overall understanding. Relying on perceptions and previously stored elements is needed, but, in conjunction with new components, it should lead to a coherent and harmonized whole, where unbiased opinions should prevail.

Mass-media has its own guiding rules and practices. Journalists, translators should meet all the professional requirements and have well-defined purposes oriented towards accurately informing people.

If reading and writing may seem quite easy actions, the manners in which they are carried out, as well as the strategies involved, make the difference in point of understanding and interpreting the messages. In order to correctly perceive the events from countries, the cultural dimensions need to be reflected in the written materials that get to the public. Translations enable people to enrich their knowledge about the society, history and mentalities of the nations described in writing.

Most modern approaches to translation include references to culture because this is what distinguishes geographical and historical entities. In the past, it was closely connected to the arts, literature and music and seemed more as a characteristic of those belonging to the upper-class. In today's world, due to the technological progress, the ways of spreading knowledge have diversified, leading to the need of providing materials which have to be accessible to a larger audience.

By means of TV, radio or Internet, people want to access information and find out about other cultures. Thus, the developments brought by globalization lead to different ways of viewing cultural aspects because they are marked by complexity, which does not allow considering them as well-defined entities.

There are words, grounded in one culture, which are almost impossible to be expressed in the target language. Translators must be aware of their mission and their contribution should not be minimized.

"As a process, translation is an imaginative and disciplined exercise in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural reiteration, a search for the most suitable synonymity (…)." (Doyle 2008:13)

Translators should have a high level of knowledge from many fields, because they try to understand people and concepts, shape ideas and give to words moral and educational values. They should also be mediators between cultures and know how to preserve the beauty of languages. The role of culture is tremendous because it comprises a set of spiritual and

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

moral values, reflecting society. Moreover, it significantly influences the manner in which events are perceived or how information is interpreted.

"To translate from one language into another it is not enough to be proficient in the source and target languages, especially in the case of such different languages as Arabic and Romanian, of civilizations and mentalities that do not have much in common." (Dobrişan 2004: 29).

Translation means more than a simple linguistic transfer. It involves a process of mediation between both source and target culture, corresponding to the people's needs of communication or acquiring information. There are also other aspects that should be considered, such as: thorough process of documentation, analysis of the beliefs expressed, attention to the subtleties encountered, as well as to any kind of social and technological developments because values and meanings change in time. According to (Schäffner 2011: 306) "technical and scientific translation in the 20th century has played a decisive role in technological and social progress".

In a world influenced by globalization, all the available resources of communication should lead to proper understanding of the individuals' cultural values. The image offered by mass-media is a mediated one, involving a process of selection because expectations coming from the audience are considered. Moreover, the information undergoes a process of prioritizing and interpreting, before it is presented to the public. By means of newspaper articles, people find out about different kinds of interactions that are established at the political level. Based on the discursive strategies and practices comprised in the materials which are presented to them, people create opinions and issue judgments.

The Arab Spring protests, which began in December 2010 in Tunisia and spread very fast in other countries (Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen), drew the people's attention worldwide. The news content referring to them included, among others: killings, attacks, hardships coming authorities, people's hopes and expectations, as it could be seen from street slogans, as well as political reforms, reflected in carefully organized discourse. By means of translated news, Romanian readership could also find out about the mass protests and the internal political changes that were going on in the Arab countries involved in the uprisings.
Times change, people change and even though the countries underwent very difficult times, it does not mean that an equal between violence and a certain nation should be placed.

There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts (…). (Said 2003 [1997]: xv)

In the case of the Arab Spring events, for constantly informing the readers about the uprisings, a process of translation was needed, which had to comprise all the dimensions and differences of opinions, purposes and attitudes.

The level in which newspapers played a part was more of a global one because demonstrators wanted everybody to know what was going on in their countries. When young people began uploading videos reflecting the tensions that took place inside their homelands (between political leaders, eager to have total control on everything, and citizens, tired of enduring injustice and oppression) they did that without having any kind of prior judgments regarding the receivers (their nationalities, beliefs and religions). Revolutionaries used all the possible means (social networks, TV, newspapers) to express themselves crossing the barriers of time and space.

The advocates of ubiquitous computing express grandiloquently the implied goal of all advocates and practitioners of digital media: to reimagine and therefore to reform the world as a mediated (and remediated) space (…) Photography, film, and television have been constructed by our culture to embody our cultural distinctions and make those distinctions part of our reality; digital media follow in this tradition. (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 62)

In the past, writings included references to the Arabic art, architecture, literature which enabled perfect combinations of music, feelings, shapes, lines and colors. Everything looked in perfect harmony and nothing appeared randomly.

Nowadays, that balance between power and beauty seems somehow forgotten. Newspaper articles coming from the Arab world abound in violent scenes. The reflections of the people's ways of thinking, of their souls are at a higher extent in the slogans that they use, as means of protesting against oppressive leaders.

It becomes obvious that the more different the source language is, as compared to the target one, the more difficult the process of translation is. It may take years for a person studying Arabic to achieve a proficient level and that is why news agencies prefer English versions instead of others.

To have specialists in all kinds of foreign languages, working for Romanian newspapers, is not a frequent practice. In the case of the Arab Spring events, quotations comprising information from public statements and speeches appeared as being according to

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

reports from: Mediafax, Reuters, AFP. For instance, a piece of information that got to the Romanians, in most of the cases, underwent several processes of translation: from Arabic to English, then to our language and it finally got to the readers. However, this is not a new practice because, some years ago, there were many instances, when providing materials required more than just translations.

In Iraq, for example, AFP have used American journalists embedded with the US forces and Iraqi journalists inside Feluja who report in Arabic, phone through to the Baghdad AFP bureau where a bilingual Arab journalist takes the information in Arabic and then writes it in English, from which it is then translated into other languages. (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 135)

There were instances when Romanian journalists decided to keep the English versions of slogans as such because they were used this way, in an unchanged manner, by news agencies worldwide (e.g. "Game over", "Go out, Mubarak" from Jurnalul Național, 1 Feb. 2011).

News referring to the Arab Spring protests reminded the Romanians about the events from December 1989, enabling them to make mental associations and even identify themselves with the protesters' causes and requests.

"In other words, the extent to which a text is translatable varies with the degree to which it is embedded in its own specific culture, also with the distance that separates the cultural background of source text and target audience in terms of time and place." (Snell-Hornby 2006: 41)

The translator's attitude should not be judgmental in any way. S/He should be as objective as possible despite the fact that some attitudes might prevail. According to Barthes (1991 [1957]: 156) "bourgeois ideology continuously transforms the products of history into essential types". Within this framework, when translating an Arab leader's political speech, special attention should be paid, in order to grasp the most suitable elements which include references to culture and even history.

In the translation process, the intentions, purposes, discursive practices and norms that can be seen in the ST need to be considered. Moreover, the political leaders' attempts to preserve the power and determine the people to stop protesting and the desired effects as outcomes of their speeches need to be analyzed. Although their expectations may not accomplish, what is interesting in their political discourse is the mixture of references relating to culture, history and their combination with ideological elements.

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

Foreign online media (www.bbc.co.uk, http//edition.cnn.com, www.washington post.com) provided full English translated transcripts of the presidential speeches. Romanian newspapers did not follow this pattern. They chose to publish just summaries, including only few quotations. For example, România liberă online edition provided a part of Mubarak's speech (from 1 Feb. 2011), translated into Romanian, as well as a link to a YouTube video which included the English version of the discourse. This tendency was not unitary in point of displaying such kind of news, because the same online newspaper chose to present some parts of Mubarak's last speech (from 10 Feb. 2014) without including a video of it. Therefore, the readers got a partial image of the president's intentions or ideas.

On the other hand, Jurnalul Național online edition chose just very few statements of the Egyptian president's speech (from 1 Feb. 2011), with one of these being mentioned in the headline as if it were the essence of his entire discourse, referring to his intentions of resigning in September.

When full text translation is avoided, definitely there is a lot of useful information missing, preventing people from having a clear and objective image of the events, despite the fact that some cultural or ideological elements may appear.

We must remember that ideologies are always doubly determined, that they owe their most specific characteristics not only to the interests of the classes or class fractions they express (the function of sociodicy), but also to the specific interests of those who produce them and to the specific logic of the field of production (…). (Bourdieu 1991: 169)

Semantic preference, rhetoric are so important in understanding relations between individuals, groups and institutions and even aspects of freedom as well as constraints related to the policymaking process. Some key concepts which characterize Arabs appeared in the original presidential speeches (of Ben Ali, Mubarak), as it could be seen from the lexical choices, involving honor, loyalty and trust as last attempts to convince people to stop protesting.

Language use, text, talk and communication (together subsumed here under the overall term of 'discourse') are needed and used by group members to learn, acquire, change, confirm, articulate, as well as to persuasively convey ideologies to other ingroup members, to inculcate them in novices, defend them against (or conceal them from) outgroup members or to propagate them among those who are (as yet) the infidels. (van Dijk 1998: 6)

Translators should be aware of the specific social and cultural norms, of the manner in which Arabs usually hold speeches, in order to properly reflect them in the target texts. The

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

bridge between cultures, ensured by means of translation, should also be reached by impartial attitude, deep understanding and knowledge of both target and source language, full awareness of the cultural and linguistic features.

News does not depict just one side of society; it comprises its entire aspects and, even though there are differences or similarities, these perfectly reflect the realities. When translating speeches coming from the Arab world, special attention should be given to the source language text; if it is in Modern Standard Arabic then it is more formal, rather than if the same material is to be found in Colloquial, because this latter one is the language spoken by people and it includes regional differences.

While Modern Standard Arabic is encountered in higher levels of education, newspapers and TV, dialects appear in informal situations. Therefore, by knowing the differences in point of the language when addressing publicly, we understand the sender's intentions and we also acquire information about the target audience, because the code used for communication purposes enables that.

Proper use of the language involves following some rules or norms. Although they can make us think of restrictions or limits, we should also see their positive sides which are inherent in all aspects of human interaction. Norms greatly contribute to success in point of interpersonal communication. They are difficult to be established because they require combinations between previous experiences and similarity with prospective situations.

"(…) adherence to the norms of the original determines the adequacy of the translation, as compared to it, adherence to the norms of the target determines its acceptability in the target linguistic and/or literary polysystems as well as its exact position within them." (Toury 1980: 55)

However, what is appropriate in one culture does not necessarily mean it is the same in another one. Lexical choice involves awareness of some norms in order to find the most suitable ways to convey the meanings of words throughout the entire process of translation. Standardization of cultures is not an expected outcome. Even though there may be common elements and patterns, this does not imply that they should be viewed as having a fixed and well-defined criterion for being defined. Each culture should be considered according to its own concepts, value systems and representations. Only this way the cultural message carried by translators can be impartial. However, "to attempt to impose the value system of the SL culture onto the TL culture is dangerous ground" (Bassnett 2002: 32).

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

Unfortunately, when referring to the Arabs, generalizations are being made, in opposition with Western ideas. Translators should leave apart any misconception or stereotype that may negatively influence the perception of the source culture. This is not an easy task to do and definitely there are some constraints throughout the entire process, but people can overcome them.

"Differences in culture and religion create differences over policy issues, ranging from human rights to immigration to trade and commerce to the environment." (Huntington 1993: 29)[1]

Cultural differences should not be minimized during translation involving target and source text because they show, among others, how people define themselves. For better news translation, extensive understanding of values and beliefs belonging to certain individuals/groups is needed because these are part of their culture and guide their social behavior and human relations.

As society develops, words can acquire different meanings or new terms may be introduced, reflecting cultural progress and society changes. They could be seen in the created contexts which had been enabled, among others, by the mediation provided by translation. Romanian translated news regarding the Arab Spring conflicts reflected the gaps between traditional ideas and civil reactions to them. Moreover, the videos of violent acts committed by authorities had a deep impact worldwide; the translated news content helped in accurate perception of the events.

The manner in which people chose to demonstrate led to what specialists referred to as a culture of protest, which rapidly spread to other Arabic countries and "music, poetry, street art, theater and cinema became popular means of expression". (Nicoarea 2014: 249)

To convey the proper meanings of the original messages, translation required thorough understanding of the social life, military institutions, political organizations and power relations. Arab cultural references involved knowledge from many domains. Most political speeches called for understanding of some previous events as well as establishing connections between translation, historical and cultural contexts. These purposes, reachable or not in the

[1] Huntington, Samuel. "The Clash of Civilizations." Foreign Affairs, 1993. Available on http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/48950/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations. Accessed on 13 September 2014.

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

newspaper articles, helped in keeping the people informed. Generally, it takes persistence, effort and constant training to grasp all the meanings from the original texts.

Ideologies were expressed during the Arab uprisings and differences in point of power relations had to be objectively reflected, in translations, as it could be noticed in news discourse.

The way an individual refers to another one is done, in most of the cases, by comparing himself with "the other", which is seen and interpreted by means of pejorative connotations.

At an extended level, when an individual compares his culture to another one, it can include either positive or negative attitudes. However, the ethnocentric views appear and broaden the gaps. Therefore, people have the tendency to perceive the cultural differences more in a negative way. It is best for translators to be objective in their work irrespective of the places where the materials come from.

In conflict situations, they should mediate between the cultural differences and consider all the allusions or connotations intended by the actors from the political scene. They should facilitate understanding of all the characteristics belonging to a nation which has its own distinctive identity.

Arab Spring uprisings brought to light confrontations between different social and political classes, reflecting the opposition with the "others", according to the prejudices and stereotypes that had already existed in the group/individual consciousness. Reflected in the political discourse at a higher or lower extent, news translators had to cope up with all kinds of representations, integrating them in materials which comprised all the similarities and differences.

Being objective in translating discourse that comes from one side of the binary opposition "us" vs. "them" is a desideratum. Participants want to define their identity, which, most of the times, is a differentiating one and all their efforts have to be integrated into discourse, by using certain strategies. All political actors have their own set of rules or values that guide them.

Many times, language is associated with power because, by the manner in which it is used, it can change mentalities, relations and societies.

Certain images that are in circulation in a social group about other social groups may be drawn upon or countered by interactants. An interactant may insist on playing with these

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

dominant discourses or images and thus not allow other interactants the individual freedom to create and present themselves as they wish. (Holliday, Hyde and Kulman 2004: 168)

Public communication reflects all the ongoing changes from society as well as those referring to sending and receiving information, with the message having a central role. In crisis situations, political leaders address to the people publicly, attempting to do all they can rather than witness the decline of their authorities.

News discourse covers a variety of topics because diversity is one of the characteristics of freedom in the media and accurate presentation of the international events to the public means finding a balance between communication and culture.

This takes us to the subject of news reader's expectations. The technological evolution brought with itself easy access to materials coming from all over the world. People can choose what to read and even look for similar information online, because there is a wide range of sources that enables them to do so. What seems accurate and reliable is likely to be chosen as a main source of information in the future.

The number of viewers of a certain article appears displayed on almost each website, enabling journalists to anticipate the full spectrum of topics that interests the people. Public perception, as referred to the news credibility, should always be positive and trustworthy leaving no place for distrust.

As a result of the translation process, the target texts should comprise all the meanings of the source texts. Moreover, in order to accurately transfer the information, apart from having linguistic knowledge, awareness of the similarities and differences in point of cultural identities and values is needed.

To be expert in anything related to words means reading as many materials as possible including foreign languages. You cannot know what is right or not, unless you have a system of your own to help you establish proper connections.

The bridge between cultures, provided by means of translation, can be seen in numerous aspects, such as: semantic preference, ideologies, forms of protest as well as daily life choices and activities. The messages that get to the public should be impartial. Effective translation means bridging both the cultural and linguistic gaps that may appear, irrespective of the places the materials come from or whom they are addressed to.

Culture is not limited. It contributes to a person's freedom (of choice, of thought). In the era of globalization, its meanings have changed. Definitions written some years ago may not correspond anymore. Knowledge is extended through translation as well as technological

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

advances, crossing the time and space boundaries, reflecting society, history as well as the true spirit of a nation.

Under the influence of translation, the vocabulary used in the media modifies and people start using new words and expressions. There are also concepts from the source texts which cannot be fully expressed in the target texts and translators/journalists have the possibility to preserve them as such, i.e. without changing them in any way.

Freedom of speech is closely connected with freedom of thought. They are fundamental rights when living in democratic societies, being protected by law. People are proud of their culture, language and identity. Therefore, when translating materials referring to the other nations, a basic paradigm should be followed, i.e. of rendering all the materials with objectivity. No matter how difficult and time-taking it may seem, journalists/translators should carry out their main professional tasks bearing in mind the aforementioned purpose.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Barthes, Roland. Mythologies. New York: Noonday Press, 1991 [1957].

Bassnett, Susan. Translation Studies. London: Routledge, 2002.

Bielsa, Esperança and Bassnett, Susan. Translation in Global News. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

Bolter, Jay David and Grusin, Richard. Remediation: Understanding New Media. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000.

Bourdieu, Pierre. Language and Symbolic Power. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

Dobrişan, Nicolae. “Extratextuality and the Translation of Fictional Work from Arabic into Romanian.” Româno-Arabica IV: Translation from/ into Arabic. Ed. Nadia Anghelescu. Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2004. 29-32.

Doyle, Michael Scott. “Translation and the Space Between: Operative Parameters of an Enterprise”. Translation: Theory and Practice, Tension and Interdependence. Ed. Larson Mildred L. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008. 13-26.

Hofstede, Geert, Hofstede, Gert Jan and Minkov, Michael. Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind. USA: McGraw-Hill, 2010.

Holliday, Adrian, Martin, Hyde and John Kullman. Intercultural Communication: An Advanced Resource Book. London: Routledge, 2004.

Nicoarea, Georgiana. “Cairo’s New Colors: Rethinking Identity in the Graffiti of the Egyptian Revolution”. Româno-Arabica XIV: Ammiyya and Fusha in Linguistics and Literature. Eds.

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)

Grigore, George and Sitaru, Laura. Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2014. 247-262.

Said, Edward. “Preface” to the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition. Orientalism, London: Penguin, 2003 [1997].

Schäffner, Christina. “Translation Studies.” Pragmatics in Practice. Eds. Jan-Ola Őstman and Jef Verschueren. Philadelphia: Johns Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011. 306-322.

Snell-Hornby, Mary. Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach. Revised Edition. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006.

Toury, Gideon. In Search of a Theory of Translation. Tel Aviv: The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, 1980.

van Dijk, Teun A. Ideology-A Multidisciplinary Approach. London: Sage Publications, 1998.

BDD-V2085 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:45:04 UTC)