

---

## **Cultural Exposure: A Challenge in Translation**

*Dr. Muhammad Zaid Malik\**

### **ABSTRACT**

Language is a medium of communication that allows its users to accurately express exactly what they wish to convey. The development of a language is a gradual process that spans centuries; within those long years, cultural, religious and geographic factors play an important role in the formation of words, phrases and idioms, according to the needs and lifestyles of the people speaking that language. Due to these cultural and contextual differences, it becomes difficult for translators to accurately translate words or phrases from one language to the other, without losing the essence of the original text in the process. Literature and language are so closely related to culture that translating idioms or figures of speech often seem to appear nonsensical and ludicrous in the translated language due to the difference in cultural context.

This article will discuss some of the cultural differences between the Arabs and non-Arabs that a translator must be acquainted with. The article will also touch on the nature of translation, what really should be translated—words, texts or meanings? In the end the author will mention some personal experiences in which the comparison between two translators will be made; one exposed to various cultures and the other not so exposed. Analytical, descriptive and inductive methods will be used.

***Key Words:*** *Challenge, Culture, Exposure, Language, Translation.*

---

\* Translation Center, King Saud University, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## Introduction

Arabs are unique in their culture and language from the rest of the world. They may share their religion with non-Arab nations but still they do not share their culture and language with any nation on the face of the earth. Hence it becomes necessary for any non-Arab translator in general and Pakistani and English translators in particular to have comprehensive study of Arabic language and culture before they undertake the task of translation. During my long stay and mixing up with the Arab world, I came to know about some of the main cultural differences between the Arabs and non-Arabs that may be summarized in the following points:

- a- Arabs are very vocal in talking about marriage.
- b- Arabs may openly discuss four marriages.
- c- Arabs are more straight-forward.
- d- Arabs are more generous.
- e- Arabs are more preserving of their traditions.

All these realities have their impact on the Arab culture.

Similarly, there are some differences between Arabic and other languages also. For example:

- a- Unlike other languages, Arabic has the quality of brevity “al-ījāz” (الايجاز). It may express many things in few words “Jawāmi‘ al-Kalim” (جوامع الكلم). Hence communicative translation is needed. This need is extremely felt when translating the Holy Qur’an. That’s why it is noticed that the scholars who avoided communicative translation resorted to frequent use of parentheses in the text of Urdu translation.
- b- The Arabic language is more eloquent and can articulate better than other languages.
- c- The Arabic language has some dialects that are spread among the Arab tribes; seven of these dialects are approved by Allah the Almighty also. Hence the Holy Qur’an was revealed in seven dialects ( نزل القرآن على سبعة ) (أحرف).

An interesting incident took place during the time of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, when he sent Khalid bin al-Walid in the Battles of Apostasy “Ḥurūb al-Riddah” (حروب الردة). At one occasion Khalid passed an order to his men. In Arabic he said, “Adfi’ū asrākum” (أدفتوا أسراكم) (meaning to warm up their captives). Some of his men who were from another Arab tribe jumped in a hurry and started killing the captives. Hearing the hue and cry, Khalid came out of his tent and stopped the killing. He then asked who ordered you to kill the captives. They said: you did. Khalid said: I

didn't. They said: didn't you say: "Adfi'ū asrākum" (أدفتوا أسراكم) ? Khalid said: yes, I did. They said: that's what we were doing. Khalid said: I meant that it was a cold night and the captives must have been feeling cold, so I wanted you to give them some warm clothes or blankets for protection. They said: in our dialect "أدفتوا" (Adfi'ū) means "اقتلوا" ('Uqtulū) (kill). Khalid had no other option but to forgive his men who tried to obey him but could not understand his orders due to the difference in Arabic dialects. Later, the Caliph paid the blood money for those killed by mistake.<sup>(1)</sup>

If this is the case of the native inhabitants of Arabian Peninsula and speakers of the pure Arabic language, then how big would be the challenge when there are two entirely different languages and cultures, trying to translate from and to each other's language?

### Meaning of Translation

There are several meanings of translation by different scholars. Some of them are as under:

Translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language. Each exercise involves some kind of loss of meaning, due to a number of factors. It provokes a continuous tension, dialectic, an argument based on the claims of each language. The basic loss is on a continuum between over translation (increased detail) and under translation (increased generalization).<sup>(2)</sup>

Translation is both an art and a science. Considered an art, it relates to how it is practically done in day-to-day life and on special occasions; being a science, it has definite rules and regulations like those of grammar and logic. For example, a local speaker of a language knows how to speak and apply his language correctly, but to ascertain that he does not make mistakes; he needs grammatical rules and regulations.<sup>(3)</sup>

Translation is a branch of comparative linguistics, and hence is closely related to philosophy of language and semantic understanding of language "Fiqh al-Lughah" (فقه اللغة).<sup>(4)</sup>

- 
- (1) Ibn al-Athīr, 'Izzud Dīn, Abū al-Hasan, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1997AD), 2/213.
  - (2) Haas, W., *The theory of translation in G.H.R. Parkinson* (Ed.) *The theory of meaning*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962AD), 88.
  - (3) Anderman, G., (Ed.), *Translation today: trends and perspectives*, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2010AD), 59.
  - (4) Qalandar, Jamil, Dr. Jamil Qalandar is a Professor of Arabic Language and Translation in the Faculty of Arabic, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan. The author went to his house in Islamabad for interview on October 06, 2011AD.

### History of Translation

As long as multiple languages have existed, and the need for inter-cultural interaction has been a necessity, a rudimentary form of translation has also been practiced. The earliest traces of written translations are engravings that date back to 3000 BC in the Egyptian Old Kingdom in the fort of Elephantine that stood before the First Cataract of the River Nile. The need for translation in the West became necessary when the Romans began to gain influence over the culture and religion of the Greeks, in 300 BC. When the West contacted the Muslims of Spain in the twelfth century, once again, translation became an integral part of the integration of the two peoples. Large scale translations took place due to the continuous contact between the languages of two cultures that were vastly different. When the Islamic rule came to an end in Spain, countless scientific and philosophical classics were translated from Arabic by the Toledo School of Translators. Tytler<sup>(1)</sup> became the first author of a significant piece of work on translation in 1790, stating that ‘a good translation is one in which the quality of the original work is so completely transfused into another language as to be as distinctly apprehended and as strongly felt by a native of the country to which that language belongs as it is by those who speak the language of the original work’.<sup>(2)</sup>

The twentieth century has been called the ‘era of translation’<sup>(3)</sup> or ‘reproduction’<sup>(4)</sup>.

### Challenges in the Way of Interpretation

The following are points that may be considered as some of the most serious challenges in the way of interpretation:

- 1- Differences in terminology, psyche, ecology and environment are big barriers in understanding the culture of a particular nation, particularly at the time of translation. Hence, when a native speaker of English language translates the Holy Qur’an without being fully conversant with the philology, phonology, phonetics, and semiotics and syntactic of Arabic language, he leaves behind a gap of understanding. English is totally different from Arabic. The Arabic pragmatics “al-Tadāwuliyyah” (التداولية) is usually not properly

- 
- (1) Tytler, Alexander Fraser 1747 – 1813 was a Scottish advocate, judge, writer and historian who served as Professor of Universal History, and Greek and Roman Antiquities at the University of Edinburgh. His book *Essays on the principles of translation* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1790AD).
  - (2) Newmark, Peter, *Approaches to translation*, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1984AD), 5.
  - (3) Jumpselt, R. W., *Die Übersetzung naturwissenschaftlicher und technischer Literatur*, (Berlin: Schöneberg, 1961), 9.
  - (4) Benjamin, W., *The translator’s task*, in H. Arendt (Ed.). *Illuminations*, (London: Cape, 1970AD), 3.

understood by the foreigners; hence they don't understand the idioms and expressions of Arabic. Translation is actually the outcome of all these prerequisites.

- 2- Phonology is the basic prerequisite for etymology. Phonetics basically tells us the practical usage of a language, which specifies particular meanings. One of the basic phonetic characteristics of Arabic language is its being the language of the letter "al-Dhād" لعة (الضاد). Pronouncing the Arabic alphabets wrongly causes a gap of understanding between a native speaker of Arabic and a foreigner. If a foreigner who is not well-versed in Arabic, pronounces any word with any of these letters "Ṣād, Dhād, Ṭā, Zā, 'Ayn, Hā, Dhāl, Thā" (ص ض ط ظ ع ح ذ ث) his/her pronunciation is usually wrong. As the Arabic language belongs to the family of phonetic languages, it is almost difficult for the foreigners to pronounce the Arabic alphabets without due practice.

There are some native speakers of English who seriously felt this challenge and tried to face it. The name of Edward Lane (1801-1876) could be mentioned on top of the list who wrote Arabic English Lexicon, after consulting the dictionaries written by the great scholars of Arabic language, like Tāj al-'Urūs by Zabīdī,<sup>(1)</sup> Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah by ibn Fāris,<sup>(2)</sup> Lisān al-'Arab by ibn Manẓūr,<sup>(3)</sup> al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ by Fayroz 'Ābādī<sup>(4)</sup> and Fiḥ al-Lughah by Tha'labī.<sup>(5)</sup>

- 
- (1) al-Zabīdī, Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Husayni al-Zabīdī, is widely known as Murtadā az-Zabīdī. (1145-1205 AH/ 1732-1790 CE). He was a Hanafī scholar, lexicographer, linguist, a grandmaster in hadīth, genealogy, biographies and personal histories (hadīth, ansāb, rijāl). He was a prolific writer. Apart from Arabic, he was proficient in Turkish and Persian. His great book *Taj al-Uroos min jawahir al-qāmūs* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1994AD).  
<https://www.ilmgate.org/imam-sayyid-murtada-al-zabidi/>
- (2) Ibn Fāris, Abu Al-Husayn Ahmad was Arab philologist from Qazwīn. His *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah* (Cairo: Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah, 1366 AH). See for details: The Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy <https://books.google.com.sa/books?isbn=1472569458>
- (3) Ibn Manẓūr, Muhammad ibn Mukarram was a Maghrebi Arab lexicographer of the Arabic language and author of a large dictionary called *Lisān al-'Arab (the tongue of the Arabs)*. (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1988AD).
- (4) Fayroz 'ābādī, Muhammad Ibn Ya'qūb was a lexicographer and was the compiler of a comprehensive Arabic dictionary, called *al-Qāmūs Al- al-Muḥīṭ*. It was one of the most widely used in Arabic for nearly five centuries. (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risālah, 1993AD). <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairuzabadi>
- (5) Al-Tha'labī, 'Abd ul-Malik ibn Muhammad, was an Iranian writer, born in Nishapur, Persia. He was most famous for his anthologies and collections

، ومعجم مقاييس اللغة لابن فارس، ولسان العرب لابن منظور والقاموس المحيط للفيروز آبادي و (تاج العروس للزبيدي  
فقه اللغة للثعالبي)

Another great personality is A. J. Arberry (1905-1969)<sup>(1)</sup> who translated the Holy Qur'an and named his translation 'The Koran Interpreted'. The uniqueness of this translation is that after writing a preface for the translation in the beginning and then after completing over half of the translation, exactly after completing the translation of Sūrah *Tā Ha*, he wrote a second preface in which he says:

*"I think it is justifiable to adopt the unusual procedure of adding a separate prologue to the second installment of a two-volume work. I suppose I shall never again recapture the freshness and excitement of the experience just now completed; the passing months and years will inevitably blur the image; this is the moment, or never, to attempt to record the impact which an unrelenting and concentrated exploration of the Koran has left on my mind and my heart."*

When a non-Arab translator translates the Qur'an once mastering the Arabic language, becomes ready to go far within the understanding of the idioms and expressions of the Holy Qur'an. It is also noted that if he sees any wrong or partial translation of the Holy Qur'an he starts defending it. The same is done by Arberry who responded to the champions of Higher Criticism, including Dr. Richard Bell who undertook to devote many years to his 'critical re-arrangement of the Sūrāhs of the Qur'an. Arberry responded to his work by saying, 'Advancing well beyond the position taken up by the critics of last century, he [Richard Bell] quite literally took the Koran to pieces and put it together again, his scrupulous reconstruction extending as far as individual verses and even parts of verses. As he set up his translation in a kind of tabular form to indicate his views of how the discourse originally ran, it is virtually unreadable; certainly one needs to have some detailed knowledge of the text in order to benefit by the laborious exercise of studying his hard-laboured pages. Bell followed Fluegel's text.'<sup>(2)</sup> Moreover, it is also seen that the bias which the West cherishes

---

of epigrams. Of the twenty-nine works known to have been written by him, the most famous is his *Kitāb Yatīmat ud-Dahr*, on the poets of his own and earlier times, arranged according to the countries of the poets, and containing valuable extracts (published at Damascus, 4 vols., 1887). <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Tha'alibi>

- (1) Arthur John Arberry was a respected British orientalist. A prolific scholar of Arabic, Persian, and Islamic studies  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_John\\_Arberry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_John_Arberry)
- (2) Arberry, Arthur John, *The Koran interpreted*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955AD), 18-19.

about the Arabic language prevents them from objective and in-depth understanding thereof. They just presume that the Arabic language does not have the aptitude to deal with the issues related to the scientific discipline of human beings.

It could be the same bias that led an American man of religion (Terry Johns of Gainesville, Florida),<sup>(1)</sup> to burn the Holy Qur'an. Had he possessed in-depth knowledge of the Arabic language, along with some sense of respect for 'others', he would have never done that. Rather it is recorded in an interview that Terry confessed he never read even the translated Qur'an as a whole.

Then during the last century, there were many men of letters who also tried to bridge this gap between the East and the West by translating the Holy Qur'an in an authentic manner, for example, to cite a few, George Sale,<sup>(2)</sup> Dr. Rodwell,<sup>(3)</sup> Palmer,<sup>(4)</sup> Pickthall,<sup>(5)</sup> Hāfiz Sarwar<sup>(6)</sup> and Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī.<sup>(7)</sup>

- 
- (1) He burned the Holy Qur'an on Sunday, the 20th of March, 2011. For details see: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HnXd5\\_Cl90](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HnXd5_Cl90)
  - (2) George Sale was an English orientalist and practicing solicitor, best known for his 1734 translation of the Qur'an into English. He was also author of *The General Dictionary*, in ten volumes. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Sale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Sale)
  - (3) John Medows Rodwell was a friend of Charles Darwin while both matriculated at Cambridge. He became an English clergyman of the Church of England and a Non-Muslim Islamic scholar. Rodwell's Qur'an translation *The Koran* was first published in 1861. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Medows\\_Rodwell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Medows_Rodwell)
  - (4) Edward Henry Palmer known as E.H. Palmer, was an English orientalist and explorer. During his residence at St John's he catalogued the Persian, Arabic and Turkish manuscripts in the university library, and in the libraries of Kings and Trinity.
  - (5) Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (born Marmaduke William Pickthall, 7 April 1875 – 19 May 1936) was a Western Islamic scholar noted for his English translation of the Qur'an (1930). A convert from Christianity, Pickthall was a novelist, esteemed by D. H. Lawrence, H. G. Wells, and E. M. Forster, as well as a journalist, headmaster, and political and religious leader. He declared his conversion to Islam in dramatic fashion after delivering a talk on 'Islam and Progress' on 29 November 1917, to the Muslim Literary Society in Notting Hill, West London. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marmaduke\\_Pickthall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marmaduke_Pickthall)
  - (6) Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar a translator of the holy Qur'an in English, from Lahore, Pakistan. <https://www.geni.com/people/Hafiz-Ghulam-Sarwar-English-Quran-Translation/6000000016777531223>
  - (7) Abdullah Yusuf Ali, was a British-Indian barrister and scholar who wrote a number of books about Islam and whose translation of the Qur'an into English is one of the most widely known and used in the English-speaking world. He died in London in 1953. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah\\_Yusuf\\_Ali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah_Yusuf_Ali)

- 3- The science of semantics has already been dealt with by Muslim scholars. For example, the book “Mukhtaṣar al-Ma‘ānī” "مختصر المعاني" by Allama Sa‘d al-Dīn Taftāzānī (d. 1339). In this book he wrote many usages of one word, for example the usages of the word “aḍ-Ḍāl” (الضال). He says that it means the one who went astray, as in “wa la aḍ-Ḍālīn” (ولا الضالين). It means the one who is lost, as in “Ḍalla al-Ṭarīq” (ضل الطريق). It means the one about whom people are in oblivion, as in “wa wajadaka ḍallan fahadā” (ووجدك ضالا فهدى). It also means the one who disappears, as it is said “Laqad dalla waj’huki fi daf’iriki kamā yaḍillu al-Badru fi al-ghuyūm” (لقد ضل وجهك في صفائك كما (يضل البدر في الغيوم), which means ‘your face has disappeared in your braids as the full moon disappears in the clouds’.

Arabic is called the language of al-Ḍād (لغة الضاد), that is, a language with the problematic letter of al-Ḍād (الضاد), too difficult to pronounce by the non-Arabic speaking community. It is also called the language of al-Aḍ’dād (لغة الأضداد), that is, the language of similar words with contradictory meanings. For example, the word “qisṭ” (قسط) means justice. From this root the word “al-Muqsiṭ” (المقسط) is derived which means the just. From the same root the word “al-Qāsiṭ” (القاسط) is derived which means the unjust. Al-Jāhiz<sup>(1)</sup> wrote on this subject his famous literary and linguistic book entitled: “al-Maḥāsin wa al-Aḍ’dād” (المحاسن والأضداد).

- 4- Then there is another linguistic aspect that is worth considering, as it determines the meaning of a word, and that is preposition. For example, if we say: I have discussed the issue, its Arabic would be: “Bahathtu al-Qaḍiyyah” (بحثت القضية), and if we want to say: I have probed the issue, its Arabic would be: “Bahathtu fi al-Qaḍiyyah” (بحثت في القضية) and if we want to say: I have searched the issue, its Arabic would be: “Bahathtu ‘an al-Qaḍiyyah” (بحثت عن القضية).

There are many phrases and idioms in Arabic language that are usually not understood properly by the non-Arabs. A linguistic environment is needed in this case. One should live the Arabic language for mastering its deep aspects.

(1) ‘Amr ibn Baḥr al-Baṣrī an Arabic prose writer and author of works of literature, Mu’tazili theology, and politico-religious polemics. His famous book *Al-Mahasin wa al-Aḍdād*, (Cairo: al-Matba‘ah al-Jamaliyyah, 1330AH).  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Jāhiz>



### **Principle of Similar Effect in Translation**

It is unanimously agreed that the translator's main goal while translating is to relay the essence of the content into the translated language. The effect brought about on the readers of the translated text should be as similar as possible to the effect of the original text.<sup>(1)</sup> Also, the translator should cater to the needs of different audiences by varying the translation of the same text for different audiences. This can be successfully done by keeping in mind the psychological aspect of that audience – how someone that belongs to a particular group thinks, feels and behaves.<sup>(2)</sup>

### **Comprehension and Formulation**

The success of the process of translation is dependent upon the interpreter's ability to master two techniques: comprehension, which involves understanding and interpreting the text, and formulation, which refers to designing or recreating the new text.<sup>(3)</sup>

### **The translation theory**

The translation theory is applicable universally since it touches upon so many different aspects of the subject. It attempts to be useful by encouraging the translator to write better and suggests points of agreement on common translation problems.

The translation theory suggests that there is a certain correlation between thought, meaning and language. It proposes the idea that language and behavior have certain universal, cultural and individual aspects. Understanding these cultural and psychological factors may help translators in interpreting texts.<sup>(4)</sup>

### **Interpretation**

The translator is left with the task of interpretation when a crucial part of the text - that contains the crux of the writer's message, is not very clear semantically. In fact, there have been numerous cases in the history of translation where translators failed to correctly interpret and represent the idea of the translated text, owing either to their own incompetence or due to the current cultural climate. Generally, translation is written in modern language, which acts as a lexical image of the culture associated with that language.<sup>(5)</sup>

- 
- (1) Rieu, Emile Victor, *Translation*, in *Cassel's encyclopedia of literature*, (London: Cassel, 1953AD), 41.
  - (2) Newmark, Peter, *Approaches to translation*, 17.
  - (3) Garvin, Paul, *A Prague school reader on aesthetics, literary structure and style*, (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1955), 27.
  - (4) Levin, Samuel, R., *The semantics of metaphor*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 89.
  - (5) Newmark, Peter, *Approaches to translation*, 19.

Interpretation is an arduous and tedious task for the translator. When a translator is presented with a text of the past, or of a distant or primitive culture, it becomes especially difficult for him to examine the many layers of lexical development; this includes the cultural significance of mythology, religion, symbols, superstitions as well as the origins and use of metaphors, idioms and abstract ideas.

The key method of making interpretative translation successful is to adopt a semantic technique of translation where the translator is highly skilled and learned in the source language culture and can fully explain the content of the text. As for the target language reader, a mere cursory glance will suffice.

### **Two Methods of Translation**

There are two main methods of translation; communicative and semantic. Communicative translation, as its name suggests, focuses on communication. It aims to communicate or relay an effect on the readers of the translated text as close as possible to the effect of the original text. Semantic translation, on the other hand, focuses on conveying the exact meaning of the original text in the target language. It aims to do this by following semantic and syntactic structures and translating according to the exact contextual meaning of the original.<sup>(1)</sup> Semantic translation, which is generally an individual's translator's forte is often referred to as an art, whereas, communicative translation, usually the result of a team of translators is a craft.

There are a number of elements that set the two methods apart. Communicative translations generally cater to the reader of the target language, who expects to be met with an integration of foreign elements into his/her native language. Semantic translation, on the other hand, aims to protect the original culture, but may be difficult for readers of the target language to fully comprehend due to connotations of the source language.<sup>(2)</sup>

According to some translation scholars, communicative translation is preferable to semantic translation. This is because semantic translation, in the attempt to interpret and relay literal and contextual meanings often results in the loss of intended meaning, rendering it inferior to the original text. In contrast, communicative translation aims to write an even better piece than the original text. This is possible because the translator is at liberty to correct possible mistakes in the original by improving logic, replacing clumsy phrasing with elegant words, removing obscure and

---

(1) Newmark, Peter, *Approaches to translation*, 19.

(2) *Ibid*, 20.

repetitive elements and modifying faulty syntax. In semantic translations, such modifications are not applicable.<sup>(1)</sup>

But this view is an exaggerated one, since the science of semantics deals analytically with the meanings of words, phrases, idioms, and syntax of the original language, and as such it is and should be the basis for communicative translation which is impossible without semantic probe of the original language.

Since a communicative translation is theoretically a subjective process in the sense that it is psychologically oriented and is more concerned initially with achieving a definite effect on its readers' minds by taking liberty with it to adjust itself to their expectations and their mental and emotional make-up, hence, a lot of objectivity and impartiality is lost in the process. Moreover, communicative translation may be a useful tool in oratory, especially at political or religious stage, whereas it fails to do justice to language expressions of purely scientific and empirical nature. It is then the semantic translation, which comes to the forefront to do its job objectively and seriously without tempering or interfering with the original text merely to mold and adjust its meaning to make a psychological impact on the readers. That is why communicative translation simply gives semantic translation another dimension by adjusting and rendering the thought and cultural nature of the original more accessible to the reader – a linguistic manipulation called “the pragmatic element” in the Leipzig School. Peirce and Morris define “pragmatics” as the branch of semiotics dealing with the relation between linguistic signs/expressions and their users, that is, transmitters and receptors.<sup>(2)</sup>

Communicative translation is said to be concerned chiefly with the receptors, normally in a linguistic context and cultural diversity, whereas semantic translation is mainly concerned with the transmitter as an individual. Communicative and semantic both aspects are however, regarded as divergent refinements/revisions of cognitive translations.<sup>(3)</sup>

#### **Nature of translation**

What exactly should be translated from one language into another? Words, text or meanings? I think words lead to the text and the text to the meanings. What really need to be translated are the meanings.<sup>(4)</sup>

#### **Comparison between two translators; one exposed to the diverse cultures and the other not so exposed**

#### **Example of a translator exposed to diverse cultures**

---

(1) Ibid, 21.

(2) (Qalandar, Jameel, 2011, personal interview).

(3) Ibid.

(4) Newmark, Peter, *Approaches to translation*, 37.

In 1982 the ex-president of Pakistan General Muhammad Ziyā ul Ḥaqq visited the Islamic University of Madīnah. I was a student there. My father was a professor and head of Translation Department there. He had to translate the speech of the president. Ziyā ul Ḥaqq first spoke a few sentences, and then my father translated them. In few minutes, Ziyā ul Ḥaqq was unable to catch the train of his thoughts as he was talking extempore, so he asked my father to let him deliver his full speech and take notes then translate the main points in a summary. He spoke for 10-12 minutes in Urdu but the summary translation of his speech made by my father was in 20 minutes. I felt that Ziyā ul Ḥaqq knew some Arabic because he praised the good translation of my father. Actually his comments to my father were:

*“Dr. Murtazā! I am sure that your translation was better than my speech.”*

Later I was informed by some of my colleagues who read Ziyā ul Ḥaqq’s CV that he spent couple of years in Jordan for military training as he led the Pakistani training mission in Jordan in 1970. That could be the reason for his understanding of Arabic and the same could validate his judgment upon my my father's translation. The point that is being made here is, my father was exposed to the Arab culture, lived among them for years; hence, he was successfully able to face the cultural difference and convert the source language into target language.

#### ***Example of a translator not exposed to diverse cultures***

In 1992 a delegation came to Pakistan to hire some teachers for the girls’ colleges in Saudi Arabia. They hired a translator who had never been to any Arab country. They had to stay for one week and conduct interviews. The translator had to translate the interviews. He was unable to translate the word “khārij dawām” (خارج دوام) which means over time.

One of the members of selecting committee knew me personally and asked me to come and help them in translation.

Similarly in another interview translation of the physicians a translator was unable to translate the word “al-‘ādah al-Shahriyyah” (العادة الشهرية) which means the monthly cycle of menstruation.

#### **Values that may stop us from translating a specific feeling**

From 2000-2006, I served as an Imam in an Islamic Center in Florida, USA. During this time the Imam of Masjid al-Nabawi, Dr. Husain ‘Āl- al-Shaykh, visited us. He spent 2 days with us and had long discussions and lectures on several issues. I translated his speeches to the community from Arabic to English. On one occasion when I was translating him, he praised me during his speech that the community has a highly learned Imam. It was difficult for me to translate this passage. So noticing this, another person came forward and translated the same.

### **Technical hitches and problems that a translator faces while undertaking the task of translation**

A translator's job is far from simple; during the process of translation, he/she may face numerous problems – some general and some practical. Some general problems are mentioned below:

#### **Some General Problems**

A translator faces some general problems that are related to the him/herself or to the environments, he/she has. The following are some of the most important general problems:

- 1- Lack of Expertise: The translator must fulfill some pre-requisites for the task of translation.
  - a. He must be an expert in both the source language – the original language which he is translating, and the target language – the language to which he is translating.
  - b. The translator should be learned and well aware of the particular subject of the content that is to be translated, since every field has distinct jargon, vocabulary, linguistic formations and style.
- 2- Unavailability of good dictionaries that may facilitate translators.
- 3- Lack of attention, concern and notice displayed towards the translation and the translators, both from higher-ups and the general public.
- 4- Poor coordination between various translation centers which makes it difficult to keep track of which work has been translated and which is yet to be translated.
- 5- Low level of Arabic language knowledge among the translators. A mere acquaintance with languages does not qualify one to become a translator. Rather, a translator is characterized by mastery in both languages.<sup>(1)</sup>

#### **Some Practical Problems**

Before the translator embarks on the process of translation, he must ensure that he understands the text. Once he has done that, he can proceed to select an appropriate translation method. Some possible criteria are suggested here:

- 1- The intention of a text: The translator must be honest and truthful in his work. He must bear in mind the intention of the author and attempt to display that in the translated work.
- 2- The intention of the translator: The translator must first identify his own intention in terms of the translation work. Is his main goal

---

(1) Malik, Muhammad Zayd, "The problems faced by a translator", Biannual Research Journal: *Al-Īdāh*, Shaykh Zayed Islamic Centre, University of Peshawar, Issue 24th, (June, 2012), 55.

- ensuring that the translated piece retains the essence of the original and manages to portray the same message as the original by catering to the same emotional and persuasive charge? Is his aim to spread the culture of the source language through the translated text? Or is he addressing an uninformed audience, who is not well-aware of the source language context and must be educated about any cultural or institutional term mentioned in the text?<sup>(1)</sup>
- 3- The reader and the setting of the text: The translator must also inquire about the audience. A member of which socio-economic class, age group, sex, race, educational level or religion is more likely to read the text? Is he/she knowledgeable or ignorant, a layman or an expert?
  - 4- The quality of the writing and the authority of the text: For any piece of writing, the quality of writing and the popularity and credibility of the author increase the value of the text. If the source text is well written and the author is a well-recognized authority on his subject, the translator has to take extra care to accurately translate every tinge of the author's meaning. Also, if the source text contains a number of cultural and societal references that may not be common knowledge to speakers of other languages (such as in novels or historical texts), the translator must make the difficult decision of choosing whether to provide supplementary information for the reader, or not.<sup>(2)</sup>
  - 5- **Qualities of a good and successful interpreter:**  
There are several qualities that a person needs to adopt to be a good interpreter.  
two of them are:
    - 1- The translator should aim high to gain expertise in both the source language and the target language. For example, Arabic and Urdu languages, differ in their basic grammars and rules of syntax.<sup>(3)</sup> To successfully translate between the two languages, a translator must take care of these delicacies.
    - 2- Instead of attempting to translate an idiom or proverb from the source language word by word, the translator should find a similar meaning idiom or proverb from the target language.

---

(1) Neubert, A., *Pragmatische aspecte der ubersetzung in Gundfragen der ubersetzungswissenschaft*, (Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopadie, 1968AD), 81.  
 (2) Newmark, Peter, *Approaches to translation*, 34.  
 (3) Khan, Pinda Muhammad, (tr.) *Sifting the sands of Sahara*. (Rawalpindi: Hy-Line Printers, 2005AD), 21.

- 3- He should be aware of the traditional difference between the peoples of source language and target language.

It can be said that the real challenge for a translator is not the expertise he has to gain in various languages, but the recognition and understanding of different cultures and civilizations. Language symbolizes culture more than anything else; literature is inevitably tied to cultural contexts making it near impossible to separate the two. This is why I proves to be so challenging for translators to literally relay idioms and figures of speech in another language. What may sound perfectly acceptable in the source language may sound like gibberish in the target language.

Here I may give an example of personal experience. I worked for some time in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia. My immediate boss was an Egyptian, Mr. Adil, who was a nice man. It was Ramadhan when he invited me (a Pakistani) along with two Egyptian colleagues over for Iftār at his house. When we sat in his drawing room, his ten-year-old daughter came in and shook hands with all of us. One of my Egyptian colleagues started talking to her and said:

"ما شاء الله عليك يا عروسة، كيف حالك؟ اسمك ايه؟ ايش رايك أجوزك؟"

خلاص بقى، أنا أجوزك"

*Ma sha Allah 'Alayki yā 'Arūsah, kayf ḥāluki? Ismik ayh? Aysh ra'yuki agawwizik? Khalas baqa, anā agawwizik*

*"Wow, you are so beautiful, you are like a bride, how are you? What is your name? Tell me, what if I marry you? All right, I will marry you."*

Hearing this I got scared and thought that a fight will break out between him and her father, but I was astonished that her father was smiling. There I felt the difference between the two cultures. It was big like a gulf.

I had another experience long before this one, when I was a young student in the Islamic University of Madīnah. As I mentioned earlier my father worked there as an Assistant Professor and head of Translation Department. There were some Egyptian translators working under him. One of them used to welcome me warmly. Whenever I went to my father's office he met me with open hands by saying "da joz bintī" (دا جوز بنتي) (This is my son in-law). He used to introduce me to his friends also in the same way.

To my understanding, this was because of some serious dissimilarities between the Egyptian culture and the Pakistani culture and I am 100% sure that the Egyptians do not introduce any person like that. That man knew me and my father for years and that could be the reason for this frankness but still every time he introduced me like this my face turned red out of shyness. In translating episodes like this, word by word translation may not be appropriate

and only the theme could be translated, leaving aside much of the outward form.

### **Suggestions**

- 1- The field of translation desperately requires unified centers for translation which are affiliated with various higher education institutions around the world. These centers can act as relay stations which can keep readers up-to-date through quarterly publication about latest translation work around the globe. Since translation is so closely tied to the study of cultural variations, a special issue could be published on how the major nations of the world differ culturally.
- 2- The training of translators should be the first and foremost job of the aforementioned translation centers, to ensure that the translation field produces authentic and accurate work. The training should be specialized by focusing on various fields of arts and sciences. Various workshops, seminars and interactive lectures could be arranged to shed light on cultural differences between the source language and target language communities.
- 3- The field of translation should receive appropriate recognition and encouragement from the government so that translators may receive greater means to produce a high level of professional work. Providing motivation and incentives to translators may also develop the field and promote it to the status of a trade.

### **Conclusion**

Translation is a field which involves a great deal of creativity, especially since it involves the meeting of different cultures. Like an artist, a translator must ensure that the essence of the original text is captured and accurately portrayed, without paying much attention to the superficial form of the text.

An artist puts together various ingredients to create an artistic masterpiece but the end product is viewed as a whole painting or sculpture, not a sum of the many ingredients used to create it. Similarly, a translator translates the original text, but it is not each word of the source that pops out, rather it is a comprehensive end product that does not interfere with the intent or essence of the source, but still manages to maintain its own originality.

Therefore, it is imperative for a translator to acknowledge, identify and then illustrate the artistic elements of the two languages as well as the two different cultures that those languages represent.