

The nomenclature of storms in Arabic

From Arabicisation to adaptation

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This article deals with the naming of ecology-related objects in Arabic, as illustrated in the naming of the snowstorms “Storm Huda”, “Storm Jana” and “Storm Zina” which whipped through the Middle East countries on January 6 and February 19, 2015 respectively. The article analyses a corpus of headlines taken from four online newspapers and one news agency, examines the strong connotative values of the snowstorm names, and discusses their relations to translation. The findings of the study show a consensus amongst journalists and meteorologists in Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia to avoid Arabicisation and opt instead for a full adaptation of foreign storm names in line with the poetics of the receiving culture, one seemingly infused with several echoes from Arab-Islamic culture and particularly the Qur’an. The meticulous care in their choice of words is fully compatible with the perceived target language (TL) audience belonging to Arab-Islamic culture, one with little affinity to English culture.

Keywords: translation, domesticating, foreignising, ecology, Storm Huda, Storm Jana, ideology

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that translation has been our *raison d’être* of “all major cultural exchanges in history” (Burke and Hsia 2007, 1). The incessant introduction of new lexicons into various languages tangibly demonstrates that such a fundamental act of human communication exchange cannot, nor should it, be cut off from history. It is interesting to note that “history tells us that Arabs, in previous epochs, contributed substantially to the production of knowledge, and by extension, to enriching the global stock of human knowledge” (UNDP 2003, 42). History also tells us that “Western Europe owes its civili[s]ation to translators” (Kelly 1979, 37). This is as true of ancient nations as it is of the modern world. Admittedly, some cultures show resistance against the ethnocentrism of translation often considered

to be a thankless undertaking to this very day. They tend to resist the introduction through translation of concepts into the existing lexicons of their languages. Such resistance can be closely related to the linguistic systems and cultural norms of these cultures. The target language (TL) systems may not be able to cope with the radically distanced source language (SL) systems, as is commonly the case between the Arabic and English languages. Toury (1984, 83) believes that “the identity of a target text as a translation is determined first and foremost by considerations pertinent to the receptor system, with no necessary connection with the source text.” It ensues, therefore, that translating inevitably abounds with intricacies that are hard to capture, ones usually ascribable to cultural diversities between the SL and TL, so the heavenly dream of equivalence might be a ‘mirage’, as it were.

A cursory look at various components of Arab culture immediately reveals that Islam has undoubtedly and significantly held sway over cultural patterns of thought, to the point that the circuits of cultural “embeddedness” (Pym 2010) are most often than not Islamic-specific. In other words, Arab culture has gelled into a unanimous culture of shared religion. This poses a serious challenge to the translator working between remote languages and cultures when it comes to cultural equivalence. In what follows we discuss one of the multifarious asymmetrical cultural specificities illustrative of differences between Arab and English cultures, namely the nomenclature of an ecological phenomenon such as the powerful winter storms that battered the Middle East on January 6, 2015. Rather than “Arabicising” foreign items – a term which will be tackled later-, journalists and meteorologists in the aftermath of the preceding year’s worst winter storm Alexa, decided to give Arabic names for the winter storms. A clear account of the full adaptation of the phenomenon investigated is presented from a translation perspective. The 2015 blizzards accrued several Arabic names, appearing and permeating all the news items and headlines that were scrutinised, namely “Storm Huda”, “Storm Jana” and “Storm Zina”.

It is worth noting here that the nomenclature of snowstorms is entirely a multi-media process, one that goes beyond the science of translating at first glance. Investigation of the underlying reality in some depth leads to the assumption that the process constitutes an obvious and crucial part of translation. While it is true that journalists and meteorologists are not translators, they seemingly thrive on translation-like activity, although they may not feel comfortable doing so. The policy pursued by these ‘non-translator’ experts is one that is virtually translation-driven. “Translation is different things for different groups of people. For people who are not translators, it is primarily a text; for people who are, it is primarily an activity” (Robinson 1997, 7). Pym, as cited in Robinson (1997, 7), defines a non-translator as a person who “thinks and talks about translation from outside the process, not knowing how it’s done”, whilst

[a] translator thinks and talks about translation from inside the process, knowing how it's done, possessing a practical real-world sense of the problems involved, some solutions to those problems, and the limitations on those solutions (the translator knows, for example, that no translation will ever be a perfectly reliable guide to the original).

Ecology is an important component insofar as the present study is concerned. Let us now investigate a simple definition of ecology as offered by *Collins Cobuild* (2002, emphasis in original): “**Ecology** is the study of the relationships between plants, animals, people, and their environment, and the balances between these relationships.” Certainly, a harmonious relationship between people and these eco-components has an immediate impact on the socio-cultural and socio-textual practices in the community of language users. It is also certain that ecology is culture-specific, as exemplified by the nomads who raise camels in different parts of the Arabian Peninsula, and the nomenclature of snow by Finnish, for instance – there are a large number of “terms in Finnish for variations of snow [and] in Arabic for aspects of camel behaviour” (Bassnett 2002, 39); the list goes on and on.

Newmark aptly remarks that the manifestations of culture are likely to be “peculiar to one speech community”, for instance,

geographical features can be normally distinguished from other cultural terms in that they are usually value-free, politically and commercially. Nevertheless, their diffusion depends on the importance of their country of origin as well as their degree of specificity. (Newmark 1988, 96)

Newmark goes on to state that ecology may include animals, plants, local winds, mountains, plains, ice, etc. (1988, 103). Translation-wise, Nida as cited in Newmark points out “that certain ecological features – the seasons, rain, hills of various sizes [...] where they are irregular or unknown may not be understood denotatively or figuratively, in translation” (Newmark 1988, 97).

2. The nomenclature of storms in English and Arabic

In English, “the National Weather Service has been assigning names to tropical storms and hurricanes since 1950, a practice that developed out of a need for clearer communication” (Potter 2005, 24). The hurricanes were named after the saints’ days on which they occurred, but it is Clement Wragge, Director of the Queensland state meteorological department in Australia at the end of the nineteenth century, who is

credited with being the first person to systematically name storms after real people. The idea never really caught on. But it was revived in the 1940s by the American Weather Bureau when short-wave radio came into general use for the

transmission of weather forecasts and warnings to shipping and aviation. Giving hurricanes nicknames was a very simple and quick way of identifying a particular storm from one day to the next. In 1953 the National Weather Service began using female names for storms.... (Weather online, History of Hurricane Names 2015)

In contrast, in Arabic, saints' days or female names do not really have any bearing on names for storms. It is also worthy of note that Islamic-Arab culture *per se* significantly differentiates between sets of negative and positive connotations of ecological features e.g. winds, clouds, rain, etc. Ath-Tha'libi (1972, 273), a renowned Arab philologist, made a dichotomous classification of winds into twenty five names, e.g. *an-nakbā'* (lit. 'a wind between two winds'), *al-rraydānah* (lit. 'a soft wind'), *habwah* (lit. 'a dusty wind'), among many others. In terms of situational context, Ath-Tha'libi (1972, 375) speaks of eight names, four of which imply positive connotations (e.g., mercy, fertilisation, etc.) whilst the others implicate otherwise (e.g., a penalty, infertility, etc.). The former includes: *al-mubashshirāt* ('winds bearing glad tidings'), *al-mursalāt* ('winds sent one after another'), *adh-dhariyāt* ('winds that scatter and disperse') and *an-nāshirāt* ('winds that scatter things over an area, usually far and wide') as can be further shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Translations of the wind names in the Qur'an¹ having positive connotations

Item	Translation
al-mubashshirāt	Among His Signs is this, that He sends the Winds, as heralds of Glad Tidings, giving you a taste of His (Grace and) Mercy (Ali 30, 46).
al-mursalāt	By the (Winds) sent forth one after another (to man's profit) (Ali 77, 1).
adh-dhariyāt	By the (Winds) that scatter broadcast [disperse]; (Ali 51, 1).
an-nāshirāt	And scatter (things) far and wide (Ali 77, 3).

In the first case, the accusative feminine plural indefinite noun *al-mubashshirāt* ('winds bearing glad tidings') is intimately tied up with the overall positive context of situation, i.e. 'as heralds of Glad Tidings'. In the second, the genitive feminine plural passive participle *al-mursalāt* ('winds sent one after another') with a positive connotation is expressed by the more explanatory translation 'to man's profit'. Finally, in the third and fourth cases, the genitive feminine plural active participle *adh-dhariyāt* ('winds that scatter and disperse') and *an-nāshirāt* ('winds that scatter things over an area, usually far and wide') can be viewed as micro-signs intertextually linked to others in the Qur'an, with a view to achieving positive connotations.

1. There have been several translations of the Qur'an and the one by Ali (1989) has been chosen for the study undertaken here.

The latter, however, includes *ṣarṣar* ('a blustery wind'), *ʿaqīm* ('a gale-force wind'), *ʿaṣīf* ('a gusty wind') and *qaṣīf* ('a gusty wind') (Ath-Thaʿālibi 1972, 375) as can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Translations of the wind names in the Qur'an having negative connotations

Item	Translation
ṣarṣar	And the 'Ad, they were destroyed by a furious Wind, exceedingly violent (Ali 69, 6)
ʿaqīm	And in the 'Ad (people) (was another Sign): Behold, We sent against them the devastating Wind (Ali 51, 41)
ʿaṣīf	then comes a stormy wind and the waves come to them from all sides (Ali 10, 22)
qaṣīf	no occurrence in the Qur'an

The genitive feminine singular indefinite adjective *ṣarṣar* ('a blustery wind') may lexically and ideationally be rendered into 'a furious Wind' whereby much of the meaning is determined by the weight of the adjective added. To better capture the negative connotations of the items, the accusative masculine singular adjective *ʿaqīm* ('a gale-force wind') and nominative masculine indefinite active participle *ʿaṣīf* ('a gusty wind') are ideationally translated into 'devastating Wind' and 'stormy wind' respectively. Finally, the study item *qaṣīf* ('a gusty wind'), which does not occur in the Qur'an, implies 'devastating wind'. By the same token, Shehab (2009, 880–1; emphasis added) addresses the problems involved in translating Arabic cognitive synonyms *ar-riḥ* ('wind' sing.) and *ar-riyyah* ('winds' pl.):

It should be noted that the word 'winds' is a reasonable equivalent to [*ar-riyyah*] as both words have almost the same sense in both Arabic and English. They move or stir up the clouds and send down rain. However, since we are dealing with a [Qur'anic] text where slight differences of lexical items do count, it could be more faithful if we translate [*ar-riyyah*] ideationally into something like 'blessing winds'.

It follows, therefore, that names of winds with negative connotations are unlikely to be used to name storms insofar as our data is concerned. Rather, names with only positive connotations are (and perhaps will continue to be) used to dub storms.

Another splendid example in Arab culture concerns clouds, which, according to Ath-Thaʿālibi (1972, 274–9), has thirty-three names, e.g. *an-nashshnu* ('wispy cloud') *saḥāb* ('cloud billows') *ghamām* ('dark clouds'), *al-ʿaqar* ('thundercloud') etc. True, "Arabic developed an enormous vocabulary [...] that is scarcely matched by any other language except possibly English" (Salloum and Peters 1996: ix-x); in this vein, Thawabteh states:

It is also quite true that Arabic is a language with endless vocabulary, most of which involves, to name only a few, desert objects, animals, love of independence, virtue, honour, generosity and freedom. Strange as it may sound, Arabic has more

than 200 names for a camel, 450 for a lion, 70 for a sword and 30 for rain, among others. (Thawabteh 2007, 5–6)

A third ecology-related object is rain. Shehab (2009, 880–1) speaks of the acute differences between the synonymous pair *maṭar* ('rain') and *ghayth* ('rain'), with the latter "[*ghayth*] conventionally implicat[ing] relief and a long-awaited rain and [the former] [*maṭar*] implicat[ing] a penalty imposed by God for wrongdoing." Two Qur'anic verses further highlight their differences. The first – "Verily the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah (alone). It is He Who sends down rain, and He Who knows what is in the wombs" (Ali, 31, 34)- indicates 'rain' with a positive connotation. The second – "And the (Unbelievers) must indeed have passed by the town on which was rained a shower of evil: did they not then see it (with their own eyes)? But they fear not the Resurrection" (Ali 25, 40)- conversely indicates 'rain' with a negative connotation.

3. Translation problems

Having reviewed the products of socio-cultural and religious systems on which the nomenclature of storms in Arabic and English are based, we assume that the job of the translator will become slightly more difficult in view of a lack of lexical equivalence between the two fairly remote languages and cultures. The examples of weather clichés and proverbs commonly used by Arabs in a number of socio-textual practices can easily be imagined as hardly compatible with their counterparts in English, or even in other languages. By way of illustration, proverbs come to be used by language users to record a moving experience, or an anecdote, etc., often with highly affectionate, patronising and emotive overtones. With such an accumulation of experience and knowledge, the Palestinian peasants continue to use weather clichés and proverbs inextricably embedded in Palestinian culture. For instance, take Examples (1) and (2) below:

- (1) *ādhār biṭla' ir-rā'ī 'ala-l-jabal bitumṭur 'alay wi byinshaf bila nār*
'In March, the shepherd climbs upon a mountain, getting soaked standing out in the rain; even though, his body dries without fire' (author's translation).
- (2) *ādhār 'bu sabī' thaljāt ikbār marrah shmaysah wmarrah im-mṭārḥ w-marrḥ mqaqāt ish-shinār*
'March is the month of seven heavy snows, blazing sunshine and rain beating down, and time when birds sing' (author's translation).

The specific mechanisms involved in the structure and textural patterns of the vernacular proverbs in Example (1) and Example (2) would lead one to believe that the task of the translator of these proverbs might seem to be fraught with peculiar perils. Indeed, translation far surpasses the linguistic dimensions. The social functions that proverbs are assumed to perform in various socio-cultural settings, i.e. a month of capricious weathers, are important to consider. These proverbs can functionally be translated into something like ‘March many weathers’. For further elaboration, let us now look at another example:

- (3) *ishbāt il-khabāt byushbuṭ wibykhubuṭ wrīhit iṣ-ṣayf fi*
 ‘February is a whipping month, but is summer-like’ (author’s translation).

In Example (3) above, the proverb seems to be so diffuse that it would be difficult not to conclude that the translator may encounter myriad problems in adequately grasping the intended meaning. In this vein, Manser (2007, 184) explains quite properly: “[t]he month of March often begins with wild, stormy weather and ends with mild, fair weather.” With such valuable information, the proverb is then meaningful and can be rendered functionally into ‘March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb’, but, as can be uncontroversially noted at this juncture, there is no room for formal equivalence.

Another problem worthy of mention is that an “immediate aura of feeling which hovers about word[s]” (Stevenson 1963, 21–2), with a predominance of emotive overtones, is recorded in the three examples above. Such emotiveness, as Ullmann (1983, 129) states, can be (1) phonetic, i.e. a phonetic structure as exemplified in the consonance of the successive words *āthār* (lit. ‘March’) *ikbār* (lit. ‘big’), *mṭār* (lit. ‘big’) and *ish-shinār* (lit. ‘birds’); and expressed through (2) lexical devices, personification, metaphors, hyperboles, synecdoche, etc. (see also Shunnaq 2012a, 50).

In view of the above, unrelated languages like Arabic and English are expected to present numerous and substantial cultural gaps, as the former belongs to a totally different language family. Faced with culture-specific expressions, e.g. weather clichés and proverbs, translators are likely to encounter many translation difficulties.

4. Translation strategies

A translation activity involves problems, and the introduction and application of salient strategies to solve these problems. Translation strategies can conceivably be defined as “the steps, selected from a consciously known range of potential procedures, taken to solve a translation problem which has been consciously detected and resulting in a consciously applied solution” (Scott-Tennent, et al. 2000, 108). Categorically, these strategies can be either formal equivalence-based or functional

equivalence-based. Formal equivalence-based strategies seek “to capture the form of the SL expression. Form relates to the image employed in the SL expression” (Farghal and Shunnaq 1999, 5). Interestingly, in Example (2) above, there is still a little room for formal equivalence to come into substance, explainable by the fact that *āthār* (‘March’) translates into its corresponding ‘March’, something like ‘March is the month of seven heavy snows, sometimes sunny, sometimes rainy and sometimes birds sing’, a translation that seems at face value to be awkward, but can be a means to document a set of values, ideas, and behaviours of SL community members. Arabisation roughly falls within this orientation. For instance, the translated item *aliksa* (‘Storm Alexa’) in Example (4) below helps to preserve the SL image as closely as possible, and is consequently considered to be formally-based. Functional equivalence-based strategies, however, seek “to capture the function of the SL expression independently of the image utilised by translating it into a TL expression that performs the same function” (Farghal and Shunnaq 1999, 5), as can be illustrated in the functional translations in Examples (2) and (3) above whereby the English proverbs perform the same function as those of Arabic.

5. Arabisation

As a point of departure, it may be appropriate to distinguish between Arabisation and Arabicisation. Al-Abed Al-Haq (1992), as cited in Mizher and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2014, 53), claims that “Arabi[s]ation indicates a reference to the people and culture of the Arabs, while Arabici[s]ation is derived morphologically from Arabic language so it is more appropriate for Arabici[s]ation Planning.” More precisely, Arabisation is defined as a process of converting foreign terms into Arabic, integrating them into its phonological system, and is relatable to different political and social situations. It is a process which gears Arabic towards its survival, preserving and promoting Arab nationalism or Pan Arabism. It has thus become a necessity (Al-Hamad 2014; Mizher and Al-Abed Al-Haq 2014; Shunnaq 2012b; Suliman 2014, among others).

Arabisation, in the words of Farghal and Shunnaq (1999, 23), is “[a] kind of naturali[s]ation that takes place at the sound level or the concept level. At the sound level, the SL spelling and pronunciation are converted into Arabic ones. At the concept level, SL concept is loan-translated into Arabic” (see also Al-Najjar 1989, 78–9). Categorically, loan-translation points in the direction of adaptation (to be discussed later) whose aim is to form a natural TL text that better meets the expectations of TL readers. In loan-translation, the concept *per se* is transferred from language A to language B, as in the case of *muḥafazati* (‘governance’) in Example (4) below which has functionally been loan-translated from the English

‘governance’. It is perhaps quite right to link the issue of Arabicisation outlined above with the proposal made earlier by Venuti (1995) for foreignisation and domestication, both of which can be considered to be of paramount importance insofar as our present study is concerned. It will be recalled that by foreignisation, Venuti (1995, 20) means seeking

to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation [;] it is highly desirable today, a strategic cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs, pitched against the hegemonic English-language nations and the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others.

A more telling example of Venuti’s view is a widespread hackneyed phrase among old Arab philologists, grammarians and even laymen, which considers Arabicisation as peripheral to the original Arabic – *‘mu’arab faf’al bihi mā tashāi’* (lit. ‘Do whatever you like with Arabicised form’). In the face of the then hegemonic nations, Arabicised form enjoyed less prestigious status than standard Arabic. For example, the Persian *kawshak* (‘garrison’) has been Arabicised into two equivalent forms, either as *jawsaq* or *jūsaq* (Ibn Manẓūr 2015). At the sound level, the spelling and pronunciation of the Persian item are converted into two forms. To more appreciate the point, take Example (4) below from our first data sample:

- (4) *da’at al-mu’assātu fi muḥafazati il-khalīl li’aqdi ijtimā’atin wa liqā’atin wa mubāḥathatin limuwājahatil ‘aṣifati mustafidina min al’ibar allatī tama iktisābuha min ‘aṣifat alikṣa allatī ḍarabat al-khalīl al’ām ilmāḍi.*

‘In Hebron District, the authorities called for meetings and deliberations to deal with this year’s blizzard, learning from the unpleasant experience of last year’s Storm Alexa’ (author’s translation).

[Ma’an News Agency, published 7 January 2015]

- (5) *ḍaraba i’ṣāru ayrīn as-sawaḥil ash-sharqiyyatī janwbiyyatī lilwilāatil mutaḥida*

‘Hurricane Irene hits East Coast of the United States’ (author’s translation).

[Ma’an News Agency, published 8 August 2015]

The Arabic *alikṣa* (‘Alexa’) in Example (4) and *ayrīn* (‘Irene’) in Example (5) are Arabicised forms of ‘Alexa’ and ‘Irene’ respectively, and are apparently diffused to be readily amenable to the Arabic phonological system – obviously catering for naturalisation at the sound level (Farghal and Shunnaq 1999, 23). This is an entirely formal-based strategy. A transliteration procedure akin to “the conversion of different alphabets” (Newmark 1988, 81) is employed in the service of these socio-textual and socio-cultural situations. By the same token, Pym (2010, 73) states very plainly that

if Y is presented without any visibly distinct translational covering, the translator is conspicuous by a certain refusal to work and there is no quantitative difference between Y as a transferred text and TT as a translated text. The result is absolute equivalence. (TT = Y, thus TT:Y = 1)

However, this translation procedure features problems in relation to “geographical names and people’s names [,which] constitute a difficulty in translation because it is difficult, in most cases, to convey their emotive overtones” (Shunnaq 1993, 54). The storm names ‘Alexa’ and ‘Irene’ are the products of American culture and have different associations that are likely to be lost when they are Arabicised. Unless the TL audience puts their practical experience to use in the course of the translation, the Arabicised forms remain a ‘lifeless’ utterance.

6. Adaptation

Newmark (1988, 82–83) addresses adaptation from the point of view of cultural equivalence as “an approximate translation where a SL cultural word is translated by a TL cultural word.” It is actually a significant shift of emphasis away from the SL cultural environment to a different situation utilised to express the message in the TL. In a sense, it is a kind of cultural approximation “whereby a culture-specific expression in the SL is translated into a cultural substitute in the TL, i.e. an approximately culturally corresponding TL expression” (Farghal and Shunnaq 1999, 26). Similarly, Beekman and Callow (1974, 201, emphasis in original; see also Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997, 35) stress that “cultural substitution” is an alternative to loanword strategy, one that mainly refers to “the use of a real-word referent from the receptor culture for an unknown referent in the original, with both of the referents having the same *function*”. Likewise in the words of Beekman and Callow as cited in Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997, 35), however, there are caveats needed when using cultural substitution, because:

- it is clearly inappropriate with words which are making a historical reference rather than a didactic point;
- it is important to choose the most relevant rather than simply the most obvious function; and
- there is a risk of causing a clash between the functions of the source and target items.

Needless to say, adaptation seems to be ideologically-motivated, whose point of departure mainly depends on the deletion of a foreign term and opting for the addition of an Arabic one. This would lead one to believe that the process is one of domestication, which according to (Venuti 1995, 20) is “an ethnocentric reduction

of the foreign text to [TL] cultural values, bringing the author back home.” In a sense, domestication “assimilates the foreign text to the values of the receiving culture to create an impression of a natural text, whose translator is invisible” (Shammaa 2009, 79). An example of how adaptation may be presented in translation can be shown in Example (6) below in which the naturalness of language is sought on at least two levels: an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign ‘Alexa’ and an opting for an Arabic storm name (i.e. Huda or Jana) with a more emotive form insofar as the TL audience is concerned.

7. Methodology

Having established a theoretical framework, we will now proceed to examine the nomenclature of storms in Arabic, as illustrated in the use of the “Huda”, “Jana” and “Zina” neologisms by media outlets. We examine a sampling of the news items and headlines that covered the snowstorm. In addition, we seek to explain this linguistic phenomenon akin to translation in light of Venuti’s (1995) seminal book on the distinction between foreignisation and domestication.

8. Data used in the study

The study examines the nomenclature of the storms adopted by the media by drawing on data from the news items posted on the websites of: Ma’an News Agency, Palestine; *The Jordan Times*, Jordan; *Arab News*, Saudi Arabia; *Alriyadh* (in Arabic), Saudi Arabia and *an-Nahar* (in Arabic), Lebanon. The data consists of a corpus of ten English and Arabic news items and headlines infused with varying lexicalisation, i.e. “Huda”, “Jana” and “Zina”, named for the polar front affecting the Middle East countries from January 6-January 12, 2015 and February 19, 2015. The Arabic news items and headlines have been translated into English by the author.

9. Significance of the study

The study is significant insofar as it underscores the benefits of input from other disciplines (e.g., journalism and meteorology) to translation studies. It sheds light on how non-translator experts from various fields of human activity exercise their profession on the periphery of translation. Importantly, it can serve to spark further discussion in translation studies on how non-translator journalists and meteorologists make a concerted effort to deal with the influx of ecology-related

terminologies into Arabic and, beyond that, to explore the assumptions underlying their decision-making.

10. Discussion and analysis

In 2015, in a straightforward news report, Ma'an News Agency stated that "Arabia Weather, Watan Weather and Ma'an News, Roya TV and a group of journalists and meteorologists in Jordan, Palestine and the Levant have all agreed to dub this winter storm 'Huda'. This agreement culminates the efforts made a year ago to name winter storms in Arabic"² (author's translation). In order to better appreciate what is involved, let us consider the following news items and headlines:

- (6) Palestine shuts down as Storm Huda strikes Holy Land.
(Ma'an News Agency, published 7 January 2015)
- (7) Palestinian authorities on Wednesday afternoon announced that all official business would be closed Thursday because of the storm, which has been nicknamed 'Huda' in Palestine and Jordan, and 'Zina' in Lebanon, and urged people to take safety measures in the coming days.
(Ma'an News Agency, published 7 January 2015).
- (8) Storm Huda touched down on Wednesday and is expected to continue until Saturday, although its force is expected to gradually decline.
(Ma'an News Agency, published 8 January 2015)
- (9) Consumers stock up on fuel ahead of 'Huda'.
(*The Jordan Times*, published 5 January 2015)
- (10) Officials described official response to the storm, dubbed Huda, as successful.
(*The Jordan Times*, published 10 January 2015).
- (11) In the post, Queen Rania welcomed the Kingdom's 'visitors', hoping that their stay in Jordan during the storm would be 'light', using a hashtag of the impending storm's name 'Jana'
(*The Jordan Times*, published 19 February 2015).

At the extremes of the discussion, one could argue that the translational business-like decisions made by the non-translators were complexly motivated and grounded in a closely regulated ideology. It is of striking importance that the naming of the storms as such reflected not only a socially and politically symbolic action but also, and perhaps most importantly, a religious action. A look at the news items

2. <http://www.maannnews.net/arb/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=751341>.

and headlines (6–11) above shows a consensus amongst the journalists and meteorologists to use Arabic names, such as “Huda” in Examples (6–10), “Zina” in Example (7) and “Jana” in Example (11), with much emphasis on the first storm’s name, as it was the one that most commonly circulated across the adjoining countries. The decision was made by the non-translators (or ‘pedagogues’, if we may) to create neologisms rather than to opt for a more readily usable Arabicisation of foreign storm names (or ‘absolute equivalence’ Pym 2010), as had been the case, for instance, with Isabel in 2003, Rita in 2008, Irene in 2011, Sandy in 2012 and Alexa in 2013.

This potential language power of recuperation seems to have been based on a politically- and ideologically-motivated decision, and reflects a domestication strategy in which foreign text ethnocentrism is reduced to conform to the receptor culture, or, in the words of Robinson (1997, 195), “the refusal to communicate across cultural boundaries; rejection of the foreign or strange.” Indeed, the case of storm nomenclature can be considered as the be-all and end-all to “ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text” (Venuti 1995, 20). As further explained by Hussein Al-Qahtani, spokesman for the Presidency of Meteorology and Environment, the case is

that the current snowstorms in some Arab countries have been named according to local culture, to create a general optimistic atmosphere among the population. (...) Sadly, the beautiful names of these natural phenomena cannot protect people from their catastrophic effects.

(published in *Arab News* on Sunday 11 January 2015)

The channel of cultural pragmatics could serve as a more contextual way for active, cogent decision-making. Arabic names are purposefully employed, and carry broad socio-cultural significance. “Huda” is a catchy name that mainly connotes a straight path. At first glance, the ideology beyond the storm names may appear nihilistic and a feminist-leaning quest for Arab women identity and independence, or even a feminist invective at Arab women much in the same way as in English a century ago (Weather online, History of Hurricane Names 2015). In fact, the names bring forth a number of ideological implications. For example, Aljazeera Net published the following headline:

Zayna wa huda ... warā' kuli 'aṣifatuin 'aẓīmatin 'imra'ah.

(Aljazeera Net, published 1 January 2015)

‘Zina and Huda: Behind every great snowstorm, there is a great woman’ (author’s translation)

It can be convincingly argued, however, that the attribution of these names to the storms was based on their relevance to Islam. In the wider Islamic-cultural

context, “Huda” has Islamic connotations and associations attached to it, which in turn are inextricably linked to the Qur’an. Allah says “Say: Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel-for he brings down the (revelation) to thy heart by Allah’s will, a confirmation of what went before, and *guidance and glad* tidings for those who believe” (Ali 2: 97; emphasis added). The highlighted phrase contains an allusion to the idea of the straight path and is used as a reasonably reliable translation of the Arabic *huda*, a potentially appropriate item for the context. Arguably, the outdated Biblical norm for the storm’s naming seems to have been revived nowadays in Arabic storm nomenclature. The naming of the storms tilts towards Arab-Islamic ideology, thus “Huda” is used in almost all news items and headlines by Ma’an News Agency and the other four online newspapers.

Likewise “Jana” is a name with powerful religious overtones, and intertextually bound to the Qur’an. Allah says: “They will recline on Carpets, whose inner linings will be of rich brocade: the *Fruit* of the Gardens will be near (and easy of reach)” (Ali 2: 97; emphasis added), where the highlighted item is an equivalent to the genitive masculine noun *janā*.

With regard to “Zina” (headlines 7 and 14), the name roughly means ‘beautiful’ and religious-free. Storm Zina is used by the Lebanon-based an-Nahar newspaper, and once again, the naming as such is ideologically-motivated. This time, however, it reflects Pan-Arabism rather than Islamic culture, perhaps in view of the wide-ranging ethnic, religious and denominational diversity in Lebanon, likely unmatched elsewhere in the Arab World.

Finally, the Arabic news items and headlines in Examples (12–15) are further worthy of study. The proposed English translation may sound appropriate as a natural SL text, with the exception of recalcitrant Huda (in Examples (12) and (13)), Zayna (in Example (14)) and Jana (in Example (15)), all of which are in textures at risk. Obviously, as noted by Venuti, a “foreign[s]ing translation in English can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism” (1995, 20). In the original (with ostensible translation traits), we are specifically concerned with natural language use, thus deviating from the English nomenclature of storms. Such deviation may be further explained in terms of the rhetorical use of Arabic, which considers Arabicised forms as less important when compared to the standard form of language use in Arabic.

- (12) *khabīr ‘arṣat ‘aṣīfatu hudā tajtāḥu al-mamlakata bilmaṭri wath-thalj wadhrrwatu al-bard fī yawmay as-sabti wal’ahd*
 ‘Meteorologist said: ‘Storm Huda began to strike the kingdom blasting great drifts of snow and pouring with rain, with a maximum of bitter weather on Saturday and Sunday’ (author’s translation).

(Alriyadh, published 9 January 2015)

- (13) *Nablus tasta'idu listiqbāl thulūji huda*
 'Nablus prepares to deal with Snowstorm Huda' (author's translation).
 (Ma'an News Agency, published 7 January 2015)
- (14) *Zayna fāj'at ij jamī*
 'Zina unexpectedly whipped again yesterday' (author's translation).
 (*an-Nahar*, published 7 January 2015)
- (15) *iktasat madaynatu il-qudsi alyawm al-jum'ah bil-ḥilatil bayḍā' ba'ada an ḍarabat al-āṣifatu ath-thaljiyyatu jana al-'araḍi al-falaṣṭīnyyah*
 'Snow blanketed Jerusalem Friday after Jana Snowstorm hit Palestinian territories' (author's translation).
 (Ma'an News Agency, published 20 February 2015)

The Arabic texts in the Examples (12–15) above are more or less translation trait-free, clearly in tune with the way they are developed in their natural habitat – the lexico-grammatical features flow logically. The presupposed sacred status of religious and/or Arabic storm names seems to be an incentive for the journalist and meteorologist to choose from, rather than to choose from other names haphazardly.

11. Implications for translators

Thus far the discussion has tended to the linguistic phenomena component of the non-translation activities carried out by non-translator experts. It indicates that translation activities are not solely limited to translators and that translation's intimate relationship to other fields of human activity travels far beyond the transferability of language X to language Z. It supports the view that the eclectic interdisciplinarity of translation "might also become a way of alerting wider disciplines to models and phenomena that traditionally and often perniciously limit our vision of the world" (Pym 2010, 200–1). Insofar as the present study is concerned, the following implications emerge:

1. Translation problems may arise in the nomenclature of storms. One serious problem translators may encounter when working on remote languages is lexical incongruity – the English term 'wind' has twenty-five Arabic designations.
2. In such a case, a functionally-based equivalence may be sought unless there is a good reason to do otherwise, i.e. to pursue a formally-based equivalence.
3. In the face of translation problems, translators should meticulously devise translation strategies, namely, Arabicisation in particular and a foreignising strategy in general, which can help to minimise the hegemony of the English language and culture as much as possible.

4. The caveat is that Arabicisation can still mirror the very process of hegemony when it is at the sound level, as exemplified by the policy adopted by journalists and meteorologists to avert it.
5. Thus, full adaptation by the journalists and meteorologists has been utilised to bring translational traits to a minimum.
6. This action brings about new neologisms with deep-rooted cultural implications, which abruptly and sharply rose to prominence during the snowstorm.
7. There is ample evidence of ideology manifesting itself in the nomenclature of storms in Arabic when both foreignising and domesticating strategies are used. Translation as a linguistic realisation of the SL is no longer tenable.
8. Translators should bear in mind the heavy connotative values with which snowstorm names are replete.

12. Concluding remarks

Translation as a discipline goes far beyond mere linguistic affairs, and the study at hand has raised important relevant observations. For instance, translators with no formal translation training or translation studies education effectively draw on their own knowledge to practice minimal translation and to protect their culture from the infiltration of foreign items. Two translation strategies are employed, falling within the demarcations of foreignisation and domestication. In a kind of virtuous circle, translation encourages journalists and meteorologists to shift away from the traditional old policy and common practice of Arabicising storm names, and to opt for a non-translation strategy that uses Arabic names as part of an overall domesticating strategy. This policy can be extended to other translation bodies around the Arab World, specifically to unpack some of the limitations of the language policies used by different translation institutions in the region. Foreign storm signifiers used to be transferred into Arabic as loanwords, e.g. *aliksa* ('Alexa') and *ayrīn* ('Irene'). The receptor culture now seems to have been sensitised to cultural implications at the ecological level as well. A domestication strategy, therefore, lends itself readily to the process of transference. Although Huda, Jana and Zina were esoteric and replete with connotative meanings at first, they later gained value and momentum in the Middle East countries. Such an acceptance of an ideology-motivated method of transference can be viewed as positive rather than negative from a monolingual position. Only names with positive connotations are used and it is reasonable to assume that this trend may continue.

Having followed the coverage of official linguistic attempts, we can safely claim that the new names undermine and delegitimise the foreign names adopted by the English-speaking media and used some years ago. News agencies conceive

of Arabisation and employ translation in a regional setting. Multi-pronged efforts are being made by journalists and meteorologists to resist the hegemonic linguistic position of English. As such, there has been a concerted effort by several journalists and meteorologists in Palestine, Jordan and Syria to give a new kind of name to snowstorms, one with more nebulous connotations that are hard to fathom and peg down. In yet a more extravagant semiotic leap, we assert that the names currently circulating in the media are on such uncharted territory that it is indeed essential to pin down and disambiguate the Arabic snowstorm names.

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