Using Functional Approach in Translating Arab Spring Topics: Aljazeera and BBC Arabic as Study Cases

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Abstract—in the last two decades there was an increasing interest in the relationship between media translation and ideology. The study sample of this article is the Arab Spring that attracted the attention of various western and Arab media channels like Aljazeera and the BBC. It is reported that each channel may be inclined certain translation strategies that may not necessarily be adopted by the other channel at the same time which entails that the translation in these media outlets is not random and unbiased. Therefore, the findings of the current work will be helpful for translators that are working in such media institutions.

Index Terms—Arab spring, media translation, functional theory, ideology, Aljazeera, BBC

I. INTRODUCTION

The Arab World is witnessing dramatic and profound political and social transformations during the events of Arab Spring. In the last years, these events are seen, by many observers, as the most significant in the area for the last two centuries and they may reshape the future of these communities (Andoni, 2011). Arab Spring, consequently, is being the focus of local Arabic as well as worldwide media. It has been covered, for example, by Aljazeera and some well-known western media agencies such as BBC. The west, however, approached Arab Spring with double standards and this led eventually to some sort of gap between the formal political discourse and the real reaction towards these rapid events and western leaders found themselves in a difficult situation. On the one hand, they are supposed to support these revolutions, as the west was always keen to urge these governments to respect human rights and liberties. On the other hand, there is a strong economic relation between western powers and old dictatorships of uprising countries. Therefore, for this type of text to achieve its goal through persuading or at least influencing the target audience, it highly relies on employing several rhetorical, implied and indirect tactics. In this case, any translation of such source texts will be assessed as inappropriate if the translator looked for the pure linguistic elements and does not take into account all other social, cultural and political factors that surround the original text. As a result, translators may unconsciously fall in two critical traps. Firstly, he/she may fail, in some way, to convey the entire intended message of source interlocutor. Secondly, and not less importantly, the target text may not meet the expectations of the targeted audience because it may be detached from the socio-cultural and political environment of the Arab World especially after the latest developments at the mass media and intellectual level. These emerging problems have not been sufficiently addressed. Some studies have tackled the relation between translation and ideology, while some others investigated how translators training programmes are laid down in the light of certain media orientations. Thus, the current research will incorporate recent developments in functional theories of translation studies and critical discourse analysis. This study seeks to enrich knowledge in this multidisciplinary area with focusing on English-Arabic direction of translation, because the majority of published works that studies the relationship between language and ideology and its implications on translation process are actually focused on a single given language and culture and they are mostly written in English and German. Furthermore, the findings of this study will be beneficial to professional translators working with rendering English political texts that are concerned with Arab current complex situation.

II. ARAB SPRING AND THE REACTION OF THE WEST

Arab Spring represents a number of internal socio-political events that took place in different Arab states. However, its most significant and common event is the radical change in the political system (Litsas, 2013). The onset of this spring was triggered in Tunisia in 2010 (Wouters & Duquet, 2013) and spread rapidly to Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. This reaction by the public was not surprising as they have been suppressed by longstanding dictatorships, financial corruption and poverty for more than three decades, (Jamshidi, 2014). The region of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been the centre of scrutiny by analysts, theorists and politicians continue to investigate the effects of Arab Spring across the Middle East. These events have practically led to political system alteration in Tunisia, Libya,

Yemen and Egypt, and it may also change the system in Syria as well (Mameli, 2013). Within a relatively short period of time since the beginning of Arab uprisings, a good deal of different types of writings have been published about the topic (Christensen & Christensen, 2013).

Arab countries have been always emphasised by the EU and US foreign policies due to their significant geography that link the west to east, its impact on Israel security. Furthermore, the Middle East is the reservoir of about 54% of the global oil and the west know well that what is going on in the Middle East and North Africa will have surely its implications on the future of oil-dependent economies (Dadush & Dunne, 2011). Western countries, while officially welcomed the possibility of new democracies emerging in the region. At the same time, US and EU gained an enormous advantage from their cooperation with the existing regimes and do not seem prepared to support the new democracies. However, as Western nations became unable and unwilling to oppose these revolutions, they should reshuffle their international goals and policies to make a dialogue with these new democracies possible (Aliboni, 2011). On the official level, the public policy of the European Union when dealing with its Arab neighbours was always stressing on enacting reforms in this area through having accountability, freedom of speech and assembly, rule of law and human rights. So, in its preliminary reaction to the Arab Spring, it welcomed it and it called for revisiting its whole policies and that they back these uprising peoples (Hollis, 2012). Eventually, this created a considerable gap between realism and idealism of the foreign policies and political discourse of western powers towards the latest transformations in Arab area (Atlas, 2012).

III. ALJAZEERA AND BBC ARABIC: SIMILAR TONGUES AND DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The world today is a mediated image of the real world. Almost everything we experience is conveyed through something else. Most of people's experience in life is now mediated through television. People's models of behaviour, values, principles, and aspirations are also mediated through the media. Therefore, besides informing audience about the world they live in; media reinforces certain representations of a selective reality. Interestingly, the media can usually offer knowledge about other parts of the world through translation in one form or another. The received information is translated and has undergone a series of changes and transformations, determined by internal and external factors (Darwish, 2010b).

The prominence of Arabic media in the Arab world and worldwide is increasing strikingly for its role in democratisation and the social, cultural and political change in the Middle East (Lahlali, 2011). In Middle East, the rise of the prominent mass media role started during the 1950s and 1960s with the emergence of Arabic unity discourse and Arab national identity. However, the transnational television broadcasting started in the 1990's (Aldawood, 2004; Amin, 2001; Sakr, 2007).

Several studies have worked on pinpointing the main features of trans-national channels in the Arab states, focusing on bias and independence of such media. They argue that despite the claims of being privately-owned, totally independent, and free from government control, these channels are acting as political tools. Arabic trans-border media is affiliated with certain agendas and ideologies directly or indirectly. These ideologies are rooted in regional conflicts (Fandy, 2007).

With the spread of international television channels worldwide in the last three decades, many issues relating to ideology, globalisation, identity, cross-cultural interactions, and wide range of cultural, political and economic implications have been tackled in academic and public world (Volkmer, 2008; Zayani & Ayish, 2006). Trans-border news channels like Aljazeera, Al-Arabia and BBC Arabic have offered the Arab audiences with a multitude of choice concerning content and presentation. This has led to breaking the monopoly of state channels and it helped in introducing the concept of freedom of expression that is significantly different from that held by Arab regimes through their discussions and current affairs programmes (Miladi, 2006).

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So that some reasonable comparisons can be performed, the study has chosen two prominent media agencies in the Arab World; the first is Qatar-based Aljazeera and the second is UK-based BBC Arabic.

A. Aljazeera Network

Aljazeera is the first Arabic trans-border channel specialised in news broadcasting that was launched in 1996 with the help of governmental long-term loan. Within less than a couple of decades, it managed to be one of the top five brands in the world coming ahead of BBC (Rusch, 2004). Many scholars attribute Qatar's emir decision to launch this channel to his strategy of mounting pressure on his rival Arab Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia regarding several regional controversial issues. Furthermore, Aljazeera has been considered a part of Qatar's double speak of sustaining friendly

economic and political relationships with both of United States and Israel while deeply criticising these nations on Aljazeera (Da Lage, 2005; El Oifi, 2005). Being sponsored by the government of Qatar, Aljazeera seemed unable to address some sensitive issues like the poor treatment of foreign workers (Tal Samuel-Azran, 2013).

Many media specialists suggest that the significance of satellite television manifested itself during 1991, when CNN monopolised the coverage of the Gulf war and the liberation of Kuwait. This war has contributed to the success of CNN, while Aljazeera's success may be attributed to airing of Osama bin Laden's tapes and the live coverage of September, 11 events in 2001 (Sultan, 2013).

Aljazeera has continuously adopted a taboo-breaking policy in its highlighting social, political and cultural controversial topics like human rights, state terror, suppression of freedom of speech, women oppression, sexuality, secularism in addition to racial and religious topics (Miles, 2005).

Aljazeera became the only credible source of information about the Arab Spring in Arabic for millions of Arab citizens. The growing fans of Aljazeera were not confined to Arab people; many western leaders were among its viewers like the American president Barack Obama, the US Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton and the British Prime Minister David Cameron (Tharoor, 2011). The main (Arabic) Aljazeera channel that was established in 1996 and Aljazeera English was launched later in 2006. Samuel-Azran & Pecht (2014) suggest that news layout is not the same in both channels. They assert that the Arabic version is more aggressive in its dealing with the US affairs, while the English version tends to be edited through making changes, omissions and shifting direct speech to the indirect one. The motive behind this procedure, as it seems, is to meet the target audience satisfactions of both channels.

Many scholars attribute the decision of Qatar's Emir to found Aljazeera to his strategy of increasing Qatar's influence against rival Arab Gulf countries especially Saudi Arabia. It was also part of Qatar's double speak of sustaining friendly economic and political relationships with both of United States and Israel, while at the same time deeply criticising these nations on Aljazeera (Da Lage, 2005; El Oifi, 2005).

Aljazeera has turned to be a controversial phenomenon in the Arab and Western World. In the one hand, it has many enthusiastic viewers who appreciate Aljazeera's revolutionary media discourse in its treatment of various sensitive issues. On the other hand, Aljazeera is being strongly criticised by Arab and Western government, as well as radio and television stations for its financial resources, independence from Qatar government, presentation style, and story choices (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002; Lynch, 2006).

Aljazeera adopts a high variety of Arabic known as Modern Standard Arabic in contrast to the colloquial version of Arabic that is spreading in many Arabic TV channels nowadays (Riman & Darwish, 2008). The influence of English is so apparent on the standardization of modern Arabic. Aljazeera depends basically on the translation of news and other contents from English (Zournazi, 2007).

B. BBC Arabic

The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), founded in October 1922, is known for being the world's largest media corporation. The corporation broadcast information services both locally and globally on television, radio, and the internet. It has a large audience reaching about 180 million people each week. The BBC operates nine TV local stations in the UK and 11 international television channels, including BBC America, BBC Knowledge, BBC World, and BBC Arabic. BBC is still in some regions of the world the only news provider (Hypergene, 2005).

BBC Arabic is a free-to-air, 24-hour television channel has been launched in 2008, based in London, to be BBC's first non-English TV station. BBC World Service is among the leading global news broadcasters that airs news in 33 languages to most parts of the world (Cheesman & Nohl, 2011). The staff and expertise of BBC Arabic TV were highly dependent on the trustworthy Arabic Service of BBC Radio that was launched in 1938. The independence of BBC's editorial policy is ambiguous because despite it is funded by the UK government, it insists on its independence concerning its management and the content of its output (Aly & Baumann, 2013).

BBC Arabic was established by the UK government to be competitive of the pan-Arabic Aljazeera channel. Although BBC World Service continuously dismisses the accusation of being Britain's government mouthpiece, many Arab critics fear that this professional media outlet may be politically biased as it is totally funded by the British Foreign Office (Jarrah, 2008). BBC Arabic television attempted to interact distinctively with topics that are being avoided by most Arab networks. Among these topics were democracy, minority rights and social change. This channel was a significant source of information about the Arab spring revolutions despite some considerable criticisms of lacking impartiality in some sporadic events (Hill & Alshaer, 2010).

BBC, in general, is well known for its implementation of tough and clear standards to assure objectivity and integrity (Harrison, 2010).

BBC Monitoring Service listens to TV, radio and news sources of over 140 countries with nearly 70 languages. The domestic version of news stories is provided by BBC General News Service. This process requires taking the huge mass of raw translations of these news sources and refining them. As a routine, translators in this service listen to broadcasts and while recording them, they type a summary of these news stories into the computer. Later, these broadcasts are prioritised and translated with guidance of the editorial policy. Then these translated materials are edited and sent to newsroom where they undergo further processing and reframing within what is known as "productive news processing" (Podkalicka, 2011).

C. Motives for Choosing Aljazeera and BBC

Aljazeera channel is regarded as a model for other Arabic satellite networks, and this makes it an ideal model for making safe generalisations. Aljazeera also offers a suitable research site as it relies on the translation of news, current affairs, documentaries and other various materials. Various modes of translation are performed in this channel like dubbing, voice over, live translation and narration (Darwish, 2010a). The reasons that have been mentioned earlier for choosing Aljazeera may be applicable to large extent to BBC as well. The other important reason for choosing these two channels is that both have Arabic and English TV channels that are well respected by Arab audience in general.

IV. MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

While translation as a practice is long established, the field developed into a separate academic discipline only in the last quarter of the 20th century. Before that, translation had often been integrated into language learning. Contrastive linguistics was another area in which translation became the subject of research. Translations and translated examples provided much of the data in these studies. The systematic linguistic approach to the study of translation began to emerge in the late 1950s. This approach marked the beginning of the scientific investigation of translation. The word *science* was used by Nida in the title of his book *Toward a Science of Translating* (published in 1964) (Munday, 2012). Translation studies have undergone serious alterations in its orientations starting from the traditional linguistic approach and ending with the functionalist and cultural approach.

A. The Linguistic Approach

The first category involves theories of translation as a product, which basically entails a linguistic approach. According to Naudé (2002), the dominating notion within this line of research would be equivalence which still has some level of influence on today's scholarship (Halverson, 1997). The notion of equivalence is summarised as a choice between translation in pursuit of conveying the formal and cultural features of the foreign text and translation cultivating pragmatic equivalence immediately intelligible to the receptor (ibid). Hence, a range of dichotomic linguistic approaches are developed based on this notion. Following the iconic categorisation of word-for-word translation v.s. sense-for-sense translation, formal equivalence (Nida & Taber, 1969; Nida, 1964), semantic translation (Newmark, 1988) and overt translation (House 1981) can be largely grouped under the former, while dynamic equivalence (Nida 1964, Nida & Taber 1969), communicative translation (Newmark, 1988), covert translation (House, 2014).

B. Discourse-analysis Approach

The deterministic role accorded to STs as the sole criterion to render and evaluate translations has gradually incurred widespread criticism on the 'equivalence' approach. Its main shortcoming lies in the total disregard for those socio-cultural conditions under which translations are produced and the requirements of acts of communication in the receiving culture (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990), which is characteristic of the normative and prescriptive category of research in translation studies. Against this backdrop, the linguistic-oriented translation theories are manifested in an updated form commonly known as discourse analysis approach. Amongst the many translation theorists following this approach, Hatim and Mason (1990, 1997) and Baker (1992, 2011) have made significant contributions by drawing on text linguistics, discourse analysis and pragmatics. Their studies conceptualise translation in a way language communicates meaning within social and power relations. To this end, translation means communicating a foreign text with target readership by exploring the pragmatic maxims in the target community. The pragmatic-oriented translation approach assumes a communicative intention and a relation of equivalence, based on textual analysis which locates equivalence at a textual and communicative level rather than at the sentential and lexical level (Naudé, 2002). The linguistic toolkit for textual analysis is derived from Halliday's systemic functional model on which the socio-cultural meanings behind texts are explored.

C. The Functional Approach

The 1980s witnessed the birth of a number of approaches to Translation Studies collectively named functionalist, which triggered a paradigm shift in the system. The second half of the twentieth century saw some paradigm shift in the discipline of translation studies, especially after the publication of Justa Holz-Manttari's *Translatorial Action: Theory and Method* and Reiss and Vermeer's *Foundation for a General Theory of Translation*, both published in 1984. These paved the way for what is later known as functionalist paradigm or approaches to translation, which view translation as a communicative act performed by an expert (the translator) within an intercultural communication, acting as a text producer who has certain communicative purposes (Nord, 2001).

In general, functionalist approaches reckon that the function of the target text determines the method of translation. These approaches are developed in opposition to the classical equivalence paradigm which sees the source text as the determinant of the nature of the target text. Vermeer (1987:29) says, "linguistics alone is not effective because translation itself is not merely a linguistic process, and that linguistics has not yet formulated the right questions to tackle our problems".

Among the most well-known publications on functionalist approach are Vermeer (1987, 1996, 2012); Reiss and Vermeer (1984); Nord (1991, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005); Holz-Manttari (1984); Honig (1997); Honig and Kussmaul (1991); and many others.

D. The Cultural Approach

The cultural turn in translation studies has emerged in the early 1990s emphasising that translation would not be seen as an isolated activity, taking place in a kind of vacuum, but as an act directly linked to the settings in which translators work. The cultural turn stressed the need to take into account the circumstances in which translation occurs, broadening the object of study from the purely textual and taking into account both source and target contexts. Itamar Even-Zohar elaborated a cultural model based on a study of translation history that showed how translation varied at different moments (Even-Zohar, 1990). When the features of the source text and its context are reproduced resulting that the final product might seem strange and unfamiliar, this process is known as foreignisation. This form of translation deliberately foregrounds the source culture, so that the translated text can never be presumed to have originated in the target language. In contrast, when a text is adapted to suit the norms of the target culture, this is known as domestication because markers of its original foreignness are erased. Venuti draws attention to the ideological implications of domestication, which he sees as problematic. When the translator erases the traces of the foreign, the he prioritizes the needs and expectations of the target culture over the source (Venuti, 1992).

V. Translation within Media Agencies

In media, the adopted translation strategies are regulated and evaluated by a set of professional and institutional constraints laid down by media broadcasters. Translating, like most other activities such as news planning, gathering, making and news reporting, is a gatekeeping activity, i.e. controlling the flow of information in communication channels. The broadcaster decides not only *what* to translate but also, importantly, *how* to translate (Katan & Sergio, 2003).

Media stations practice gatekeeping on the available material for translation by selecting what to translate and the optimal corresponding translation strategies. Such decisions are directed by the broadcasters according to particular programme strategies and general policies and perspectives of the channel. This process of gatekeeping is composed of two main phases of control of the translation activity. First, the potential target text is filtered before commencing translating through following instructions that guarantee the satisfaction of the beliefs, values and agendas of the media outlet. Second, there is extensive control during the editing process after translating. Theoretically, deletion, addition, substitution and reorganisation of the target text during editing should be the duty of the translator while, in reality, such editing is done by journalists (Vuorinen, 1997).

Translation is thus governed by the regulations and power of the broadcasting authorities. These constraints constitute a hidden force which directs translation tasks, roles and activities. The translator, therefore, is required to take into account the ideological orientations of the media agency. Dealing with ST and TT needs to match the expectations of media broadcasters. In other words, any decisions made in translation regarding translation strategy, degree of mediation, style and choices of TT structures, have to be in harmony with the tendencies and demands of the broadcasters (Katan & Sergio, 2003).

VI. Major Themes of Functional Theories of Translation

1. It is a target-text rather than source-text inclined approach: according to Vermeer and Nord, a source text is an *offer of information* that is directed from the author to reader; meanwhile the translated text is not an identical information offer because it is tailored for a different language and different culture. This means that the translator may not be able or is not required to offer the same quantity and quality of information of the source text to his target audience. The translator, instead, offers information in a new form because the target audience have different expectations, needs, background knowledge, etc (Mohatlane, 2014; Snell-Hornby, 2006).

2. It is applicable to all types of translations: Vermeer (1996) says that his theory can be perceived as a general theory because it can be applied to all types of translation. Snell-Hornby (1990) demonstrates that despite scholars believe that this theory may be of limited applicability in the field of literary works where there is no function from a skopos perspective, Vermeer counters these criticisms by saying that even with these texts, a translator may work purposefully to some extent.

3. It is a cross-cultural communicative process: skopos theory does not look at translation as a mere linguistic transcoding, but t places it in a wider frame of cross-cultural communication. This leads us to think that we cannot dig in the linguistic form to explore the function; however it is something culturally determined and it has a pragmatic nature for its dependence on the perception of receiver as well as context (Yan & Naikang, 2011; Yi, 2013).

4. It assumes possible multiple renderings of a text: according to this theory, it is normal to have more than one correct translation for a single source text depending on the needs, expectations and norms of target audience. This proposition has managed to solve the longstanding translation dichotomies like free vs. literal, formal vs. dynamic

equivalence and so on by making the purpose of translation to judge the appropriate translation for each particular case (Du, 2012).

5. It assumes multiple functionality of a text: conventionally, it said that a text has one function, but practically there may more than one function simultaneously. In such a case, these functions should not be of a similar importance and they have to be ordered hierarchically. Multiplicity of skopos surely affects the final target text in a way or another (Nord, 1997).

6. It presumes that each text has a function: functionalists stress on that the translators have always to be aware that all texts should have skopos. Except rarely, the skopos is not explicitly expressed, thus it has to be inferred (Schäffner, 2011).

For the above reasons, the functional theory is seen as the most appropriate for conducting and analysing translation in both media agencies because it justifies more than one correct target texts for a single source text based on the intended function of the text that is going to be translated.

VII. CONCLUSION

Translation is a dynamic and complex process that may involve multitude of factors and dimensions. Therefore, the traditional linguistic concept of equivalence has proved inadequate to understand and analyse certain types of translation such as media translation. In media, there could be more than one correct translation for the original text. This openness and the freedom that is shown on the part of translator is better explained and supported by the functional orientation of translation studies which has been introduced in the early eighties of the past century. For translating a sensitive political topic such as the Arab Spring, it is seen that different media outlets adopts different approaches and strategies in accordance with their eventual aims and perspectives. In this case, the primary aim of these media channels is to satisfy the needs and expectations of their audience. Thus, Aljazeera and BBC guide and train their own translators in way that serves their media strategy. The most noted translation strategy in these media agencies is the intervention or manipulation strategy in which the message of the target text may not totally mach that of the source text.

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