

A Practical Study of Translating Doumōu' wa Choumōu' / Cries and Candles: a Novel from Arabic to French

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Abstract:

More and more I discover that translation is not a greedy knowledge of words in both or many languages but a whole procedural operational technique able to fail for the least mistake.

My beliefs about difficult translation are certainly approved when it is the matter of translating any piece of literature from Arabic to a foreign language especially when you are driven by the risk of such adventure and you endure it in a work that you should absorb through a systematic reading. Accordingly, this is a personal experience that I am living in translating a small novel in Arabic entitled Doumōu' wa Choumōu' or Cries and Candles by the Algerian novelist Pr.Abdeljalil Mortad where I have encountered many issues among which stylistic, semantic, cultural, and linguistic are mainly focused. Consequently out of many gist readings I infer that translating the novel is a tiring task if we compare it to a poem or any other type of texts, it is also tedious to approach conveniently the novel since some many difficulties arise in providing a real bridge between Arabic and French and/or English comprising:

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- Grammar
- Dialectal expressions
- Cultural components

And many other problems that are only discovered once faced by them in a translation mostly sought to be exact or appropriate to the original text.

Introduction

The idea of such paper springs from my strong conviction that no theory about translation can be made evident far from the practical experience which when being achieved, one may bring so many points into theoretical discussions. Though I should focus on some notional issues but the highlight of the study is on the practical side of translating this novel: Cries and Candles from Arabic to French and to show how much easier translation seems to be when you just read about and not do. Henceforward, my focal intention aims at a descriptive-explanatory research rather than a rush listing of theories. Not for nothing many scholars still endeavour to produce books about translation and still they are doubtful about it as an exact art, a craft, a science, a linguistic exercise or a codebook. Vladimir Nabokov's Problems of Translation and Friedrich Nietzsche's On the Problems of Translation and so many other scholars have been tired to solve the mystery of translation and all of them infer that translation is not an operational process in mathematics and being a problem, even thorny one, is very natural.

many questions pose deliberately but mostly is the dilemma already dealt for a millennia whether I should

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be faithful to the source text (st) without distortions or be transparent with respect to all conventions of the target language (tl) wishing that the nightmare of the comparison of translation to beautiful women who cannot be faithful at the same time won't invade my thought during my own translating to Cries and Candles which is about the paradox created out of crisis of ordinary Algerian life and the whole novel is a reference to two women whom one of them works diligently to be important creature in the society, while the second cheaply consumes her body for temporary happiness, and hence a struggle of values and cultural constraints increases in such literary work that copies truly a social actual reality in Algeria.

Translation paves the way to uncover the splendour of a literature abandoned and lost because of the gloom, if not the absence, of Arabic literature which is unlikely to achieve a public but an Arab, and it is only through literary translation that we can introduce such literature in a target language to a more global audience

As for the difficulties of translating Arabic into French, there is the problem of finding equivalents in French for historical register, rhetoric and style that are characteristics marking this novel and so the shift is not at all free from trouble.

- Grammar

Arabic and French are two different systematical languages in so many points: capitalization in French not in Arabic, the dual form in Arabic notion French and so on.

- Negation

In chapter one the author introduces the novel by a short negative simple sentence preceded by two words, and two phrases:

*Chevaux, explosives, course du **ǧGoumǧ** des gens entourés goinfrent du couscous beurré et finement miellé,, **les cuillères nōont pas suffit.*** Doumōu' wa choumōu'.P5

الخيّل، البارود، سباق القوم، الناس مستوون حلقات حلقات ينهمون
الكسكس بالزبدة والعسل المصفى،

لم تكف الملاعق

Unlike in French there are three particles of negation in Arabic as shows diagram 1

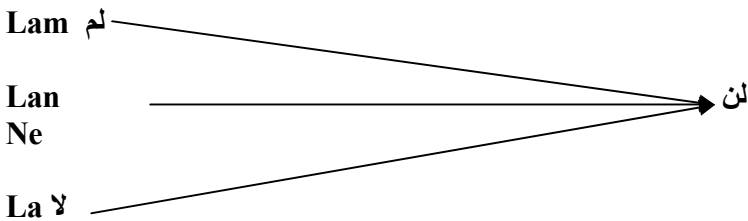


Diagram 1: Particles of Negation in Arabic and French

In Arabic all of these particles of negation can only be joined to verbs in the imperfective or the present tense but the purpose is different **lam** is a particle to mean a temporary negation that occurs to an action in previous time but may change in the near future, **lan** is a definite

negation beginning in the present and continues in the future, whereas **la** means actual present moment and can change to affirmative if the speaker changes his opinion. But negation in French is generally expressed with the use of negative words **ne/pas** attached to the verb.

- Word Order

Traditionally translation was a transaction between two languages, as defined by J. C. Catford's in his book *Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics* (1965) as a "substitution of TL [i.e., Target Language] meanings for SL [i.e., Source Language] meanings" (quoted in Bassnett:2000, 15)

The reader, hence, is not neglected as said by Nida(1964:9) "in translating from one language into another he must go beyond mere comparison of corresponding structures and attempt to describe the mechanisms by which the total message is decoded, transferred, and transformed into the structures of another language.

* Negation

The second transformation while translating a negative sentence from SA to French is within the word order

In ST

Particle of negation + verb + noun لم + تكف + الملاعق

In TT

Subject + particle of negation + auxiliary +
particle of negation + verb

Les cuillères n'ont pas suffit

* Affirmative

The syntactic system in Arabic tends to adapt the word order VSO (verb before subject) rather than SVO (subject before verb) like:

Les gens se sont dispersés, et je me suis dispersé avec eux.(p.5)

انفض الناس، فانفضت مع المنفضين

Subject + verb

Les gens + se sont dispersés

Verb + noun

الناس + انفض

* Questions

There are many questions asked in the novel, but I was drifted towards a question that though I like it and I did not stop reading it again and again I was scarred at the way I should translate it as nice as it is in ST and I worry whether the reader to this same sentence should read it in TT in the same pleasant way:

*Etes vous une nation gouvernée sans un gouvernement
ou une nation avec gouverneurs sans des gouvernés ?*

هل أنتم أمة محكومة بلا حكومة، أم أمة ذات حكام بلا محكومين؟

- Necessity of the asking element **hal**

There is no equivalent in French for the asking element **hal** هل in Arabic, this is why it is dropped from the sentence in TT, moreover the question in French can be

made without this element unlike in Arabic I can't use this sentence in question without the use of questioning word **hal** like: أنتم أمة محكومة بلا حكومة، أم أمة ذات حكام بلا محكومين؟*

- Absence of verb

This sentence in ST is formulated in the form of a question and composed of twelve words but none of them is functioning as a verb which is something rare in French.

When I try to translate it to French I include the auxiliary **etre** to the sentence so that it looks as meaningful question, and then I infer that translation may be of different techniques as deletion, paraphrase, direct substitution or, in this case, adding elements.

Translation for a sentence necessitates observing the grammatical rules and word order to have a lucid TT

- Dialectal Expressions

Dialect is no more a rustic form of language that may distort the standard but a spontaneous way of speech verily produced from the mouths of the popular, I am not asked to give a sociolinguistic definition to dialect simply because it's not my concern, at least now, but it is essential to remind that the phenomenon of dialect use in literature is fast appearing to justify realism in literary production and the author of this novel believes that dialects may sometimes accumulate a rich invaluable linguistic store that may not be found in our official language itself" (Mortad 2003:98). Though Cries and Candles is a standard Arabic novel but it is a good copy of an Algerian one as well, clearly evident in many of the

expressions that the author has included in many passages of the text:

*Chevaux, explosives, course du **ôGoumô**, des gens entourés goinfrent du couscous beurré et finement miellé, les cuillères n'ont pas suffi, les grands font manger les petits, **é** Music **ôghaytaô**, timbales, groupes musicales **ôel aâarfaô**, groupes religieux **âtolbaô, é é é** ..c'est l'aspect de la fête annuelle **ôwaâadaô** à l'honneur du saint marabout **ôsidi el Jilaliô** (p.5)*

الخيّل، البارود، سباق القوم، الناس مستون حلقات حلقات ينهمون
الكسكس بالزبدة والعسل المصفى، لم تكف الملاعق، الكبار يلقمون
الصغار،.. الغايطة، البندير، العرفاء، الطلبة، المتسولون، المحسنون،
البائعون، المشترون،.. هذه هي حال الوعدة السنوية للولي الصالح سيدي
الجيلالي.

The translation of dialectal words in the SL of the above passage is apparent in the TL through the bold and italic style. All of the words **goum**, **ghayta**, **ela'arfa**, **tolba**, **wa'ada**, and **Sidi El Jilali** are words that are not easy for any foreign readers, and even for some of them from the Middle East, as they are words typically Algerian and regardless of their cultural connotations they are not easy at all to translate to any other language since their equivalents mainly in French are absent; thus I try to preserve their original sound in a French alphabetization so that it can at least be readable in the TT; but, meanwhile the use of some footnotes where to explain the meaning of such words to a non Algerian audience is urgently needed. The diagram below shows the dialectal word which changes its alphabet in TT keeping its SL sound:

Dialectal word in ST → Dialectal word in TT

طَلْبَة → TOLBA

Diagram 2: The shift of some dialectal words from SL to TL

The second form of translation to some other dialectal words is not always made through preserving the Arabic sound in a French alphabetization but rather translating to French and a whole change of form and sound occur to these words as noticed in this passage:

Quel miserable! Ça te plait ce que tu en deviens un homme idiot, soté sit u a gardé ta flutte que tu jouait sur elle pour tes moutons et chèvresé :P6

مسكين! "عاجبو الحال" أنت رجل أبله، مغفل... لو حافظت على
قصبتك التي كنت تشدو بها لخرافك ومعيزك

1- it is clearly evident that the word “miserable” in French can not afford the same meaning in Arabic and though the word mesquin exists in French with the meaning of lack in height and prosper i.e. small and mediocre, in standard Arabic it has the meaning of a bitter poverty, because there is a difference of meaning in SA for the word fakir or a poor to mean a bad situation of living and mesquin to mean not having the least of food for eating and surviving; but in our dialect the word has other connotations and it is used to show someone's poor state or health but it is used also when someone is so generous or so naïve and sometimes idiot. The latter is

the meaning of the author in the ST for he is mocking at such simple minded man and shouts at him by the word: mesquin!

2- The expression “ça te plait ce que tu en deviens” is translated from a dialect in ST to standard in TL because عاجبو الحال in Standard Arabic is أعجبه حاله and so the translation to French « ça te plait ce que tu en deviens” is made from the standard expression and not the dialectal one to preserve the meaning which is more important here than any other functional or technical objective of the author's use of the expression in dialect and not in SA

3- The word “flute” is a near equivalent to the dialectal word “**gasba**” which means a lyre for music, this word may be gloomy for some speakers in the Arab world needless to speak about others in the whole world because “**gasba**” in ST is “**mizmar**” in SA and again translation is made from SA to TL.

The diagram below shows the shift from SL to TL during the process of translation of some dialectal words:

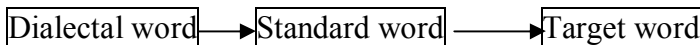


Diagram 3: Shift of Words from Dialect to TL

And even if the reader to the TT may quickly understand that flute is a means of playing music he cannot have the complete meaning the word “**gasba**” has in the ST because this lyre is a special instrument for shepherds to accompany their sheep, and it is a primordial means of singing that reflects a famous popular music; whereas the word “flute” is an instrument of music used in some

formal and international concerts to rather show classical music accomplished by expert musicians and not just a simple passionate shepherd who is ignorant to conventions of international music.

In fact the standard word is an artificial equivalent that may distort the effect the dialectal word has in ST but it appears to be the only means to move to TL and to lessen the complication of dialect translation that appears impossible without any change, needless to speak of the cultural signs that most of dialectal expressions carry - as mentioned in the following part. So it is highly controversial to preserve the author's individual style and open it up for the TL reader

The language can be more suitable for translation when it is segmented into other smaller units as suggested by Hatim and Mason (1990):

LANGUAGE VARIETY

User related

Use related

(dialect)

(discourse)

The speaker of dialect as user related language variety may belong to some dimensions as the social status of the speaker in his/her community, who is, and the geographical or the regional area he/she comes from.

The novel is rich of so many other dialectal words challenging to translate such as "bi jah sidi el jilali/ بجاه سيدي الجيلالي" P8, "rakassat a'alawiya/ رقصة العلاوية. la'ib bi ddaff/ لعب بالدف" P9, "razza/ رزة.....serwal el a'arbi wa takkatouhou/ السروال العربي وتكتته.....serwal roumi/ سروال

”رومي” P10 “maskoun/مسكون” P15, “chitaba/الشيظابة” P17,
“yakcha/يقشة” P29, « kabda/كبدة »p41, « rachia/راشية »
P43.

Though dialect translation seems to be impossible at first sight but a thorough knowledge of the standard SL and its varieties helps a lot to transmit at least the meaning of such words when translating them from dialect to TL.

- Cultural Components

It is undoubtedly assumed that cultural background is special to each country and can never be common to all parts of the world and though culture, especially oral, is meant to refer to old heritage of ancient generations it is agreed, however, that no civilization can be made developed if there is a denial to these vital manifestations of people that have a unique artistic style

Concerning the Arab literature namely Algerian novel, there is a good presence of popular culture that is thought to reflect the society's malaise and remedy, pleasure and taste, thought and beliefs through different folkloric features clearly present in the form of songs, dances, proverbs, riddles, feasts, religious beliefs, traditional clothes and so on this is why “the story, be it oral or written assures a continuum between generations who transmit popular folklore that is differing according to environment, dialect, and audience of such type of literature” (Roseline Leila Koreich.1980:22). Like in Cries and Candles, the author A. Mortad does not hesitate to include so many marvelous images of culture that reflect a realistic overview of Algerian people, of different levels and age who contribute to reproduce a vivid image of authentic ordinary life truly duplicated in

an artistic literary text because he says in his book دراسة " I am terribly convinced about a legitimate fact that most of writers –he means Algerian- agree upon the functional use of popular signs in terms of traditions, customs, legends, and socio-cultural or religious phenomena"(Mortad.2004:142)

But with all the splendour that culture may give to any work of literature, it becomes a serious problem that worries any translator concerned with transcending such cultural components to another language .i.e. another culture and ,thus, translating begins to be a an inter-cultural communication and as thought by (Hudson.1996:74) "most of language is cultural knowledge, since it has to be learned from others"

The most striking folkloric features of Algerian culture in the novel are:

1. Religious Feast

The novel introduces a descriptive passage of a popular ceremony called **wa'ada** often celebrated by ordinary people each year where huge number of groups are invited to eat couscous and as much this meal is consumed as much God may be satisfied towards such benevolent peoples.

This public ceremony is a traditional event very famous in our country and often celebrated on the occasion of great achievements of success or building or remedy after illness, freedom from prison, or even on the memory of an endeared dead person.

In the novel, this feast has another meaning because it is done on the behalf of a saint wise man called **Sidi El Jilali** who never appears to the sight of people

nevertheless, they perceive his traces of his prayers to God and his horse that he rides when leaving the region. The expression the annual **wa'ada** of the saint benevolent **Sidi El Jilali** is not at all easy to translate from Arabic to French since it contains so many cultural signs that are unknown to a foreign reader, and as asserted by (Hudson 1996:81)

items in some languages which certainly express meanings not expressed in others, this can be seen in the difficulties of translating between languages that are associated with different cultures, and consequently have names for different ranges of customs (birthday-party), objects (hovercraft, sausage), institutions (university) and so on.

Then the word **wa'ada** has no direct equivalent in TL because it is typically Algerian so there is no way to include it in TT except through keeping its original sound in a French alphabetization and refer to its cultural connotation in a footnote

2. Strong Belief in Wise Men

It is so common in our society to believe in so many saint women and men who were famous during their life for being obedient to god till death, in the novel the author cites so many like "**Lalla Setti**"P10 and "**Sidi Boumedienne**" P10 and "**Sidi El Jilali**"P5/6

the only approach to translate these words is a literal translation i.e. word for word for two reasons: first of all theses are proper names and there is no translation to them unless to keep them as pronounced in SL, secondly they are dialectal proper names of very famous saint women and men in our country that have a strong

cultural weight in the Algerian society and deleting them from TT is a big distortion to the original, so the use of a footnote where to explain their status in the minds of the populace is primordial the importance of these saint people in clarified in this passage when the hero wants to take a rest under a tree that is believed to be the property of **Sidi El Jilali**:

Aussitot je me réjoui comme je distingue de loin un arbuste près d'une colline autour de laquelle les gens se sont racontés beaucoup d'histoires, je me suis immédiatement diriger la bas pour m'allonger sous elle, en ce moment je me suis rendu compte que ces arbustes ombrés sont vénérables chez les habitants, sûrement ils me fouettaient si jamais ils me surprenaient ici, quand meme c'est l'arbuste de Sidi El Jilali. (p.5)

وكم كان سروري عظيما حين قشعت من بعيد شجيرة على ربة ردّ الناس حولها كثيرا من القصص، قصدتها على عجل، استلقيت تحتها، وبعد ثوان فقط تذكرت أن هذه الشجيرات المظلة مقدسة لدى السكان، لو شاهدوني لجلدوني، إنها شجيرة "سيدي الجيلالي"

The fear from causing harm to places where saint people have passed through is popular in our country, and though religion insists that the dead people are buried within their deeds and only God can be of total dependence, people still believe in people as a way to approach god and ask him favour

3. Popular Music

This type of music is very rich in our country and translation can be a way to introduce it to foreigners like

did the music of Rai in the whole world, and the author includes so many elements of music that are essential like **ghayta**, **bendir**, **a'arfa**, and in P19 dances of **al a'alawiat** رقصات علاوية, play on **daff** بالدف

Though these words look terse but they are of a very deep meaning that no near equivalent can cope them since they are part of speech and in fact “we have the tendency to take control over language much easier than speech” (Mortad 2000:134)

Proverb

The popular proverbs as defined by (Mortad 2003:120) are oral expressions that are inscribed and in this way our oral language is saved from extinction. In the case of translation, proverbs are not at all easy unless they are international and already known in different languages of the world. I venture to undertake a highly structured proverb in the novel which is:

Un libre comprend par un clin d'œil, un esclave par un poing de boxe

الحر بالغمزة والعبد بالدبزة

It so famous a saying to someone taking time to understand very clear cut matters, and the translation of it from SL to TL seems to have changed the aesthetic effect the expression has in ST, this why Nida(1964:156) says that it exists three basic factors in translating

- 1- the nature of the message
- 2- the purpose or purposes of the author
- 3- the type of audience

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The translator is confronting an alien society where he tries to create equivalence between Stand TT. moreover and as suggested but (Hudson1996:82) in some cases of difficult translation there is a “search for universal components of meaning in terms of which all meanings can be expressed”

And the possible translations to this proverb are rather linked with the first part of it the witty person from a winkle of an eye الحر بالغمة والعبد بالدبزة as showed in the table

the Proverb in ST	الحر بالغمة والعبد بالدبزة
Standard Arabic	إن اللبيب من الاشارة يفهم
Dialectal Arabic	آل الأندلس يفهم الاشارة
Latin	Intelligenti pauca
English	No explanations for those who understand
French	A certaines personnes on peut parler à demi-mot A qui sait comprendre peu de mots suffisent A bon entendeur, demi mot suffit Si on ne se comprend pas à demi-mot il faut utiliser les grand moyens

Table1: Different Near Equivalentes to the Proverb in the ST

In SA the meaning of the proverb is clear but in dialectal Arabic the source of such expression is very famous in Andalusia music which is a famous genre typically Tlemcenian and popular music has always been inspired

from the minds of the peoples usually of big witness and wisdom.

All among the French versions the last one i.e. *si on ne se comprend pas à demi-mot il faut utiliser les grands moyens* is the most matching one to SL meaning of the proverb but does not it loose part of its aesthetic flavour it has in its ST? proverbs often require a conceptual translation that mainly focuses on the meaning of it rather than the word itself which does not support our idea above and then I am left to loss with the assertion: Literal translation or conceptual translation; that is the question.

4. Traditional Clothes

There are so many words reflecting a typical Algerian clothes worn by old people of some regions like: **Razza** a special hat for head, Arabian trousers a large short dress put on by farmers and Bedouin, woolen **tekka** is a thick belt put around this trousers. there seems to be no French word coping exactly with the Arabic concept and, indeed, “a proportion of everyday vocabulary is tied to culture-specific concepts- concepts which simply do not exist in other cultures” (Hudson.1996:81)

All of these words referring to traditional clothes need a description by the translator but out of the text either through a footnote or an appendix in order not to render the text dull and redundant

5. The belief in haunting creatures

Haunted creatures is a belief that seems to be stronger in ignorant societies, but each has its way in that. When Nora who is a doctor and educated woman suspects her

feverous husband suffering from the inclusion of a djinn in his spirit and she brings him the cheikh a man who is supposed to learn Koran or some of it to exclude this bad intruder and cure her husband he tells her in (p.15)

*Ton mari, madame est **ñhantéo** par un djinn géant et incroyant, sinon il aurai terminer la version de la verse, heureusement pour nous c'est un djinn incroyant d'habitude facile « a abattre qu'un djinn croyant », préparez moi un braisier brulant, pour incendier ce djinn qui vient de la tribune de **Beni Chayssan** »*

إن زوجك، يا سيدتي "مسكون" بجان مارد كافر، وإلا أتم الآية، الجان الكافر أيسر علينا في هذه الحالة التي عليها زوجك مما لو "ضربو جن مومن"، جهزوا مجمرا زاهرا، فصاحبه جاهلي من بني الشيصان

Literal translation to ضَرَبُوا جَنَّ مُؤْمِنٌ is that un djinn croyant l'a frappé as usually said in our colloquial expressions but thought i try to be faithful to the expression in the SL I may escape to the transparency of it and loose its popular cultural connotation which has the sense of a haunted spirit

It is highly problematic to remove types of expressions about popular beliefs – in djinn in the novel- but this part of a popular culture that is difficult to clarify in TT through TL because “if culture is knowledge, it can exist only inside people’s heads so there is a problem in studying it: how can one know what the cultural knowledge of Mr X is? Worse still, how can one know what the culture of community X is” (Hudson 1996:71)

This is why and as viewed by *Harish Trivedi* (Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation) the

translation of a literary text became a transaction not between two languages, or a somewhat mechanical sounding act of linguistic "substitution" as Catford had put it, but rather a more complex negotiation between two cultures. The unit of translation was no longer a word or a sentence or a paragraph or a page or even a text, but indeed the whole language and culture in which that text was constituted.

Conclusion

On the basis of what is mentioned above, the study relies on some results

1- Most of dialectal words have preserved their original sound in an alphabetized script in the TT; others may have their equivalents in TL but the meaning still looks gloomy and then the use of a footnote is primordial to clarify their significance the SL

2- The translator should be aware of all the Systems of grammar that are different between Arabic and French, because sentences in TT should keep the meaning in ST and, at the same time, respecting the rule of grammar

3- Folkloric features of popular cultural are not at all evident to transcend them to TT and the decision is hard whether which meaning to preserve a direct or connotative one and to what extent shall the translator explain the impact of popular beliefs and the strong desire to some traditional clothes besides music and popular dances strictly known geographically and not widely famous and hence it's the translator duty to show

them to the reader of TT without being redundant and so he may be loosing the aesthetic or technical functions of these components of culture in an artistic medium

4- There is a clear discourse purpose from the use of folkloric types reflecting the Algerian culture; but the fact that they are linguistically ranged in the novel in a colloquial style and are mainly functional language variation seems to make them terribly difficult to translational equivalence.

5- I already complain about translation as read is not at all the same as when being done but lack of lucidity may be remedied by being familiar with both the SL and TL in terms of lexical, syntactic, textual, and discoursal properties, besides the message of the subject matter that should be clear and after all many things will be changed except the meaning of the message which being unchanged is the proof of a successful translation.

6- A practical translation of Arabic/French is a frustrating endeavour for there are peculiar connotations to Arabic words, phrases, and sentences a duplication of which is almost impossible in perfect accuracy.

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الشيء الوحيد الذي يعكس اعتباره شرعيا هو مما يتشارك فيه الكتاب على
مستوى التوظيفات للرموز الشعبية من عادات وتقاليد وأساطير وظواهر
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سواء الشفاهية منها أو المكتوبة تؤكد استمرار التواصل بين الأجيال في
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