The Role of the Peritext in the Reception of the Translation of Taha Hussein's Autobiography Al Ayyam into English

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Abstract:

The present paper discusses the role the peritext may have in shaping the understanding of the English translation of Taha Hussein's Al Ayyam. Three peritextual elements are dealt with: prefaces, titles, and covers. Genette's Paratext, Threshold of Interpretation (1987/1997) will be used as the theoretical framework for defining and understanding the functions of the three mentioned elements. The study draws on various cultural approaches to translation, including Baker's Translation and Conflict (2006), among others, to analyse the selective context in translation and the power of the narrative. The paper examines how covers, translated titles, and included prefaces, whether by translators or others, can orient the reception of the text towards a particular understanding. In a similar vein, the various discourses at work in the peritext will be examined to determine the extent to which these elements can influence the readers' reception of the text and, consequently, their understanding of the Egyptian cultural context. The obtained results confirm a pivotal role of the peritext in framing the reader's interpretation and imposing a specific vision about the source culture.

Key words: Peritext, translated autobiography, selective context, narrative.

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Introduction:

Autobiography, as a literary genre, refers to a self-written narrative about one's life. In the Arab World, diverse forms of autobiography emerged centuries before the genre's appearance in the Western literary tradition. However, scholars disagreed on whether to consider those works as literary

autobiographies in the Western sense of the term. Ihsan Abbas, in his book The Art of Autobiography (1996) (فن السيرة), explains that the most successful modern Arabic autobiographical works were written by authors well-versed in the Western tradition and that this genre was more developed in the West (6,7). Dwight F. Reynolds (2001) appears to view the long and well-established tradition of autobiography writing in the Arab World as a predecessor to the modern literary autobiography. It is just important to understand these writings within their historical and social contexts (5, 6). The two authors agree, however, that Taha Hussein's autobiography Al -Ayyam was a turning point in the history of this genre in the Arab World as it marked the fusion between the autobiography and the novel on one hand and inspired more writers to publish their autobiographies in the same fashion on the other (Reynolds, 2001, 10; عباس، 1996، 131-133).

A translated autobiography is often regarded as a valuable source for accessing a foreign culture and understanding the related historical and social contexts. More often than not, its content would transcend the author's life struggles to reveal some social and political realities and shed light on hidden aspects of a culture. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the impact of peritextual elements on the reception of Taha Hussein's autobiography, Al-Ayyam. Initially, the book was published in three volumes: Al-Ayyam 1 (1929), Al-Ayyam 2 (1940), and Al-Ayyam 3(1972). They were translated by three different translators: Henry Paxton, Hilary Wayment, and Kenneth Cragg, respectively. The English translations of the first, second, and third volumes were entitled An Egyptian Childhood (1932), The Stream of Days: A Student at the Azhar (1943), and A Passage to France (1976). In 1997, a collection of the three translations was published by the American University in Cairo, AUC in the text, under the title The Days (this paper uses a 2006 version of this collection).

2. The Impact of the Peritext on the Reception of Translated Texts:

Paratextual elements surround the text and function as a link between the text and the external world. Genette explains that it is a supporting discourse created for the text's benefit (12). He distinguishes between the peritext, the paratext immediately surrounding the text (Title, cover, preface), and the epitext; the paratext located outside the book (interviews, conversations, letters, etc. (5). Genette's typology was basically about original texts and not translations. Translation scholars saw the potential of investigating paratexts of translated texts. Tahir-Gurcaglar claims that investigating the paratext in translation can inform about history, the publishing industry, reception, and ideological impact (46). A view shared by Vallery

Pellat, who believes that the different peritextual elements contribute to the reconstruction, interpretation, and introduction of the text to the reader (3).

A preface is a space where the translator can be visible, can assert his authority over the translation, embrace, or oppose certain discourses. Tymoczko and Gentzler see it as a manifestation of power that can even contribute to cultural and political change (xviii). No matter how important prefaces may be for a translation, it has been observed that they are a rare phenomenon in translated literature, especially in literature translated into English (McRae 67-70). This tendency may be related to prevailing publishing norms that prefer to present the text as original. It could also be caused by the view of these external elements as disturbing for the reader. It is worth mentioning that the prefaces and footnotes of translations acquire a totally different dimension within the postcolonial approach and become the space where the translation project can be explained (Gentzler 209-210).

According to McRae, the prefaces of translations have three main functions: "1) foregrounding differences of cultures and languages, 2) promoting understanding of the source culture, and 3) promoting understanding of the translator's role and intervention" (65). In fact, all the information included in the translation's introduction is subject to selection. The possibility to choose gives the translator authority over the text and allows him to frame the reader's understanding.

3. Analysis of the Impact of the Peritext on the Reception of the English Translation of Hussein's Al Ayyam:

As explained above, the peritext refers to the texts immediately linked to the main text and contributing in one way or another to its introduction to the reader. In the following paragraphs, we will examine three forms of peritexts: prefaces, titles, and covers. We will investigate how these elements, which are not part of the original text, may influence the reception and orient the reader towards a specific understanding of the source culture.

3.1. Prefaces:

Prefaces can be either authorial or allographic; the former is written by the book's author, while the latter is written by a person other than the author (Genette 263). According to this classification, a translator's preface is allographic because he is not the creator of the original text. This view was contested

by Genette's translator, who claimed that the translator's preface may be considered authorial, as it is often used to comment on the translation experience (264n22).

In his introduction to An Egyptian Childhood (1932), Henry Paxton observes that the book not only records scenes from the author's childhood in Upper Egypt but also meticulously portrays the Egyptian rural life in the late 19th century. The inclusion of this type of general information helps introduce a foreign culture, which is one of the functions of a translator's preface (McRae 65). Indeed, the first part of Paxton's introduction offered the reader an idea about the foreign culture and prepared him for the reading experience in a neutral tone. However, when the translator began discussing the author's character and conflicts, the tone of the discourse shifted slightly and lost its neutrality. In the passage where the translator describes Hussein's movement from Al-Azhar to the university, we may read:

> "He was initiated to modern Western methods of literary criticism, and rapidly threw off the prejudices and cramped outlook of the Azharites. The European professors (...) were the men whose helpful influence Dr. Taha Hussein acknowledged with gratitude." (Hussein, An Egyptian v-vi)

Visibly, the translator not only describes a tremendous change in the author's life, but also makes the reader believe that what he did was the right choice, and that the option of Al-Azhar education was marked by backwardness and obscurantism. For him, Western methods of education are the proper methods, and traditional methods can by no means compete with them.

The translator's position is more apparent when he mentioned the huge controversy over Hussein's book, On Pre-Islamic Poetry:

> "During the storm which was aroused in Egypt by his book on Pre-Islamic Poetry he was described by a popular English daily as "The Martin Luther of Egypt". The comparison is hardly fair, since he does not claim to be a religious reformer. However, he has shown Luther's dauntless courage in the face of persecution and like Luther has survived it." (Hussein, An Egyptian vi-vii)

Paxton did not hesitate to compare Taha Hussein to Martin Luther, which reveals his conviction that in the mentioned conflict, Hussein was not the one to blame. In addition, portraying the author as a hero who faced persecution because of his revolutionary ideas creates a kind of emotional connection with the reader who is likely to sympathize with his cause. However, Hussein's intellectual battles were numerous, and he acknowledged some of his past mistakes in the third volume of his autobiography. In other words, he was not a victim and had his own faults. The translator presented an image of the author that does not

align with his portrayal in Egypt during the same period. He operated what Mona Baker refers to as the selective context (5), that is, to select from the original context what may suit the target culture's expectations. Consequently, the preface altered the way the author is perceived, a situation described by Summers as a "change in the author's function" (9).

In addition, by neglecting part of the historical context, the translator confirmed for his reader the idea of Western supremacy and that what is right and wrong is defined by a Western vision. This discourse is not unusual for the early 20th-century era. The period was still under the hold of the imperialistic age, and it was normal to propagate these narratives.

The preface of the second volume differs from that of the first in its educational orientation. From the beginning, the translator informed his reader that reading the introduction was necessary to be fully prepared for the text. The included information sheds light on the emergence of Al-Azhar and the Egyptian Intellectual movement, represented by Sheikh Mohammed Abdou (Hussein, The Days 97-102). Although a selective context is also observed here, the translator does not seem to be concerned with the reader's orientation towards a given narrative; his focus appears to be on promoting an understanding of the source culture (McRae 65). Probably the translator's academic background influenced the way he introduced the source culture, presenting it in a tone that was generally balanced. A comparison between the two introductions leads to the following conclusion: in translation, a selective context is unavoidable, but the generated image about the source culture is subject to the translator's choices and his personality.

This second introduction differs from the first in that it includes another function, namely the explanation of the translator's role and his intervention (McRae 65). In fact, the translator explained to his reader that he deliberately chose not to imitate Hussein's style because he did not want to produce a fake local colour, which would be difficult for the reader to relate to (Hussein, The Days 103). For Wayment, a successful communication with the reader is more important than preserving the text's style. This preference could be understood in relation to prevailing domesticating translation strategies. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this type of material allows a better understanding of the circumstances of the production of the translated text, and for professionals, it clarifies translational choices.

The introduction to the third volume was the longest. It included material related to the two functions of prefaces: promoting the understanding of the source culture and understanding the translator's role and intervention. Like Paxton, Kragg addressed Hussein's intellectual conflicts (Hussein, The Days 237), but he did not portray him as the martyr of enlightenment. Indeed, the translator's style and

opinions may orient the readers' understanding and shape their conception of the source culture. Kragg's primary focus was on the literary aspects of the text; he explained the reasons behind the title's choice and his decision to substitute a third-person narrator with a first-person narrator. This latter point has a direct impact on the text's reception. Kragg states that:

> "The English translation takes the liberty to make Taha Husain speak with the pronoun "I". Any other course would seem stilted in a translation." (Hussein, The Days 242)

This decision may seem similar to Waymant's (discussed above), but it actually has far more severe consequences on the final product. Hussein's decision not to address his reader directly may be linked to his personal condition as a blind person. It may be likened to a physical dark veil separating him from the real world, and the use of the third-person narrator preserves this distance. Kragg claims that his decision will not affect the quality of the narrated story. However, Hussein's narrative style is a key element in the text's texture and reception. By altering the narrator's point of view, the translator transformed a fascinating blend of fiction and autobiography into an ordinary autobiography. The translational decision distorted the text's identity, reducing an exceptional story to a mere direct account of events. It eventually obliged the author to reveal himself to the reader while he kept himself mysterious in the original.

The translator's choices had a significant impact on the text's reception, but they seem to be made for literary considerations rather than any ideological stance. Keneth Kragg is a renowned scholar in comparative theology and spent many years working in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the material included in the preface does not systematically divulge his academic identity. The sole situation that might be related to his background was when he explained that some of Hussein's books were an attempt to simplify Islam for the young generation (Hussein, The Days 243). Here, the translator alludes to Islam as a "difficult" religion that needs simplification, which may amplify an already existing misconception about this religion in the West. It could be argued that Kragg's preface enlightened the reader about many aspects of Arabic literature and provided clues on how to approach the translated text. However, it kept many cultural aspects unexplained, which may alter the representation of the source culture for the target receptors.

An allographic introduction was added to more recent versions of the autobiography; it is found in the AUC version as a substitute for Paxton's introduction. Its author is Pierre Cachia, a prominent Professor of Arabic Language and Literature. He is also known for the monograph he wrote about Taha Hussein. It is impossible to speculate about the reasons behind the decision, especially since it was quite possible to keep

both prefaces. The decision eclipsed the translator's visibility and disturbed the reception of the text as a translation.

Genette believes that allographic prefaces have their importance in the introduction of the book, but they usually serve some personal objectives of their writers (271). In the case of Cachia, the preface included valuable material about the writer and his literary heritage (Hussein, The Days 3). Much of it, however, was devoted to a lengthy discussion of his previous opinions, with which Hussein's family was not pleased (he is referring to his 1956 monograph). Mejdell notes that the purpose of the introduction is to defend critical opinions that did not please the author of Al-Ayyam and his family (164). Rather than introducing the book and its author to the English reader, Cachia appears to be more concerned with his own image.

Regarding the presentation of the cultural features of the original text, this introduction has accomplished part of that goal. It shed light on how the writer's opinions, as a human being, and his ideas evolved, moving away from exaggerations and superficial classifications. It also provided insights into the circumstances under which the book was written and published. Regardless of the purpose behind writing this introduction, it is helpful for the reader because it offers a lot of information about the author's personality and the social and political context in Egypt during the first half of the 20th century.

All four prefaces share an interest in introducing the source culture to the target text reader. They, however, differ in their underlying narratives and the accuracy of the resulting image of the source culture. Based on the selected context, these prefaces are of two types. The first one is more concerned with promoting the readers' understanding of the source culture, with a focus on successful intercultural communication. Wayment's preface to the second volume represents this category. The second type may have broader objectives and attempts to use the preface as a means to send messages not directly related to the translated text. Cachia's introduction stands as an example of this category. The first type serves the good reception of the source culture better and spares the reader ambiguity and confusion.

3.2. Titles:

A book's title can be considered as a brief message from the author; it may refer to the discussed theme or bear the general moral of the story. According to Genette's taxonomy, titles have an obligatory function of identification; i.e., a book is first defined by its title. They may also fulfil other functions, such as describing the book's subject matter or engaging in public persuasion (76). Titles of translated texts may

undergo a radical change, remain unchanged, or be translated literally. Each translational choice will undoubtedly impact the reception of both the source text and the source culture.

All three translators of Hussein's autobiography opted for new titles, rather than maintaining the original ones. In contrast, the AUC version, which included the three volumes, opted to retain a literal translation of the title (The Days) on the cover and preserve the translators' titles in the three sections of the book. The three translators focused on the function of the title in relation to the content of the text; that is, they chose titles that reflect and recapitulate the narrated stories.

An Egyptian Childhood traces the author's childhood in a remote village in Upper Egypt; this choice helps enhance the reception of the text and guides readers' understanding. The same can be said of The Stream of Days: A Student at Al-Azhar and A Passage to France; both clearly reflect the content of the respective volumes and offer the reader a precise idea about the told stories. Only the translator of the third volume, Keneth Kragg, however, felt the urge to share with his reader the reasons for his decision. He explained that the Arabic title would sound unusual in English (Hussein, The Days 238) and that imitating the title of a famous English novel (A Passage to India) is likely to pique the reader's curiosity (Hussein, The Days 241). Obviously, all three translators were in a communicative dynamic; the titles have the priority of preparing the readers for their reading experience.

This translational choice facilitates the texts' reception but overlooks the original title's metaphoric dimension. The Arabic word "Al-Ayyam" may refer to the battles or conflicts between Arab tribes, such as "Al Bassous" or "Dahis wal Al-Ghabraa". Many believe that Hussein may have used the term in this sense as the publication of the first volume came amid a storm provoked by On Pre-Islamic Poetry (Fi Al Adab Al Jahili في الأدب الجاهلي), another book by the author. Therefore, the term "Al-Ayyam" may have been used to evoke the intellectual battles between writers and thinkers in early twentieth-century Egypt, which lends a historical significance to the simple word. Another facet of the meaning of the Arabic title could be explained in relation to the author's character and personal traits; he was known for his stubbornness and perseverance (شرف، 1992، 64). The Arabic title may then refer to Hussein's battles and his struggles to achieve his goals. From this perspective, even the literal rendering 'The Days' fails to suggest these cultural meanings for the English reader, as it does not have the same semantic density. Thus, it seems that translators prioritised the text's reception over cultural visibility and did not pay much attention to the reasons behind Hussein's choice of "Al-Ayyam".

3.3. Covers:

The covers of the books are governed by copyright rules, which explains that more often than not, translations' covers are different from the originals. For the translator and the publisher, the content of the cover is very important; it is the façade of the text, the reader's first contact with, and first impression on, the text, so it has commercial and communicational roles that need to be handled cleverly.

It is equally important to note that the multiplicity of publishing houses and the numerous editions render any final judgement impossible. In our analysis, we will be interested in the first translated editions and the one by the AUC, as shown in the pictures below:

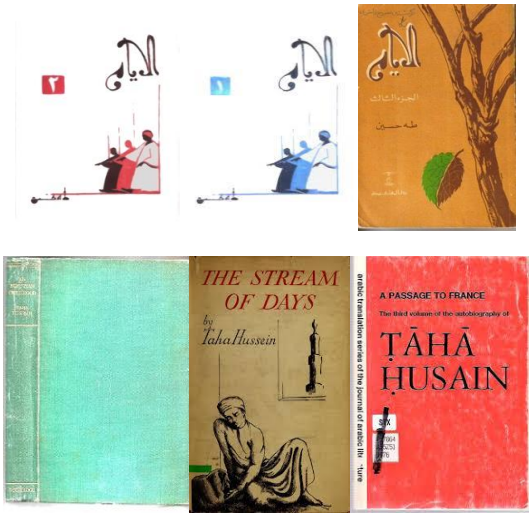


Figure 1: Hussein's Al-Ayyam: Early Editions and their Respective Translations (my own production)

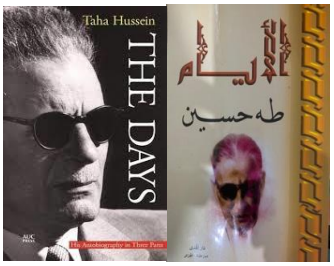
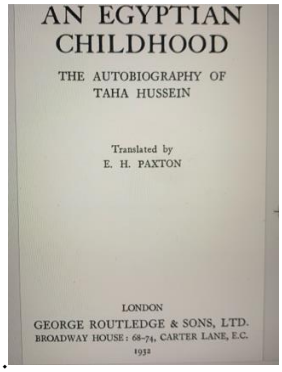


Figure 2: Hussein's Al-Ayyam: A Recent Algerian Edition with all three volumes (Arabic) and an English Translation with all three volumes by the AUC (my own production)

The recent AUC edition features a personal photograph of the author as a strong element, linking the cover to the book's content. This choice offers the reader a concrete idea about the physical appearance of the author, though the three volumes describe young Taha Hussein, and the cover shows the mature, older one. In addition to the picture, the cover warns the reader that the book is a three-volume autobiography, previously published in separate volumes. More details about the translations and the author are found on the back cover, which highlights the author's prominent position in the Arabic literary scene. The general information provided to the reader in this space serves commercial purposes and aims to draw attention to the importance of the work; however, it does not significantly help in the discovery and understanding of the source culture as described in the book.

For the earliest editions of translations, the context was totally different, and the publishing norms were different. The covers lack sophistication, featuring simple graphic drawings alongside the title and the author's name. In the 1932 Routledge edition of An Egyptian Childhood, no information is provided on the front cover; the book's title and author's name are located on the spine. It is on the title page, inside, where the reader can access more information about the book, as shown in the picture below:


AN EGYPTIAN CHILDHOOD

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF TAHA HUSSEIN

Translated by E. H. PAXTON

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS, LTD.
BROADWAY HOUSE: 68-74, CARTER LANE, E.C.
1932

Figure 3: Hussein's An Egyptian Childhood's Title Page

The front cover of the second volume English version exhibits some Egyptian cultural aspects. The drawing on the cover shows a typical Egyptian peasant with a minaret in the background. No doubt, the picture echoes to a certain extent the content of the book, which follows the writer's experience at Al-Azhar. Both the blind man and the mosque reflect the core of the story, linking the title (The Stream of Days: A Student at Al-Azhar) to the main text. From this perspective, it is safe to say that the cover prepares the reader for the foreignness he/she is about to discover. It is also possible to perceive this cover as a mere Orientalist depiction of Egypt, reduced to an ignorant peasant enslaved by religious institutions, an already

existing and well-established image of the East, as if the misconception is reinforced, nothing more. This type of cultural representation lacks depth and tends to generalise; it does not consider the particularity of each person and each story, and as a result, contributes to the perpetuation of existing stereotypes. These two possible, though divergent, interpretations of the cover picture allow us to observe the complexity of the task and never jump to unfounded conclusions.

Nevertheless, it is possible to interpret the huge space devoted to the author's name in the English version of the third volume (A Passage to France) as an attempt to invest in Hussein's reputation as a commercial and communicational tool. The same can be said about the personal photograph in the AUC edition, where the notoriety of the literary figure is at the centre of a publishing strategy attempting to convince the reader of the book's worth. In this case, it is difficult to assess the impact of the cover on the reception of the text because an assumption is made that the reader may have prior knowledge of the author; otherwise, there is no reason to place such a strong focus on him instead of the title, for instance.

To put it in a nutshell, the cover aids in the introduction and reception of the translated text; however, it is challenging to measure its efficiency or evaluate its potential negative impact on the representation of the source culture.

Conclusion:

The analysis of the peritextual elements in the English translations of Taha Hussein's Al-Ayyam reveals the profound impact these elements have on shaping the reception and understanding of the text in the target culture. Indeed, the peritext in translation has the capacity to orient the text's interpretation and empower specific narratives about the source culture. Additionally, the translator plays a crucial role in framing the reader's perception of the source culture. In fact, the role of the peritext transcends the direct influence on the text's reception and may contribute to a cultural change. It is then important to recognise the power of peritextual choices and their impact on the cultural understanding of translated texts.

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Il titolo dell'articolo in arabo (Sakkal Majalla, 18 grasso)

Il titolo dell'articolo in inglese (Times New Roman, 14 **grasso**, corsivo, interlinea 1)

Nome e cognome dell'autore[1]

Nome e cognome del secondo autore (se c'è)[2]

Data dell'invio:	Data d'accettazione:	Data di pubblicazione:
giorno/mese/anno	giorno/mese/anno	giorno/mese/anno
...../...../.....	...../...../.....	...../...../.....

Il riassunto:

Inserisci il riassunto qui (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). Inserisci il riassunto qui (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). Inserisci il riassunto qui (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). Inserisci il riassunto qui (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). Inserisci il riassunto qui (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della

[1] L'indirizzo professionale e posta elettronica
[2] L'indirizzo professionale e posta elettronica

ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). Inserisci il riassunto qui (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). (14, Sakkal Majalla)

Le parole chiave: parola, parola, parola, parola, parola.

Abstract:

Mettere il riassunto in inglese (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). mettere il riassunto in inglese (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). Mettere il riassunto in inglese (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). mettere il riassunto in inglese (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). mettere il riassunto in inglese (in esso bisogna precisare l'obiettivo della ricerca, la sua importanza in circa 100 parole). (12 : Times New roman , corsivo)

Key words: word, word, word

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L'autore emittente: nome & cognome e posta elettronica

Introduzione:

L'introduzione dell'articolo deve contenere una premessa adatta al contenuto. Poi si pone la problematica della ricerca e si determina l'obiettivo dello studio nonché la metodologia adottata.

2. **Il primo titolo principale:**

2.1. Il primo sottotitolo:

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2.2. Il secondo sottotitolo:

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3. **Il secondo titolo principale:**

3.1: **Il primo sottotitolo:**

Inserire qui il contenuto del primo sottotitolo. Inserire qui il contenuto del primo sottotitolo. Inserire qui il contenuto del primo sottotitolo. Inserire qui il contenuto del primo sottotitolo. Inserire qui il contenuto del primo sottotitolo. Inserire qui il contenuto del primo sottotitolo.

3.2: Il secondo sottotitolo:

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Tabella 1: (Traditionnal arabic, 13 Grasso, Centrato)

(Questa tabella è solo illustrativa per coloro che usano le tabelle, Esempio: nella stilistica statistica)

Modello	Genere 1	Genere 2	Risultato
15	12	9	16
18	11	15	12
11	23	24	28

La fonte: l'autore, l'anno, la pagina (Traditionnal arabic, 13, normale, centrato)

Osservazione: (mettere la freccia del mouse sulla scrittura e sulle cifre dentro la tabella per riconoscere il carattere e la dimensione della scrittura. Il carattere e la dimensione della scrittura per i numeri)

Osservazione: le figure e i grafici sotto forma di immagine devono essere allineati al centro e sistemati con l'opzione layout (in linea con il testo, davanti il testo)

- I grafici e le figure complesse devono essere raggruppati.

4. Conclusione:

Mettere in conclusione un riassunto di quanto viene detto nel contenuto della ricerca evidenziando i risultati maggiori raggiunti e presentando proposte aventi legami con il tema della ricerca.

5. Le note:

Le note sono note di stesura (i riferimenti) e s'inseriscono in modo automatico.

- Opera: nome e cognome (dell'autore o autori), titolo dell'opera, casa editrice, numero d'edizione, luogo d'edizione, anno d'edizione, p.....(Sakkal Majalla, 11 grasso)

- Articolo : nome e cognome (dell'autore o autori), titolo dell'articolo, la rivista, paese, volume, numero, anno, p.....(Sakkal Majalla, 11 grasso)

- Comunicazione: nome e cognome (dell'autore o autori), titolo della comunicazione, il convegno scientifico, luogo d'organizzazione, data d'organizzazione, paese. (Sakkal Majalla, 11 grasso).

- siti internet: nome e cognome (dell'autore o autori), titolo dell'articolo, data di pubblicazione, data di visualizzazione, il link dell'articolo. (Sakkal Majalla, 11 grasso).

6. Impostazione della pagina:

(2 cm superiore, 2 cm inferiore, 2 cm a destra, 2 cm a sinistra, carta 16/23) ***