

*The Literary Translation Challenges in Translating
Ahlem MOSTAGHANMI's Novel « Chaos of the Senses »*

تحديات الترجمة الأدبية في ترجمة فوضى الحواس لأحلام مستغانمي

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المخلص:

للتجربة الأدبية دور جوهري في تلاقي الثقافات بين مختلف الحضارات. فهي تقوم على ترجمة الأعمال الإبداعية والفنية. ولذلك، ينبغي أن ينتبه المترجمون إلى تلك السمات المميزة لهذا النوع من الترجمة. وبما أن الأدب مرآة عاكسة للمجتمعات، فإنه يفرض تحديات كبيرة على المترجم الذي يقف أحياناً تائهاً بين المكونات الجمالية والثقافية لكل من النص المصدر والنص الهدف. وعليه، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص ترجمة رواية الكاتبة الجزائرية أحلام مستغانمي "فوضى الحواس". رواية تعج بفوضى تعانق عقول القراء مسببة ارتباكاً تاماً بين الواقع والخيال. فهل تمكنت المترجمة برّيا أحمر من الاحتفاظ بخصائص السرد المصدر؟ وكيف واجهت المكونات الجمالية؟ وهل نجحت في نقل سحر الأدب النسوي للرواية محدثاً نفس الأثر؟ اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي من أجل تحديد الاستراتيجيات التي استخدمتها المترجمة لتذليل العقبات المختلفة من خلال تحليل بعض المقاطع الأدبية المأخوذة من الرواية. وكخلاصة، تعد الترجمة الأدبية ابداعاً. فعلى المترجم أن يكون كاتباً جيداً، وعلى دراية ببلغة وثقافة كل من المصدر والهدف. وهكذا، خلص البحث إلى أن ترجمة فوضى الحواس لمستغانمي لم تكن ناجحة حقاً لأنها لم تحقق نفس الشعبية والشهرة التي حققتها الرواية الأصل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أحلام مستغانمي، الفن، فوضى الحواس، الأدب، الترجمة.

Abstract:

Literary translation plays an important role in bridging the gaps between different civilizations and societies. It is interested in transferring the creative and artistic works. Since literature is usually regarded as the mirror of the society, reflecting its diverse aspects: social, cultural, and linguistic, it imposes great challenges on translators. Therefore, they should be aware of the particular features of such kind of translation. Accordingly, this study aims at examining the translation of the Algerian feminist writer, A. Mostaghanmi's novel "Chaos of the Senses" (Fawda Elhawes). In fact, this novel is about a chaos that embraces the readers' minds causing a total confusion between reality and fiction. So, could the translator, Baria Ahmer, keep the features of the source narrative? How did she face the aesthetic components? Did she succeed in transferring the literary feminist charm of the novel rendering the same impact? The study adopted a descriptive- analytical approach in order to determine the strategies used by the translator to surmount various obstacles through the analysis of some literary passages taken from the novel. As a result, literary translation requires creativity and the translator needs to be a skillful artist writer. The research has concluded that the translation of Mostaghanmi's *Chaos of the Senses* was not successful since it did not realize the same original work fame and popularity.

Keywords: A. Mostaghanmi ; *Chaos of the Senses*; literature; translation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation, as an act of interhuman communication, has a crucial role in establishing knowledge bridges between communities and civilizations. Transferring creative and artistic texts, however, is a great challenge because it certainly poses several difficulties for the translator who should be bilingual and bicultural. They have to consider the extra-linguistic elements, and to be aware of how these concepts are manifested in each culture. That makes it the most difficult type of translation, which requires, in fact, a creative and flexible way to render the same impact. Moreover, the literary translator should master language and culture of both, ST and TT, enjoying some literary creativity so that s/he can overcome all the barriers during translating process. (CHAAL, p.130)

The present study explores *Chaos of the Senses* novel's translation to reveal if the translator could keep the features of the source narrative and particularly preserve the popularity of the Arabic version. It attempts also to examine the success of the translated version in transferring the literary feminist charm of the novel, rendering the same impact without losing the beauty of the source product.

2. Methods of Literary Translation

It is strongly believed that literary translation is a unique type, which requires talent and a good language proficiency since it deals with artistic and aesthetic texts. It is also considered as a mode of cross-cultural communication as it helps authors reach further readership in the whole world. For that, it is stated that writers make national literature, yet translators make international one.

Accordingly, when transmitting messages from one language into another, translators may face diverse obstacles, particularly when dealing with literary works. As a result, many translation strategies have been created to assure a successful and effective transfer.

The British linguist and translator, Peter Newmark (1988, 96), has suggested two strategies that are transference and componential analysis. According to him, transference keeps the "local colour", especially when dealing with cultural concepts. In this context, the translator conveys the cultural elements as they appear in the source text. In parallel, he claims that this method may cause problems for the general readership and limit the comprehension of certain concepts.

In a similar vein, the scholar, E. Nida (1964, p 129) has proposed the formal equivalence and the dynamic equivalence. Based on these methods, Nida highlights the importance of preserving the same impact.

It is obviously stated that literary translation refers to human lives and experiences, so other methods and procedures of translation have been created and applied in order to ensure a correct and wonderful transfer ; such as borrowing, compensation, omission, domestication ,substitution, generalization, explication, expansion, description, reduction , condensation, ...

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Therefore, the translator must be closer to the SL text, reproducing a meaningful and correct translation in terms of form and content. A good translation should fulfill the same purpose in the TL as the original did, having closer impression. For this reason, naturalness is highly recommended in this context.

3. Research Methodology

The study chose one of the feminist Algerian writer's, Ahlem Mostaghanmi, trilogy: *Chaos of the Senses* which was translated twice. The Lebanese translator, Baria Ahmar Sreih, translated the first version in 2004, and the second one was transferred by Nancy Roberts, in 2015. However, the researcher selects the first version for a number of reasons.

In fact, Ahlam Mostaghanmi has been described as one of the most famous modern Arab writers. Since the publication of her first novel, *Memory in the Flesh*, in 1993, she has gained much popularity in the Arab world. This fame woke up many translators and publishers' willingness to transfer her artistic product into several languages, especially after getting Naguib Mahfouz Literary Medal in 1998. Many researches in Arabic spot the light on Mostaghanmi's narratives, yet very few studies have discussed the value of her work in English. (Tahani Alazzam, 2021)

3.1.The Presentation of the Novel

Critics declared that *Chaos of the Senses* is one of Mostaghanmi's novels that reached a great success and fame, especially in the Arab world, due to its particular language tone. Her works are distinguished by the themes she has tackled, and the different language styles she used. For that, she could reach a universal popularity. This unique artistic creativity, therefore, has generated significant literature in the context of the Arab women's writing.

However, the translation of her work seems a tricky adventure due to the author's style of writing. She uses multi language levels when writing, and her style is characterized by a provocative narrative structure, through which she attempts to introduce strangeness into literature. This author prefers tampering with language in order to create an artistic pleasure, using literary techniques that intensify the language and make it distorted. Her narrative style has special techniques in which the public intertwine harmoniously through textual structures that differ from one novel to another.

4.1.Analysis and Discussion

Chaos of the Senses novel resumes what was left off in *Memory in the Flesh*, with the story of love set in Algeria of the 1990's. Mosteghanmi takes her readers through the streets of suspense of a forbidden love affair, through a story within a story, creating an emotional rowdiness. This scenario paved the way for *Chaos of the Senses* to find its fast track to popularity and to be selected for translation by the American University in Cairo Press for translation.

This novel was transferred into English twice. Its title was translated literally in both versions (فوضى الحواس = *Chaos of the Senses*). The American University in Cairo

Press sponsored the first translation (Tahani Elazzam, 2021). In addition, the reason for selecting it for translation into English is that it was one of a prize-winning author's works and for its aesthetic and literary value. The American University in Cairo Press published the translation in 2004. The translation was undertaken by Baria Ahmar; a Lebanese Journalist, translator and author. Ahmar is an activist feminist who originally writes on women's rights and this explains her interest in the translation of Mosteghanmi's novels.

As it has been mentioned above, translating literary productions is a very hard task. In this context, those translations have not transmitted the author's Arabic wide-readership and reception among the English language readers. Later on, Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing released a new translation of *Chaos of the Senses* under the same title in 2015 (cited in Tahani Alazzam, p.233).

However, Mostaghanmi herself was not satisfied with the American University in Cairo Press's translation of her novels. She proclaimed that the main problem with translation in general is that translators impose their own 'method and linguistic composition' on the translated text. She added that she wished a skillful, talented translator to translate her novel (Tahani Alazzam).

Contrary to the previous translation, Mosteghanmi declares that she was optimist, saying that the new translation seems better than the first version. Raphael Cohen, a professional British translator, has done this translation (Baaqeel, 2008, p147).

Moreover, for this new version, she was requested to choose the suitable title: *The Dance of the Oblivion* or *The Bridges of Constantine*. She obviously chose *The Bridges of Constantine*; she thought that this title can 'arouse and prick the curiosity of the foreign reader' (Tahani Alazzam, p.234), expecting to realize better reception. Accordingly, Ahlem has always been aware of her work translation because she firmly believed that translation could never remain faithful, it could never keep the spirit of her narratives, which are full of poeticity and linguistic quirks. This is the challenge.

To examine this hard task, the researcher chose the first translation done by B. Ahmar to check how she treated this linguistic creativity and transmitted the literary charm. Therefore, the following are some examples taken from the novel in both languages: Arabic and English as illustrations:

مثال 1. ... كم كان يلزمها من الإيمان كي تقاوم نظرتها!

كم كان يلزمه من الصمت كي لا تشي به الحرائق! (مستغانمي ص 9)

➡ What inner strength she needed to resist his eyes. What silence he used to maintain such cool, lest those flames of passion give him away. (Ahmer, p.1)

It can be noticed in this passage that the translator utilized detailed descriptions as a means of transmitting the meaning behind the Arabic words. She avoided literal translation, using, for instance, the phrase "inner strength" instead of the exact translation of the word "إيمان" which is faith. Moreover, the translator added a description of the word "حرائق" to clearly indicate to the reader that the author is

referring to passion and love. As for the sentence structure, she maintained the exclamatory for which functions well in Arabic but fails to relate to the literary nature of the target language.

An alternate translation may be: It costed her unfathomable determination to resist his gaze; it costed him unfathomable silence to prevent his flames of passion from confessing.

مثال 2. تمتطي إليه جنونها وتدري، للرجبة سهيل داخلي لا يعترضه منطق فتشبهق وخيول الشوق الوحشية تأخذها إليه. (مستغامي ص 10)

➡ *She rides her madness to him. She knows well that whinnying moan of desire – beyond the bounds of reason. She gasps in the air as the wild horses of yearning carry her away to him. (p.2)*

It is interesting to remark here that the translator did not change the animal-related metaphor. The reason behind this is that the horse is among the animals found in multiple environments, including that of the source and the target language. Any metaphor related to it is, hence, admissible in both the Arab and the Western context.

An alternate translation may be as follows: **Towards him, she rides her madness, as she is aware of the engraved whinnying of desire that transcends the boundaries of reason. With a gasps in the air, she allows herself onto the wild horses riding her to him.**

مثال 3. هناك حيث ذات يوم على جسد الكلمات أطفأ سيجارته الأخيرة. (ص 14)

➡ *There, where one day, with words on his lips, he had extinguished his last cigarette. (p.4)*

There is a change in an entire phrase within this sentence. جسد الكلمات was interpreted as “words on his lips.” The choice of the translator is arguably acceptable insomuch as the overall meaning remains the same. Has she chosen to insert such words as “body,” or “flesh,” the idea would have been diverted because of the connotations of these words in the English language that are stripped away from “words.” Selecting the term “lips,” instead, may function well.

An alternate translation may be

It was where he, once upon a day, extinguished his last cigarette on the flesh of words.

مثال 4. ها هي تتقدم نحو مساحة شكه، وتجرده من حصانه الأول. فهو لم يتعود أن يراها تضع الإيمان برنسا لغويا على كتفها. (ص 19)

➡ *There she was moving toward the field if his doubts, taking his first knight. He was not used to seeing her wrap her faith around her shoulders as if it were a linguistic robe. (p.9)*

The word حصانه in this context is a quite problematic one. Although it is literally translated into "his horse," the translator attempted to read significance of the horse to the meaning of the sentence. She, thus, chose the word "night," as it provides more context to the latter. However, one can dive even further into such connotation. Since the job of the knight is to defend the lord, the phrase "line of defense" can function equally well. Furthermore, the cultural reference carried in the word نيرس is notably removed from the English translation and replaced with the rather neutral term, robe. The translator may have intended to focus the attention of the reader on the narrative rather than shifting toward an aspect of culture because the latter is not central to the given context. However, since literature is a mixture of narrative and culture, the original word would have functioned well without jeopardizing the emphasis on strong emotions.

An alternate translation may be

She was stepping into his circle of doubt, stripping him away from his first line of defense. He was not accustomed at the sight of her wearing faith as linguistic robe.

مثال 5. وثمة دفاتر ، تشتريها بحكم العادة، فتبقى في جواريرك أشهرا دون أن توقظ فيك مرة، تلك الشهوة الجارفة للكتابة، أو تتحرش بك كي تخط عليها ولو بضعة أسطر. (ص 22)

➡ *And there are notebooks that you buy out of habit, and they lie in some drawer for months without once arousing in you that stormy desire to write, or even provoking you into putting a few lines to paper. (p.11)*

This is another example of a translation that is almost identical to the source text, for the connotations of words are universal. It can be noticed, hitherto, that literary texts rely heavily on the indicated meaning rather than the literal one, which drives the flaw in translating such texts.

An alternate translation may be: Other notebooks are bought habitually only to reside in drawers for months, seizing to tempt you for immersing in the ecstasy of writing nor provoke you to pen a line.

مثال 6. تنبته بعد ذلك، إلى أن أبوته هي التي كانت تعني لي الأكثر، وأن مهامه السياسية ورتبته العسكرية لم تكن تعنيني بوجاهتها ، وإنما لكونها استمرارا لذاكرة نضالية نشأت عليها ، وعنقوان جزائر حلمت بها. كنت أرى في قامته الوطن، بقوته وشموخه... (ص 33)

➡ *Later on, I realized that his fatherliness meant the most to me and that the prestige of his military rank and political position only mattered to me insofar as it kept alive the memory of struggle I had grown up with and the pride of an Algeria I dreamed of. I used to see my country in his stature, in his strength and loftiness. (p.20)*

This passage is more informative. For this reason, the text in the target language meets most of the angels of that in the source tongue. A possible remark

here is the wordiness of both passages, which is something that suits the round structure of Arabic more than the straightforwardness and flatness of English.

An alternate translation may be

I realized, thereafter, that what appealed to me was his fatherliness. His political agendas and military rank, however, were not of an interest to me in themselves. They merely reflected the echo of resistance that I grew up embracing and the vigour of an Algeria that I grew up envisioning.

In his stature, I saw the solidity and glory of the homeland.

مثال 7. ...وقالت له على طريقة الشرقيين:

- نحن ننتظر منذ نصف ساعة، عليك أن تولينا اهتماما خاصا. إننا ضيوف لدى الرئاسة !

ولكنه رد عليها بطريقة لا يتقنها غير الجزائريين:

- ما دمت ضيفة عند الرئاسة...روحي لعند بن جديد "يسربليك". ومضى ليتركها مذهولة. (ص 59)

➡ *Only in our country would a waiter suggest that the president serve his own guests.* (p.37)

The entire dialogue is interestingly removed. The translator opts for a sentence that summarizes the entirety of the situation. The voice of the translation appears here in the pronoun "our." One possible reason behind the removal of the dialogue is that the latter carries a cultural reference in the phrase *لا يتقنها غير الجزائريين* to which Algerian readers can relate. If the dialogue was to be translated, such a phrase may cause a state of exclusion for target audience. Nevertheless, the core purpose of translation is, in fact, to cross cultural boundaries as well as linguistic ones. The dialogues, hence, may still be translated without risking diverging the attention of the target reader.

An alternate translation may be

She said, in an oriental manner:

- "We have been waiting for half an hour. You owe up a special attention, for we are presidential guests."

To which he replied, in a tone suited for Algerian passive-aggressiveness:

- "Ask the president to host you, then, if you are boasting for being a presidential guest."

And left her in an awe.

مثال 8. فمن الواضح أنه بيت يعود إلى أيام الاحتلال الفرنسي، يوم كان كبار الإقطاعيين الفرنسيين، يعمرّون فيلات فخمة على الشواطئ الجزائرية... بعد الاستقلال، حجزت الدولة الأملاك الشاغرة التي تركها المعمرّون الفرنسيون لتكون مقرا صيفيا لكبار الضباط والمسؤولين الذين أصبح لهم وجود شرعي ودائم على شواطئ موريتي وسيدي فرج، ونادي الصنوبر. (ص 118-119)

➡ *It was clear that it dated back to the era of the French occupation, when grand French feudal lords built luxurious villas on the Algerian coast...*

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After Independence, the state reserved the vacant properties abandoned by the French colonists to become summerhouses for high-ranking officers and officials, who gained a legitimate and permanent presence at the beaches of Moriti and SidiFaraj and the Pine Club. (p.80)

This appears more like a historical passage than a literary one. It shows the flexibility of literature in embracing various forms of writing. The translation is smooth when it comes to the above sentences due to the lack of literary language and techniques that include but are not limited to, similes, metaphors, juxtaposition, oxymoron, and the like. It is about a passage on a tangible matter, such as history, that proves to be more adaptable to translation. On the contrary, abstract matters, like emotions, love, and hatred, lose a few original words, for they rely on descriptions that are highly tied to culture. This brings the final point, which is that the more the culture is diverse; the more translators rely on alternate phrasing to avoid losing the meaning in translation.

The selected examples discussed different issues related to postcolonial literature: love, history, the Arabic language beauty, the literary creativity, and the culture.

The translated version did not really convey the literary richness of the source text. There is no soul; it seems purely a literal translation, it hides the aesthetic aspect and the poetic touch. Therefore, the translator did not realize an acceptable transfer since she did neither render the artistic fame nor keep Mostaghanmi's wide popularity.

5. Conclusion

Literary translation is no doubt a challenging task. It requires more than just translating words between two languages. Translators should have solid language commands, along with great writing skills and creative minds.

Accordingly, it could be said that literary translation is a recreation and rewriting. It requires professional translators who need to be skillful talented artists, and wide knowledgeable writers. Moreover, they need to be closer to the original authors to understand them and then their writing just to translate in a good way in order to preserve the soul of the text. Simply, in this context, translators are born not made.

The study examines the translation of Mostaghanemi's *Chaos of the Senses*. The analysis showed that the translated version did not reach the same original work fame and popularity.

Therefore, further researches are necessary to investigate the matter to find out answers to the problems of reception of *Chaos of the Senses* and other titles translated from Arabic into English, or other languages. They faced the same fate of translation, and they did not get a great readership among the other nationalities although these novels and narratives realized a wonderful success in their original language.

Arab writers and translators are recommended to combine and intensify their efforts to transfer the Arabic literature to the Other as the previous Arabic Civilization did.

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