

Rethinking parallel translated educational texts between Arabic and English subjects to preserve the memory and consolidate the national identity

Case study: middle school textbooks

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Abstract:

With the comeback of translation as a pedagogical tool in foreign languages acquisition, practitioners dare to consider it as the fifth skill to move from a mere tool and become an attainable objective. Hence, professionals start to insert tasks in which foreign languages learners make use of dictionaries to discover new words and expressions and meet new notions. These latter can be related to one's memory and national identity with the objective of preserving and consolidating them in the learners' mind. In this respect, the researcher draws the paper in a sense to make of translation twice as effective: learning a new language and consolidating the memory and national identity. To this end, the corpus, extracted from middle school textbooks of English and Arabic, displays texts and tasks deeply related to the Algerian liberation war and the love of homeland. In a descriptive analysis of the documents, and with a series of suggestions, the researcher could reveal a serious intention to introduce translation, as a pedagogical tool, in parallel texts related to the above-mentioned theme.

Keywords: translation; educational texts; foreign language acquisition; memory; national identity.

Introduction :

Translation has long been regarded as a method of teaching according to professionals. These latter have even considered it as the fifth skill after listening, speaking, reading and writing. As for using translation as a tool in language teaching and/or learning, many are the views to decide about its effectiveness in attaining the objectives with a prior determination.

Actually middle school textbooks in both Arabic and English subjects offer a variety of texts dealing with a number of topics, all displayed in units and sequences with different themes. Among these units, there are those focusing on the memory and national identity of the Algerian. Some texts deal with the glorious liberation war that was launched on November 1, 1954 while some others introduce the learners to some famous heroes of the war through building a practice material over their biographies.

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As a building block for this paper, the researcher first examines the educational texts available on middle school textbooks, those dealing with the Algerian liberation war, and then extracts the way they may attract the learners' attention and consolidate the memory and the national identity in their minds. Purposefully, the problem of this paper discusses any possibility to introduce translated material between Arabic and English texts shedding light on the terms related to memory and national identity.

1. Literature review

For a long time ago, translation has been one of the most efficient tools used in teaching foreign languages. In the meantime, it generated a series of controversies. By the beginning of the 20th Century, translation was so close to grammar that it had been put far from being an efficient teaching method. However, some decades later, teachers attempted to revive the use of translation in teaching foreign languages as translation tends to emerge again as an effective tool and since it « plays a very important role in an increasingly globalized world » (Leonardi, 2010, p 17)

1.1 Translation in language teaching

Attempting to learn foreign languages is as old as history: as a method, the Greek and Romans used translation to learn each other's classical languages. Their aim at that time « was to learn everything about anything more than the thing itself » (Richards & Rogers, 2001). Then, over history, scholars defended the use of translation as a pedagogical tool to teach foreign languages as it consistently boosts language competence assessment. However, with the emergence of new teaching methods and materials, translation lost some of its effectiveness because of some reasons. Among these latter, there is its radical difference from the four skills that define language competence, namely, speaking, listening, reading and writing. Additionally there is the fact that translation takes valuable time and may mislead students and prevent them from thinking in the way native speakers do, resulting in language interference.

1.1.1 The predicted effectiveness of translation

By the middle of the 20th Century, linguistics witnessed a qualitative quantum in scientific research, and translation was at its core as it ended to be a self-contained science. Actually, back in the 1970s, some linguists voiced a cautious opinion that « probably in the future, language teachers would once again examine the effectiveness of translation.» (Falk, 1978).

1.1.2 Translation promotes communication

Being the main purpose of learning a language, translation promotes communication since it stimulates the learner (being the sender) to make the appropriate effort to make the receiver understand the message. Peter Newmark (1991) admits that translation from L1 to L2 and from L2 to L1 is recognized as the fifth skill and the most important social skill since it promotes communication and understanding between strangers.

1.1.3 Comparison of language units

Once a learner develops the learning skills and becomes able to distinguish the different language systems he gradually discovers, he would be able to draw any sort of comparison among the language units. In this regard, Naimushin asserts that « the use of translation in the foreign language classroom will encourage students to compare linguistic units of the two languages on the basis of their meaning.» (Naimushin, 2002, p.48). In fact, this comparison may be at the grammatical level just as it may tackle the semantic and pragmatic overviews to get back to grammar and syntax.

1.1.4 No serious negative interference

The question of linguistic interference has long been seen as the everlasting issue in translation-based classrooms. Newly teaching processes focusing on the structure-based language acquisition made it easier to distinguish among languages. In this respect, «the newly gained awareness of the structural differences between the two languages as well as of the different functions of similar structures in them will surely reduce the level of the negative interference between L1 and L2. » (Bley-Vroman, 2012).

1.1.5 Translation develops skills

Over two decades ago, Naimushin conducted a survey on foreign languages learners and introduced translation as a pedagogical tool. One of the outstanding findings of his research deduced that « in assessing translation into a foreign language, special attention is paid to the development of the skills of rendering the essential meaning of the paragraph, article, etc., using resources that are available to the student ». He added that with translation « there is always a way of defining a synonym, trying a paraphrase or even longer explanation. » (Naimushin, 2002, p 49).

1.1.6 Translation contributes in language classroom

In a most recent research, many of the old admissions that regarded translation as a reason for negative interference were miscarried. Saridaki (2023) said, « Through recent years there has been some reconsideration of the contribution of translation in the language classroom». This declaration enhances researchers in translation to tackle language learning based on translation for further positive outcome.

1.2 Memory and national identity

1.2.1 The historical memory

Historical memory, also known as collective memory or social memory, is all that shows the way a group, nation or community collectively constructs and shapes its present-day social, cultural, and political contexts. It is crucial for identity and serves considerably in building a community and in consolidating it socially. In a recent work by Gusevskaya and Plotnikova 2020, it is admitted that the memory of people's past strengthens the connection between generations, and among individuals in the community. The way it contributes in that varies from one community to another: memories of important events, heroes, ancestors' feats, and the celebration of the memorable dates.

1.2.2 Memory and history provide national identity

The sense of belonging to a nation or state is called national identity. This latter is built on shared cultural criteria like tradition, language and history. It is commonplace to point out the fact « since the emergence of the nation state, memory and history have been key elements in the formation of national identity in all states ». (Papaioannou, 2022, p. 90). Subsequently the importance of memory is so great that it not only creates identity, but also forms and defines its existence as it involves a personal and emotional connection among individuals; it connects these latter to a country, to its symbols and collective memory.

2. Memory and national identity in middle school textbook (Arabic and English)

As an empirical part of the research, the researcher considers middle school textbooks as a corpus to extract texts related to the Algerian collective memory, a memory mixed to the liberation war and patriotism. The main objective is to find any possible ways to blend English and Arabic as a translation fact within the course book.

2.1 Document 1

Figure 1: The official anthem of the Algerian student's union

Task 1: I compare the English translation of the poem below with its original Arabic version, and choose the correct word in brackets. Then, I search the internet for the full version of the poem and translate the remaining stanzas with my partner, using a bilingual dictionary.

The Official Anthem of the Algerian Students' Union

We are the (students; youths) of Algeria
We are the builders of (glory; hope)
We are the (glory; hope) of Algeria
in the dark of the night
We've sunk in her blood ... and burnt to protect
her ... and worn in her skies the perfume of her
soul ...
We are the (students; youths) of Algeria
We are the builders of glory
Take out our thoughts
and make bricks out of them
to build Algeria ...
Take out our thoughts
and squeeze life out of them
to keep Algeria (alive; dead)
We are the ones who responded to her call ...
in times of dire woes ...
We rushed to sacrifice ourselves
in the face of screaming death (...)

EXPRESS BIO:
The Poet of the Revolution

NAME: ?
Date of Birth: 12 June 1908
Place of Birth: Beni Isguen (M'Zab, Algeria)
Education: Tunis
1937-1939: imprisoned by the French in Algiers for his political opinions and activism
1956-1959: imprisoned by the French in Algiers with a group of revolutionary friends
Date of Death: 17 August 1977
Place of Death: Tunis. Now buried in Beni Isguen

An extra clue: This poet is also the writer of the Algerian national anthem: "Qasamen".

Task 2: I read the express biography of the poet, who wrote the Official Anthem of the Algerian Students, and search his name on the internet.

النشيد الرسمي لاتحاد الطلاب الجزائريين
نحن طلاب الجزائر
نحن للمجد بناء
نحن أمال الجزائر
في النشائي الحاتكات
كم غرقنا في دماها واحرقنا في حماها وعبقنا في
سماها بعير الهجات
نحن طلاب الجزائر
نحن للمجد بناء
فخذوا الأرواح منا
واجعلوها لبنات
واصنعوا منها الجزائر
وخذوا الأفكار عنا
واحصروا منها الحياة
واجعلوا منها الجزائر
نحن من لبن دماها عندما اشتد بلاها واندفعنا
والنينا صرخات (...)

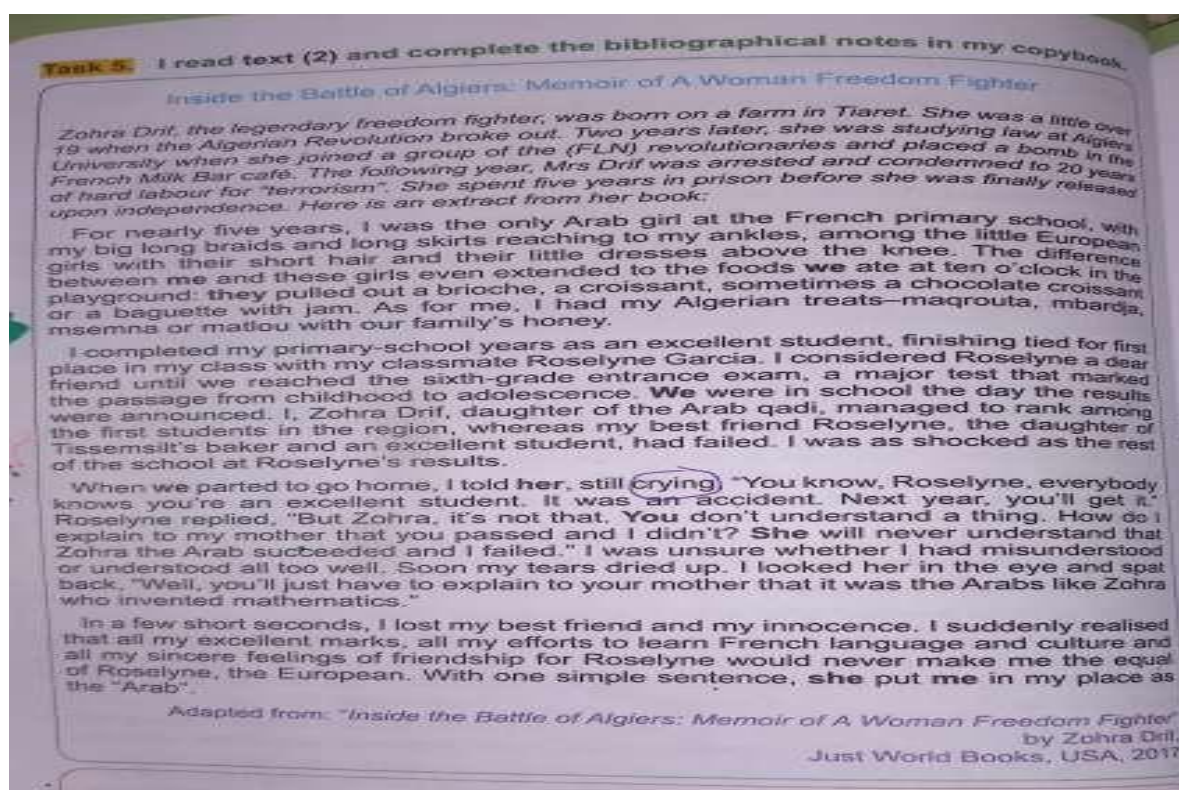
Source: Fourth year textbook of English (2019, p. 91)

In the task « I play and enjoy », the learner is asked to compare the English translation of the poem to its Arabic version, and he will choose the correct word in brackets, the one fitting with its equivalent in the Arabic version. Then, he will search in the internet for the full version of the poem and translate the remaining parts with his partner.

The source language is Arabic, the mother tongue of the learner, and the target language is English. Since the indication is visual, that is the picture, the learner may find no difficulty to identify the poet; but to translate the missing words, he is allowed to use a bilingual dictionary. Actually, the suggested words are in pairs as follows: students versus youths, glory versus hope, souls versus hearts and alive versus dead. The learner is then making use of translation to discover new words and new notions. The researcher finds the words to be checked for in dictionaries are quite intense and touch the context of memory and identity since they refer to glory, hope, souls, hearts, alive and dead. However, he suggests also the notion of sacrifice and responding to the country's call.

2.2 Document 2

Figure 2: Zohra Drif's biography

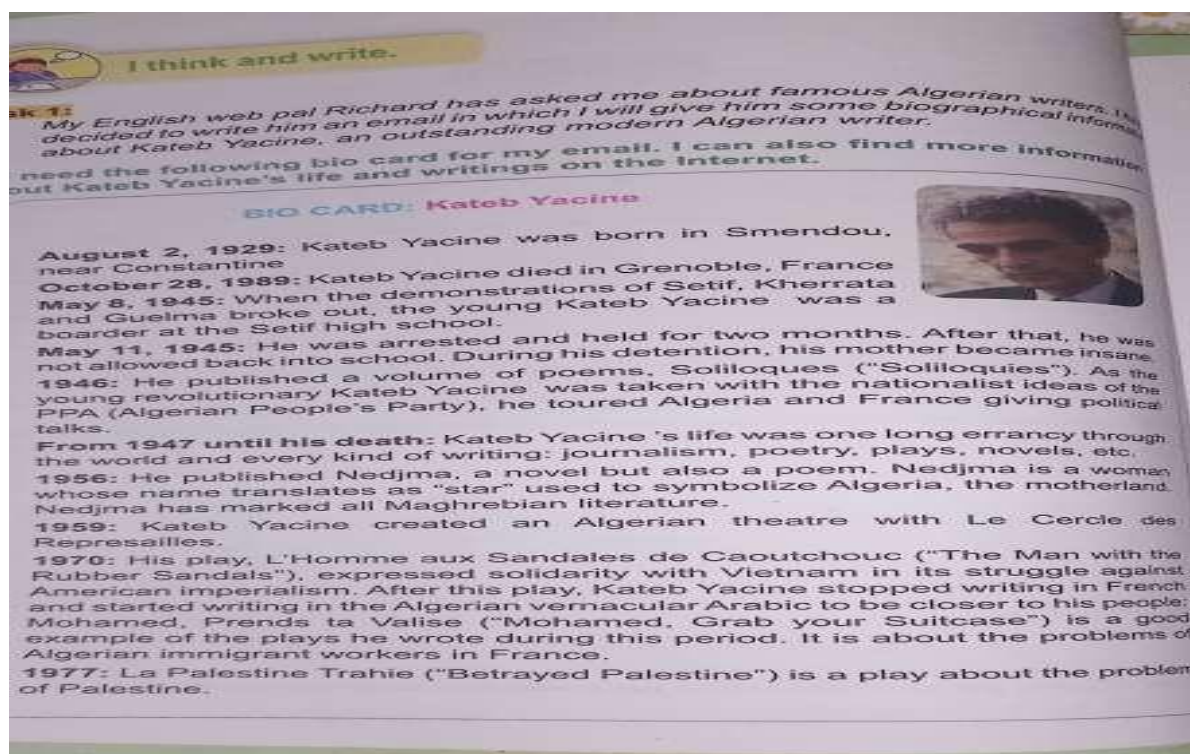


Source: Fourth year textbook of English (2019, p. 82)

The student's task on this document is to read the biography and then complete the biographical notes on his copybook. The biographical notes concern her full name, her date and place of birth, her nationality, and some reasons for her fame. Actually, the researcher suggests including some details about: her high grades in the primary school, and how excellent she was despite the social context she came from. Additionally her two-year university experience that did not prevent her from leaving her seat to join the Front of National Liberation because of her faith in her nation's cause. In addition to that, the Arab's discrimination in their homeland deserves to be highlighted through some translation interventions.

2.3 Document 3

Figure 3: Kateb Yacine's Bio Card



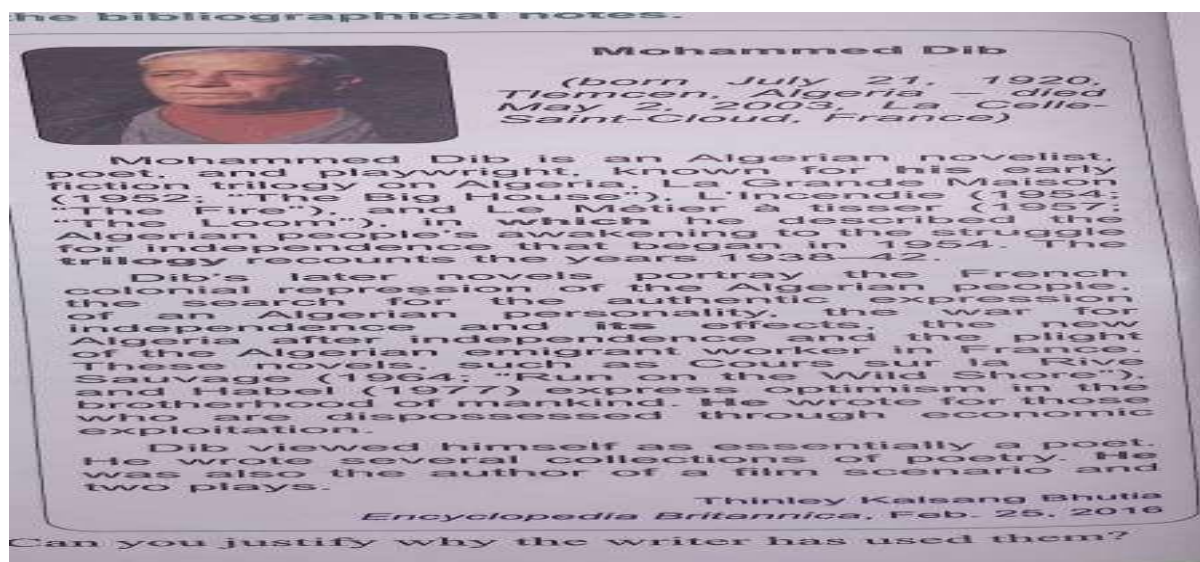
Source: Fourth year textbook of English (2019, p. 44)

Kateb Yacine's bio card makes it easy for the learners to know by the very beginning about his dates of birth and death. The researcher believes that the first event mentioned after these two dates was not put there at random: it invites the learner to situate Kateb Yacine's age within the demonstrations of Setif, Guelma and Kharrata on May 8th, 1945. It is mentioned that he was arrested during this event and that a year later he could publish a volume of poems, being fifteen years only.

Fifteen years old is the approximate age of fourth year middle school learner, and the researcher does not reject the intention to let the learner calculate Kateb Yacine's age to compare himself to such a famous writer. This may be an explicit call to revive patriotic feeling especially after reading the whole bio card and discover that Nedjma is actually Algeria in his famous novel published in 1956 and that marked all Maghrebian literature.

2.4 Document 4

Figure 4: Mohamed Dib

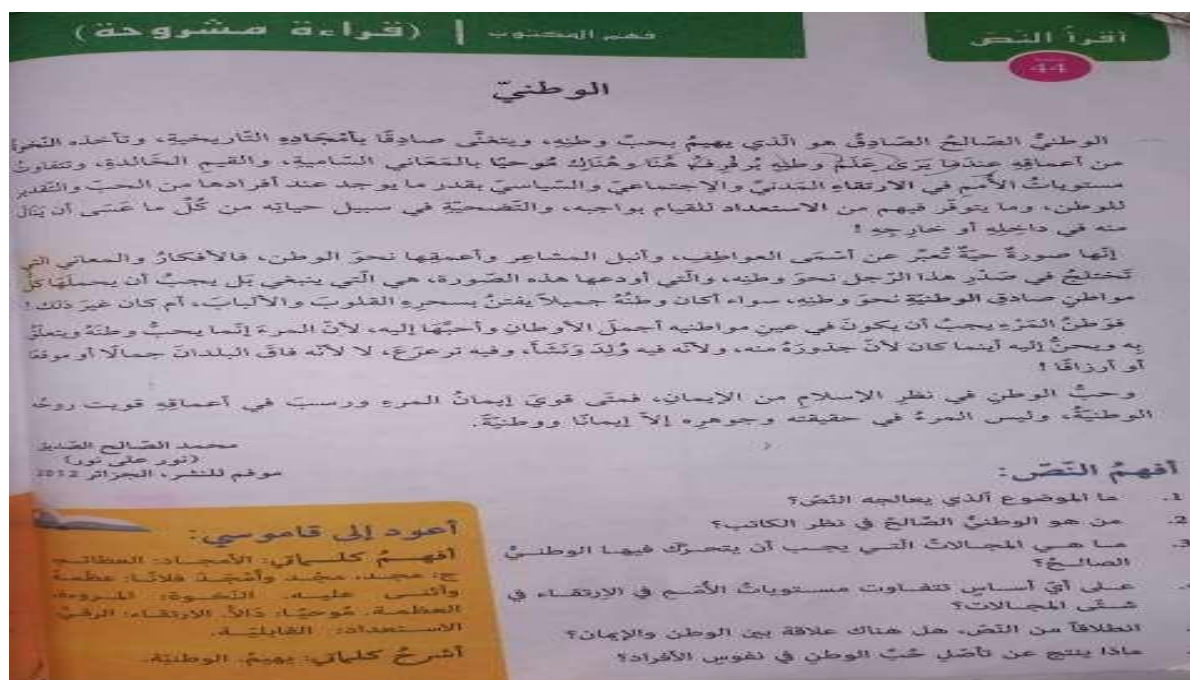


Source: Fourth year textbook of English (2019, p. 40)

Mohamed Dib is a famous Algerian writer and poet. His bio card on page 40 reveals that it is among the units taught in the first term, around November, which coincides with the anniversary of the Algerian Revolution. Many keywords deserve to be dealt with through translation such as awakening to struggle for independence, optimism, brotherhood among others. It is worth to mention the source of this bio card to the learners since it is famous enough to be proud of the Algerian writer.

2.5 Document 5

Figure 5: The patriotic



Source: Second year textbook of Arabic (2017, p. 44)

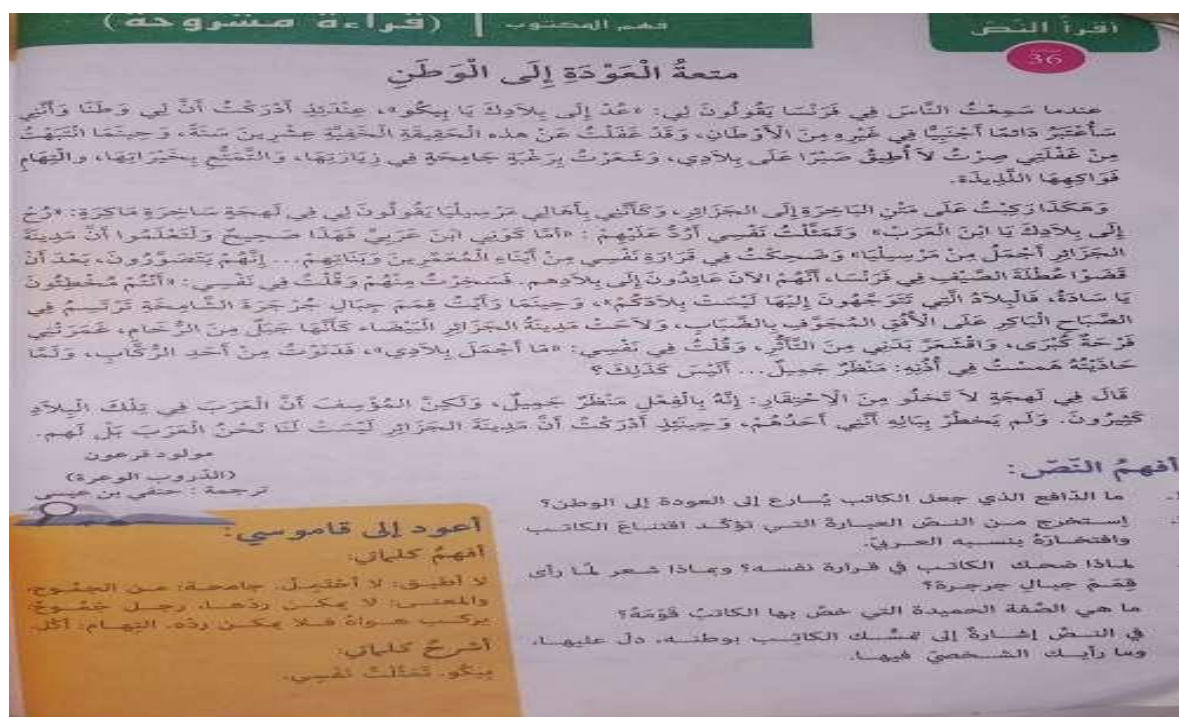
The document above is extracted from second year Arabic textbook, and at this level, the learner may at least use a monolingual dictionary to explain the difficult words. The researcher may suggest the listing of some words in English despite this latter is taught for only a year. This does not seem too demanding for a learner in the present big technology-empowered era where a child masters devices and can easily learn new words in English translated in his Arabic textbook. The words extracted from the text and that may be translated are : الوطني، الصالح، الصادق، حب وطنه، أمجاد، نخوة، القيم، الواجب، التضحية : which refer respectively to patriotic, good, honest, love of homeland, glories, chivalry, values, duty, sacrifice.

Below is the researcher's suggested translation of the third paragraph for any future introduction in parallel educational texts between Arabic and English with some underlined words to be focused on:

One's homeland should be in the eyes of its citizens the most beautiful of all, for a man loves his homeland, keeps attached to it, turns nostalgic for it wherever he is, because he is rooted therein, and was born and grew up in it; and not because his homeland is the prettiest, the best located and the richest!

2.6 Document 6

Figure 6: The pleasure of homecoming



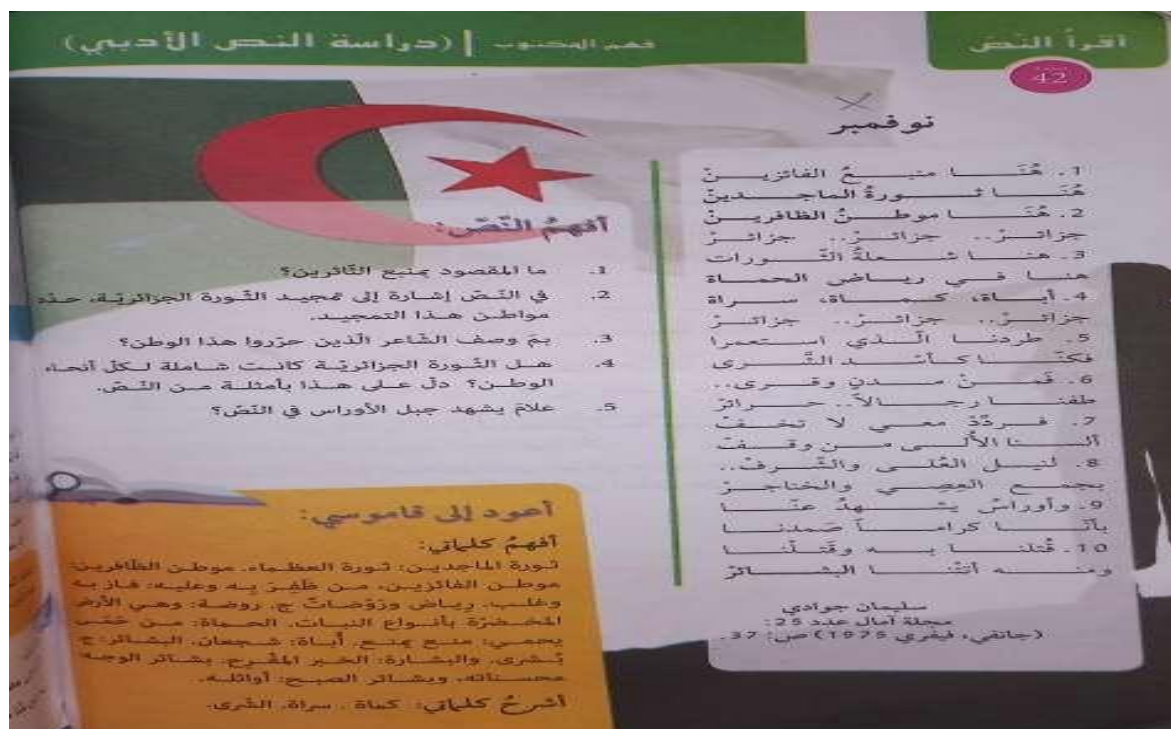
Source: Second year textbook of Arabic (2017, p. 36)

The text above describes an Algerian emigrant living in France who discovered, after more than 20 years, that he has a homeland; that occurred only when people told him go back to your country. Some keywords would make the learner grasp that a foreigner remains a foreigner whatever time he spends in others' land. The emigrant decides then to

go back home and during his trip he discovers that Algiers is much pretty than Marseille especially when he describes the Djurdjura mounts in the foggy horizons and then Algiers appeared like a marble mountain. He explicitly let the reader live his feelings when he got chills. Translation is quite suitable for terms and expressions like: nations, my country, this is not your country, the Arabs among others.

2.7 Document 7

Figure 7: November



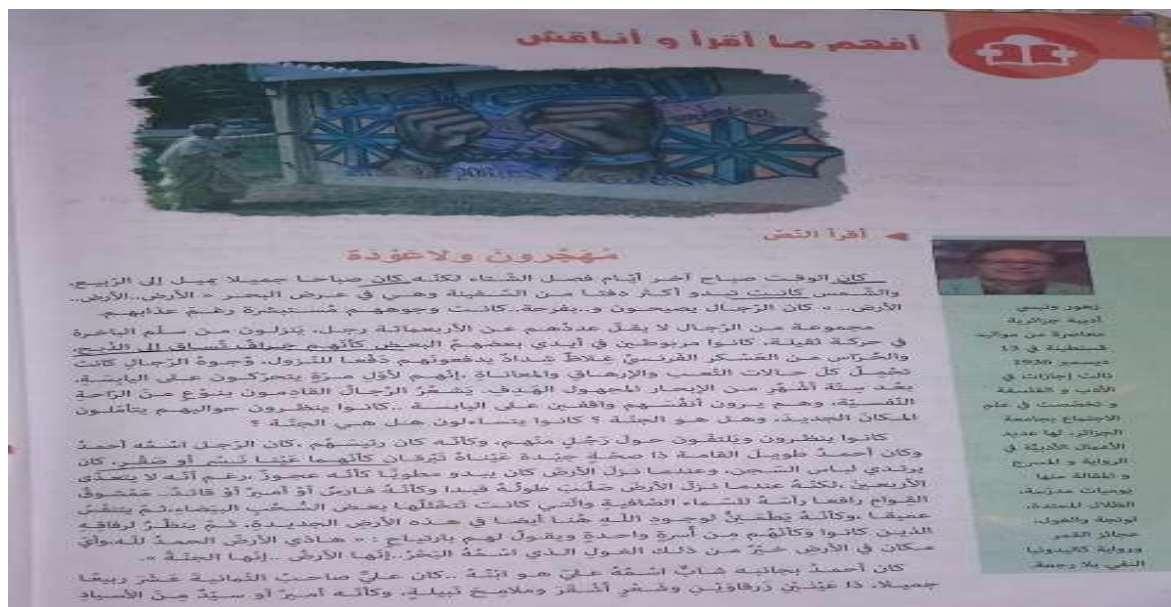
Source: Second year textbook of Arabic (2017, p. 42)

November is the title of a poem by Slimane Djouadi published in the mid-seventies and is still present in learners' textbooks because, according to the researcher, it is full of attracting words related to patriotism. The researcher suggests the translation of verses 1, 2, 9 and 10 of the poem with some underlined words to be highlighted in class:

1. Here is the source of the winners
Here is the revolution of the glorious
2. Here is the homeland of the victorious
Algeria, Algeria, Algeria
[...]
9. The Aures Mountains still witness
Our honor and our resilience
10. We were killed, and we killed
And in it we were rewarded.

2.8 Document 8

Figure 8: Displaced with no return



Source: Fourth year middle school textbook of Arabic (2019, p. 150)

The document above deals with the memory of the Algerian fighters who have been displaced during the 19th Century to very far territories so that they cannot return to their countries. In addition, since this text is in fourth year textbook of Arabic, the researcher suggests the translation of an excerpt that intensively expresses the discrimination and torture of the deported at that time. Some words are underlined to suggest more focus in class.

With rejoicing faces despite torture.

[...] tied up to each other like sheep driven to be slaughtered.

Guards from the French military were cold-blooded and tough.

Men faces with fatigue, exhaustion and suffering [...] after six months of unknown sailing...

3. Conclusion

Educational textbooks are continually subject to modifications and adjustments whenever professionals of pedagogy find it necessary to happen. Moreover, as translation starts to intervene efficiently in foreign languages classrooms, the researcher found it conducive to suggest a series of means to make translation, as a pedagogical tool, more efficient to help preserve the memory and consolidate the national identity in the mind of middle school learners.

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