Cultural Equivalence as a Barrier to Translating Arabic Fictional Works into English

"a case study"

By

Hussein Abdul-Rahman I. Al-Mutlaq

B.A. English Language & Literature, Yarmouk University, 1988

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Hussein Obeidat  Chairman
Dr. Hassan Shuqair  Member
Dr. Mahmoud Kharbutli  Member

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ABSTRACT

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Prepared by
Hussein Abdul-Rahman I. Al-Mutlaq

Supervisor
Dr. Hussein Obeldat

This study aims at highlighting the role of cultural equivalence as a barrier for the Arabic-English translator of fictional works. The novel of *Ziqaq Al-Midaq* by Najeeb Mahfouz has been selected as a case study for two reasons: firstly, it is loaded with cultural terms and expressions that are bound to Arabic and Islamic culture in general, and to Egyptian culture in particular. Secondly, the novel was translated into English, and the translation shows a great difference between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT).

The researcher classifies these terms and expressions into three major categories: the religious terms, the social expressions, and the referential gaps. The first category (chapter II) has been subdivided into three parts: those which belong to the name of the Almighty Allah, the Qura’nic terms with some emphasis on the phenomenon of Al-Iqtibas (quoting from the Holy
Qura’n), and the expressions that have the name of Mohammad, the Prophet (ص). The second category (chapter III) covers nine types of social expressions currently used in everyday Egyptian discourse, while the last category (chapter IV), includes eleven examples that are confined to Islam, Arab, or Egyptian culture.

To highlight the difficulty in finding cultural equivalents in English for the Arabic expressions, the following procedure is adopted: 1) presenting the problematic term with its translation as rendered by Gassick (1975), the translator of the novel; 2) comparing the intended meaning in the ST with 3) proposing alternative translations for most of the given examples. Alternative translations are verified by some academicians specialized in teaching translation in Jordanian universities, by some experienced translators, and by some native speakers of English.

Finally, the study concludes with implications and recommendations for further research.
Notes:

1. (ص) is an abbreviation of "صلى الله عليه وسلم" means "peace be upon him" used in spoken and written Arabic after the name of the prophet wherever it is mentioned.