Translating Arabic/English Individual Cultural References: Strategies and Parameters

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Abstract
In order to optimise a translator decision making, he/s needs to be aware of the fullest possible list of options available: in terms of translation strategies and parameters which need to be taken into account when selecting appropriate options. Many studies focus only on the strategies of translating cultural references Ivir (1987), Mailhac (1996), Dickins et al (2002), Fernández (2012). Thus, this paper attempts to shed light on both strategies and parameters which would be relevant to the translation of individual cultural reference. Ivirs and Mailhac suggestions are utilised in this paper as a theoretical framework. It is found that there are too many strategies and parameters to formulate usable strategies; broad one possible. However, before translating CRs, a translator has to set parameters especially; text type and readership as parameters will lead the translator to select the accurate strategies.
1- Introduction

In practice, translation requires exquisite lingual and cultural skills to decode the meaning often couched in certain words that vary in their meaning regionally and culturally both synchronically and diachronically. It is not surprising to find a word that connotes a different thing in one culture, and the same time it connotes another thing in another culture. This is due to certain reasons ascribed to ideology, attitude, association, pragmatics, or otherwise expressed. Hall (1976) suggests that culture is similar to an iceberg. He proposed that 10% of the culture (external or surface culture) is easily visible like the tip of the iceberg such as food, clothing, art, dance etc, while 90%, of culture (internal or deep culture) is hidden below the surface like idiom, collocation, proverbs, metaphor and other figurative speech.

Katan (1999, 2004) argues that one of the skills of translation is to have cultural proficiency. This means that a translator should be a lingual mediator to unpack what culture-specific words have. Admittedly, Newmark (1995) states that translation mediates cultures. Likewise, Baker (2011) warns translators that words are very much like traditional costumes because words are uniquely the production of individual cultures. This goes in line with Hall’s theory of language and culture; culture by time creates a deeper layer of word-level meanings that require skills beyond the lingual skills. This theory sounds true for many translation pundits. Vermeer describes a translator as “bi-cultural” (Vermeer, 1978). By the same token, Snell-Hornby states that a translator is such a cross-cultural specialist (Snell-Hornby, 1992). Interestingly, Robinson (1988) classifies cultural meaning at word-level into four approaches: behaviorist, functionalist, cognitive, and dynamic. Venuti (2000) suggests foreignization and domestication as strategies to translating cultural references (CRs).
Focusing on the importance of culture in translation Tosi (2003), Rubel and Rosman (2003), Moder and Martinovic-Zic (2004), recognizing the differences among cultures, and knowing how to find suitable equivalents for words especially those that have cultural references are very important to shed light on. Moreover, Arabic and English are genetically unrelated especially when it comes to the translation of formulaic language i.e idioms, collocations and fixed expressions that have cultural reference as Abu-Ssaydeh (2004) and Al Daqs (2011) clarify. Furthermore, the validity of investigating cultural references (CRs) as they have been studied by many researches Ranzato (2016) and Olk (2013) reflect their importance of CRs in translation.

Adding to that, many papers shed light only on the strategies of translating CRs, while very few ones have studied parameters. Due to the crucial role of the latter in recognising the main factors that affect a translator’s strategies while dealing with CR, this paper focuses on both strategies and parameters that should be taken into consideration while translation.

Based on Ivir’s (1987) and Mailhac’s (1996) suggestions, and giving many Arabic/English translation as examples, the paper aims to answer the research question: what are the strategies and parameters that should be taken into account while translating Arabic/English individual CRs?

2- Cultural References

With regard to cultural references (CRs), Leemets (1992: 475; cited in Ranzato (2016)) defines culture references as

Every language has words denoting concepts and things that another language has not considered worth mentioning, or that are absent from the life or consciousness of the other nation. The reasons are differences in the ways of life,
traditions, beliefs, historical developments – in one word, the cultures of the nations. Also, differences can be observed on conceptual level. Different languages often nominate concepts from different viewpoints, and they also tend to classify them slightly differently.

On the other hand, Mailhac (1996, p. 133-134) describes CR "any reference to a cultural entity which, due to its distance from the target culture, is characterised by a sufficient degree of opacity for the target reader to constitute a possible problem".

3- Strategies
Ivir (1987) suggests a group of strategies. Mailhac (1996) argues that Newmark’s componential analysis as applied to cultural words confirm how inextricably linked the strategies are; one should therefore use at least one functional and one descriptive component. Ivir (1987) suggests six strategies in rendering individual CRs, cultural borrowing, claque translation, definition, cultural substitution, lexical creation, deliberate omission respectively. Mailhac (1996) suggests three more; namely, footnotes, and compensation combination of strategies. To further explain, each strategy will be outlined and defined with examples.

3.1 Cultural borrowing
According to Sundqvist, S. (2011, p.8), borrowing refers to “using the same word in the target text as in the source text”.

In translation, cultural borrowing means to borrow words from the source language that culturally do not exist in the target language (Ivir's, 1987).
A language is mainly known by increasing its vocabularies by borrowing words from other languages. This strategy is the common type of language’s exchange as stated by (Ghasemi & Sattari 2010). Arabic language borrows some words such as Internet, Strategy, Carbon, and Virus from English language. On the contrary, words like algebra, Quran, Jar, Lemon, Safari, and Amber are borrowed from Arabic.

3.2 Claque Translation

Calque is defined as a special kind of borrowing where SL expression or structure is translated in literal translation” (Vinay & Darbelnet, as cited in Munday 2001). According to (Ivir's, 1987), literal translation or claque means to translate words literally without any addition or modification to be part of the target language dictionary.

Politically, “the corridors of power” is translated literally as it is without any change. Similarly, recycling, is an example of calque translation. Ivir (1987) draws some examples like: gone with the wind، ذهب السوق السوداء، the cold war، الحرب الباردة، the black market، the black market، and the lion cub becomes، يزيد الطين بلة، ‘like father like son’ which is rendered in Arabic as، هذا الشبل من ذاك الاسد (This lion cub is from that lion). Another example is: ‘Add fuel to the fire’ which becomes، لا يقل الحديد الا الحديد, ‘Diamond cuts diamond’ is replaced by، (make clay moisture) while ‘Diamond cuts diamond’

3.3 Definition

In language, definition means “an explanation of the meaning of a word, phrase, etc.: a statement that defines a word, phrase, etc” (Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary).
Ivir (1987) suggests that definition may be used to define a new concept or term. Some words are culturally challenging when it comes to conveying their meaning in the target language, so providing a definition can help. For example, bridesmaids, bridegrooms and baptism are terms that have no equivalents in Islam. Thus, if the readers are Muslim, these terms must be accompanied by definitions. Thus, bridesmaids (*اشترْٞرا اىؼتترٗ*) might be defined as members of the bride's party on a wedding, who are typically young women, and close friends of the bride. On the other hand, if the readers are non-Muslims, the Arabic term (*صتة الاستتررب*) (decision-making) would have to be explained by way of a definition by saying that the *Istikhaarah* prayer is a kind of prayer done by Muslims asking for God’s guidance to make a good choice.

### 3.4 Cultural substitution

Cultural substitution entails finding the most appropriate equivalent in the target culture of a concept or entity that exists in the source culture Ivir (1987). In the similar vein, substitution is defined by Palusziewicz-Misiaczek (2005, p.244) as “replacing a culture-specific item or expression in the source text with a target language item which describes a similar concept in target culture and thus is likely to have a similar impact on the target readers”. Similarly, Pokasamrit (2013, p. 215) states that “the translation of some known or unknown concepts in the source language by using the substitution from the culture of the receptor language rather than by other available means of meaning equivalence”.

The English use ‘pound’ (رطل) as a weight unit. Arabs, however, use kilos (كيلو). So, when we say ‘four pounds of meat’ in English, we substitute this in Arabic with ‘about two kilos of meat’.

In translating a piece of work that contains something widely known for being funny and comic in one culture may not have the same impression in
another culture. For example, ‘Tash ma Tash’ is a widely known comedy in Saudi Arabia. To translate it to the British people means nothing. So, we have to find a good cultural transplantation. A good one for the British people would be for example ‘Mr. Bean’.

In an empirical study, Pokasamrit, (2013, p. 224) outlines “cultural substitution works best on a proverb treated as a unit of meaning”.

### 3.5 Lexical creation

Lexical creation stands for coining a suitable term for words that do not exist in the target language, and thus gain a dictionary entry for all users. According to Ivir's (1987, p.45), “lexical creation is attempted by the translator when the communicative situation rules out a definition or literal translation, when borrowing is sociolinguistically discouraged, and substitution is not available for communicative reasons”.

The word ‘telephone’ entered to Arabic lexicon, so did radio, radio, helicopter, video and tram.

### 3.6 Deliberate omission

Deliberate omission refers to deletion of words that do not fit in the target culture or words that sound meaningless (ibid). The expression أطال الله في عمره (May God extend his life) in جلالته الملك أطال الله في عمره يزور اسبانيا (His Majesty, extend his life, visits Spain) can be omitted because it is notoriously problematic to render into English. Arab students are used to saying ‘Professor’ or ‘Dr.’ before the name of their tutors as a mark of respect for their higher status. Therefore, it is quite usual to address a tutor by saying الاستاذ الدكتور علي المحتزم (The respected Professor Dr. Ali) which sounds awkward in English. Thus, all these additional adjectives must be omitted from the English target text. Again, ‘detached house’ is usually
translated simply as ‘house’ as this kind of house is not found in Arab culture.

3.7 Compensation

Compensation procedure is used to compensate for the function of a referent which appears to be rather opaque in its original form (Mailhac, 1996). Dickins, et al. (2002, p. 40) states that compensation seems “crucial to successful translation”.

For instance, ‘I will go to Debenhams and Clarks’ will be translated as ساذهب للتسوق (I will go shopping). Also, if a translator says احتاج ان اذهب الى محل الأدوات (I need to go to the tool shop) instead of ‘I need to go to the DIY’, s/he is attempting to compensate for the loss of the term ‘DIY’ by focusing on its function as a tool shop.

3.8 Footnote

Footnote means to provide an explanatory elucidation about the difficult word at the end of the translation for further information (Mailhac, 1996). However, Blight (2005, p.7) states that using “footnotes are too sophisticated for their readers”. Miao and Salem (2010) consider utilising footnotes in translation might be a way to insert the translator’s intention.

In Arab culture, most often a married man would be given an honorific name derived from his eldest son ‘abo Hassan’ ابو حسن (Hassan’s father). This culture-bound meaning is to be explained or glossed in a footnote so that the reader gets the message clearly. If this is left unexplained, it would create problematic misunderstanding. In the same way, الأفيون (Opium drug) needs footnote to further explain what it means exactly as “a drug made from the seeds of a poppy and used to control pain or to help people sleep.

3.9 Combination of Procedures

Combination of strategies or as Mailhac called it “combination of procedures” means to use more than one strategy or method to facilitate the
translation process (Mailhac, 1996 p. 141). Using both borrowing and definition together is a clear example of this procedure. This needs to be done with, for example, 
سحور (Suhuur) which is a meal eaten before dawn for fasting in Islam. In addition, a term like 
dishdasha (a sort of loose robe) will be translated by means of borrowing and adding a footnote which explains that it is customarily worn by both men and women in the Gulf countries, both indoors and outdoors.

All the strategies suggested by Ivir and Mailhac are summarized in Figure 1:

*Figure 1: Strategies of translating Individual CRS*

4. Parameters

According to Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary, parameter is defined as “a rule or limit that controls what something is or how something should be done”.

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Strategies for translating individual CRs necessitate relevant parameters that justify the way why a translator may, for example, opt for translating a word this way and not that way. Thus, Mailhac (1996) suggests parameters which are partly based on Ivir (1987) suggestion and partly on his own observations. Each parameter is discussed with examples in detail below.

4.1 Purpose of a text

Ivir (1987) draws the attention to the importance of knowing the general purpose of a text as reflected in its various communicative functions is a main parameter which will influence to a certain degree a number of other parameters. In addition, the choice of selecting the right and accurate strategy will depend entirely on this parameter due to its importance. Dickins et al. (2002, p. 177) point out that “the term 'text-type' is often used in a similar sense to 'genre'”. Then they define genre as “a category to which, in a given culture, a given text is seen to belong, and within which the text is seen to share a type of communicative purpose and effect with other texts; that is, the text is seen to be more or less typical of the genre” (ibid, p. 236).

Before translating any text, the translator has to take into his/her consideration the genre of that text. So, s/he can make an accurate design while choosing the best equivalent vocabularies. Dickins et al. (2002) suggest main five categories of genres: literary, religious, philosophical, empirical and persuasive and sometimes there will be a hybrid genre.

4.2 Cultural Reference Role

Cultural Reference Role means to decide whether it is a must to translate CR or not depending on its suggestive significance in both the ST and the TT (Ivir, 1987). For example, the word مخلوع (ousted) in الرئيس المخلوع (the ousted president) is socially derogatory. So, it must be translated and not left. Here it is the central word and cannot be dropped. However, المفدى
(redeemer) in جلالة الملك المغدى (his Majesty redeemed king) is not central and therefore needs to be omitted as “His Majesty King ….” which is more honorific in the ST and the TT. Again, the word دولة فلسطين in دولة is more assertive than decorative or tautologous. Therefore, it must be translated to assert the Palestinians’ statehood and their non-existence or diaspora. For many politicians in the west, it is more offensive and therefore it should be dropped.

4.3 Culture Transparency
Culture Transparency is when culture referent is known in the source culture and target culture (ibid). Owning to the fact that words like, Hollywood, Boxing Bay, Twix and Flake and Toblerone bar are widely known in many cultures, there is no need to translate or explain them; a translator can only use borrowing strategy.

4.4 Readership
Readership means the type of reader we are addressing in terms of age, nationality and gender (Ivir, 1987). Newmark (1988) classifies readers into: expert, educated generalist, and uninformed. Readership can play a major role in choosing a procedure. Similarly, Dickins et al (2002) emphasise on the importance of knowing the readership before starting translating. To illustrate this point, an Arabic text depicting a local food might refer to it as ‘Kabsa’ or Mansaf (a Saudi and Jordanian local food which consists of rice and meat), which might be better translated into English as ‘fish and chips’ and into Italian as ‘pizza’ by adopting a substitution procedure. Likewise, when words such as ‘CT scanner, MRA and Mammography’ occur in a text addressing doctors, there is no need to explain what these medical devices are, while using a combination of borrowing and definition or footnote is required if the text addresses are non-expert readers. By the same token, it is better to use the
word “lift” rather than “elevator” when we address the British readers. By the same token, readership’s knowledge of source culture: depends on whether the reader knows what this CR means in the source culture. لقمة العيش for the Syrians is “bread” while for the Saudis it is الذر. Therefore, since this word is very important for the Syrians, the translator should not drop it at all.

4.5 Frequency
In language, frequency stands for “the number of repetitions of a periodic process in a unit of time” (Merriam-Webster dictionary). Translating individual CRs can be influenced by the frequency of the referent (Ivir, 1987). Hence, if a referent is mentioned once and is peripheral in the ST, the translator can omit it, whereas if it is crucial, the translator has to choose other strategies, e.g. borrowing, definition or a combination of strategies.

4.6 Pragmatic coherence
Pragmatic coherence means the amount of information which can be inserted to the TT without creating a communication problem (ibid). For example, An Arab translator facing the English term “health visitor” will have to explain it in some way as Arab culture does not have an exact equivalent. Therefore, depending on the purpose of the text parameter, s/he may choose to insert a definition of a health visitor by saying ‘a health visitor is a nurse who works with mothers after giving birth, advises on feeding and care, and provides support for both infants and parents’. If this definition does not solve the communication problem, a footnote can be provided explaining what a ‘health visitor’ means.

4.7 Cultural coherence
Mailhac (1996, p. 147) states that "cultural coherence should be considered first in terms of homogeneity of the culture(s) portrayed".
He explains cultural coherence by stating that one should not mix the source culture with a foreign one (ibid). To clarify this point, if a translator mentions the Iraqi local currency in a British context and uses the term ‘dinar’ instead of ‘pound’, he will not achieve cultural coherence. If the sentence, ‘my son paid 650 for a watch’, which is translated into Arabic as (دفع ابنى ٦٥ دينار لشراء ساعة) (my son paid 650 Dinar for a watch), this translation will not preserve the cultural coherence.

4.8 Semiotic value of referent
Ivir (1987) states that semiotic value of referent means that some referents have different semiotic values in cultures. Some referents have the same semiotic values in the source culture and the target culture (wedding – fishing – shopping) as in France and Spain. However, shopping in Thai islands is done on boats, and playing soccer in the USA is not the same as in Brazil. The bird (owl طائر البومة) has a positive connotation in west countries and it refers to wisdom, while it has a negative impact on Arab countries and refers to “pessimism”. Thus, in translation form English into Arabic, a translator has either to compensate owl with any animal which has the same positive impact or use a footnote to explain the difference of connotative meaning of owl between the two cultures.

4.9 Stylistic equivalence
In English, style means “a way of writing or a way of using language” (Oxford living dictionaries). In translation, stylistic equivalence means preserving the cultural style of the source referent as suggested by Ivir (1987). For example, in a literary style, it is better to translate an expression such as “in his autumn years” into في خريف عمره (in his autumn age) and not into something like “in his last years” which does not preserve the style of the ST. Equally, in another example, it is better not to modulate مساكين (the have-nots) by using a word such as معدمن (destitute).
4.10 Contextual information

Ivir (1987) states that the contextual information plays an important role, since the cultural information available in the context can be of great help to the translator, as shown by the following example, which provides enough information to licorice (a kind of plant) that has been used as medicine.

He needs to buy licorice. Actually this natural plant has been used in food and as medicine for thousands of years.

4.11 Elegance

In Language, elegance means something which is elegant. Thus Ivir (1987) applies the same concept in translation. He suggests making the translation more punchy and snappy depending on the culture. For example, سمعته في الحضيض (his fame is in bottom) is better translated as “his fame is in tatters” than “his fame is ruined”.

Figure 2 summarises the main parameters suggested by Ivir and Mailhac.
By keeping these parameters in mind and applying the most feasible and viable strategies, we can produce a translation that reflects accurately the source culture referents without any violation as exemplified above. Words like 


are culture-specific. They need to be glossed, substituted, or calqued. In Arabic we have 

ٝريو اىقرآُ

and 

ٝتيت٘ اىقترآُ

in English these two words have no equivalents; we just say “recite”, in a similar vein, ٝؼتر and ٝؼيتٌ are two different verbs in Arabic but in English it is just “know”. Arabs are notoriously keen on having جترٓ when going to propose to someone for marriage; you need to bring along some notables to the house of the fiancé to impress them that you are socially backed. This is totally absent in English.

Again, the word جتو in Lebanon is culture-bound and has no equivalent in English. It needs to be glossed or modified. In English we have two words for قفازات which are “mittens” and “gloves”. The Arabs are notorious for التنصير في فنجان القهوة which is absent in many other cultures. This can be substituted by reading one’s palm or “palmistry”. The Saudis distinguish three types of gown depending on its fabric and colour and purpose of wearing it; a gown can be حسويه – بشت – عباءة which is not there in English.

(ysmark), ِرِقع, حجاب (veil) are not cultural items in English while in Arabic they are essential items of clothes women should have in Saudi Arabia. Such words can be either calqued or glossed.

When translating words that are culture-specific, we should take into account that we can handle this either by maximum presence or minimum presence of the translator. This can be summed by a statement made by Ivir that translation is a way of establishing contacts with cultures (Ivir, 1987).
Another factor Mailhac discusses is readership in terms of region and age. In terms of age, the word ‘commence’ is at the top of the register scale; it is very formal. This word, therefore, does not suit childlike readership when translating bedtime stories. We better use ‘start’ or ‘begin’. In terms of region, the word ‘thugs’ is translated differently depending on the regional readership. “Thugs” in Egypt is translated as شطبية, in Syria شبحة, in Morocco الشماكرية. Another good example is the word “turban”; in Saudi Arabia, it is غترة or غمّة depending on the fabric and colour, and in Sudan it is عامة, while in Syria شملة and so on.

Translating meaning at word-level can be influenced depending on the referent type. In Islam, we have زكاة, استخاره, وضوء which are purely Islam-specific. To translate such words, we better gloss them or provide explanatory footnotes to make the meaning transparent. Likewise, in Christianity, we have “baptism” which is not there in Islam. This term needs to be glossed or explained, too.

Situation coherence is another factor that takes prominence in translating meaning at word-level. Most Arabs would say نعيمأ to someone who has already had his haircut or has already taken a shower. In English, this can be deleted as it is not there in their culture. For the instant, there are about 100 words for the English word “snow”. The 100 words vary depending on the situation of the snow falling; how it falls, when it falls, with what it falls, how it feels, how it looks, etc. when it comes to relatives and siblings, the Arabic culture has عم and خال while English uses the word for these two words “uncle”. The word ضرة in Arabic – a word that a wife uses to call her husband’s second wife – is not there in English. We may translate it as fellow-wife. This challenge exists because some societies are monogamous while others are polygamous. Again, when we refer to الشام as a group of four countries in the Arab world – Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon –
we may use “The Levant”. However, the word most often means Syria only, and surprisingly in Syria the word means Damascus. Another good example about this factor is the word “woman’s emancipation” . In most countries, this culturally means something good as a new way to open up to the world. However, it has a negative tone in Saudi Arabia because women should be always submissive, docile, subservient, and tame. In addition, the word in Arabic used to mean “law and order”. However, the same word now means brutal regime and dictatorship.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, although there are many strategies and parameters available to the translator, there are no specific strategies to translate meaning at individual CRs. Moreover, parameters in general and two parameters: text type and readership in particular, provide the basis of selecting the appropriate strategy that would produce an accurate and equivalent translation for translating Arabic/English individual culture references. Such strategies require parameters to provide guidance on ways of opting for the exact word without having to fumble around for the correct meaning. This goes in line with Olk (2013) empirical findings. Thus, the translator believes that they are firmly interlinked, and this is why we can see that a word can be translated differently depending on different parameters and by adopting many strategies.

Translating culture-specific words is very much like piecing together a jigsaw; it is very difficult but never impossible. As likened earlier, translating individual CRs is very much like looking at an iceberg; one should dive deeply into the layers that lie under the waterline to be a good mediator and not just a translator. It is a skill we need to polish up proficiently.
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ترجمة المفردات اللغوية ذات المدلولات الثقافية في اللغتين العربية والإنكليزية: استراتيجيات ومتغيرات

المفتاحية:

مفردات لغوية ذات مدلولات ثقافية، متغيرات، استراتيجيات

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المستخلص:

من أجل اختيار المفردات الأمثل والأنسب في الترجمة، على المترجم أن يطلع على جميع الخيارات المتاحة أمامه خاصة وأن يدركها لاسيما في ما يتعلق بأساليب ترجمة المفردات اللغوية والتي تجري في طياتها على مدلولات ثقافية، وأن يدرك كذلك المتغيرات التي يجب أن تؤخذ بنظر الاعتبار أثناء ترجمة كهكذا نوع من المفردات.

ركزت الكثير من البحوث السابقة على الاستراتيجيات المتوافرة لترجمة المفردات ذات المدلول الثقافي حصراً، والقليل من البحوث ركزت على المتغيرات التي تؤثر على الاستراتيجيات التي سيتبعها المترجم أثناء ترجمته المفردات اللغوية ذات المدلولات الثقافية. لذا تناول بحث الاستراتيجيات و المتغيرات التي تؤثر في اختيار المترجم للمفردة اللغوية والتي يتبع عليها أن يكون مطلعاً عليها وعلى وعي بها. واستعملت في هذا البحث مقتراحات كل من إيفروماباك لترجمة المفردات اللغوية ذات المدلولات الثقافية. توصل البحث في نهائته إلى أن هناك العديد من الاستراتيجيات والمتغيرات الممكن استخدامها. وان المتغيرات عموماً وكل من نوع النص المراد ترجمته والقارئ بمثابة القاعدة الرئيسة لتحديد الاستراتيجيات المتبقية في الترجمة لإيجاد مكافئ لغوي مناسب.