

# Creativity in Poetic Translation

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## Abstract:

“Why does poetry move us so? That question is extremely significant to our context: if it is the various devices used to evoke emotions that make poetry what it is, then it is these same ‘verbal emotions’ that make poetry a huge challenge to translators.” (Alina Cincan, 2016:94-102). The meters, rhymes, alliterations, metaphors and other devices that make a poem worth reading are nearly impossible to accurately translate into another language. This does not mean that translating poetry is worthless; on the contrary, a creative, translated poem that does justice to the original has just caught a new audience for the original writer.

To approach poetic translation is to approach inevitably the fascination of creativity. Creativity, in turn, has always been surrounded by an intricate mystery. If the translator is a creative person, the process of translation will be creative in itself. But are there limits for this creativity? How to arrive from the creative character of the poetic text to the creativity of the translation process?

**Key words:** Creativity, Poetic translation, Re-creation, Aesthetic order

## Créativité en traduction poétique

### Résumé:

"Pourquoi la poésie nous émeut-elle? Cette question est extrêmement significative à notre contexte. Si ce sont les différentes manières pour évoquer les émotions qui créent la poésie, ce sont ces mêmes «émotions verbales» qui font de la poésie un énorme défi pour les traducteurs. » (Alina Cincan, 2016 : 94-102). Les rimes, les alliterations, les métaphores et autres procédés, qui font qu'un poème vaut la peine d'être lu, sont presque impossibles à traduire avec précision dans une autre langue. Cela ne veut pas dire que traduire la poésie reste inutile; au contraire, une traduction créative d'une poésie

qui rend justice à l'original pourrait séduire un nouveau public pour l'auteur du texte source.

Approcher la traduction poétique, c'est inévitablement s'approcher de la fascination de la créativité. La créativité, à son tour, a toujours été entourée d'un mystère complexe. Si le traducteur est une personne créative, le processus de traduction sera lui-même créatif. Mais y a-t-il des limites à cette créativité? Comment arriver du caractère créatif du texte poétique à la créativité du processus de traduction?

**Mots clés :** Créativité, Traduction poétique, Recréation, Ordre esthétique.

### الإبداع في الترجمة الشعرية

لماذا يحرك الشعر مشاعرنا؟" تساؤل مهم جدا في إطار سياقنا. فإذا كانت الأساليب التعبيرية المختلفة عن العواطف هي جوهر الشعر، فهذه "العواطف اللفظية" نفسها هي التي تجعل من الشعر تحديًا كبيرًا أمام المترجمين. إن القافية و المجانسة الصوتية و الاستعارة و غيرها من الأساليب الشعرية، والتي تجعل من القصيدة نصا جديرا بالقراءة، يستحيل تقريبا نقلها إلى لغة أخرى. و مع هذا، لا يمكن القول بأن ترجمة الشعر غير ضرورية، بل بالعكس، يمكن لترجمة مبدعة لقصيدة ما أن تحرك مشاعر قراء جدد كما فعلته القصيدة الأصلية.

إن مقارنة الترجمة الشعرية هي حتما الاقتراب من سحر الإبداع، إبداع أحيط دائما بسر معقد. و إذا كان المترجم شخصا مبدعا، فعميلة الترجمة هي حتما إبداع، إبداع نتساءل عن حدوده و عن كيفية الانتقال من الطابع المبدع للنص الشعري إلى إبداع العملية الترجمية؟

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإبداعية، الترجمة الشعرية، إعادة الإبداع، الترتيب الجمالي.

### Introduction:

In fact, poetic translation is an art of re-creation, where each word, each group of words, takes on its true meaning according to its contextual position. It is not just about transferring from one language to another a thought or a feeling, but also to implement an aesthetic value but with a specific thorough character. Naturally, it follows that the true spirit of

poetic translation is involved in the very definition of poetry, which can be considered as an art of speech intended to create an emotion and a style of its own that does not exist in other verbal combinations of language. Poetry is that speech which creates a dual-valued language unit: a representative or symbolic value which constitutes an image, and a communicative value, which conducts a message more often from the outside to the inside, involving a poetic idea. In clearer terms, this idea which has been put into prose claims the poetic verse. (Kayra, 1998: 2).

Subsequently, the characteristics of poetic language lead us to treat the source text at two levels: the referential order, and the stylistic or aesthetic order. In this sense, poetic translation becomes a practical activity where the form as well as the content reside in the visible, which can only be found in the hidden. Expressing the same thing in another language without losing anything of its music and its harmony, its colour and its inner rhythm necessarily requires a linguistic practice, a series of skills of a specific character, a sense of harmony and rhyme, and above all a taste for poetic beauty.

### **1. Creativity in Translation:**

The translator has to be a creator, in this sense, thanks to creative qualities and abilities that are, indeed, in his cognitive nature. Besides, it is precisely the cognitive approach to translation which reveals to us the expert translator, his flexibility, his divergent thoughts, and, above all, his ability of association. In addition, his experience has a determining significance. In fact, the poetic translator demands an interdisciplinary, extra-linguistic, cultural and encyclopaedic knowledge. His experience, with cognitive assets, allows him to concentrate, to observe, to imagine, and to make analogies. Additionally, whatever the competence and talent of a translator, sometimes he is obliged to tap into dictionaries.

The translator, from the moment he feels the same emotional torment of the author, he demonstrates professional courage and assumes his "Translative" Creativity, to be not identified to those who Marcel Proust called "the drivers, those

who never take off. Only the courage of creativity gives wings to the translator”. (Branîște, 2018: 514).

A translation can only be creative when it is the result of a creative process, realized by a creative being. Creativity in translation consists of writing something new. It's not about to redo the original text, but it is precisely to write a text that pretends to be the same text, but in another language, with the scientific and artistic talent of a person, who pronounces a never-ending inspiration. This bilingual personality has the courage of a unique, creative nature, with an exceptional intelligence.

In our practical exercise, Elia Abou Madi's poem: I Don't Know, is taken as an example to illustrate the above assumptions and expectations of how a poetic re-creation can, as Bysshe Shelly assumes “render the very image of a poem expressed in its eternal truth”. I have selected the translation of only the first two stanzas of ‘لست أدري’ for eventual interpretation and analysis.

The poet says:

جئت، لا أعلم من أين، ولكي أتيت  
ولقد أبصرت قدامي طريقا فمشيت  
وسأبقي سائرا ان شئت هذا أم أبيت  
كيف جئت؟ كيف أبصرت طريقي؟  
لست أدري  
أجدد أم قديم أنا في هذا الوجود  
هل أنا حر طليق أم أسير في قيود  
هل أنا قائد نفسي في حياتي أم مقود  
أتمنى أنني أدري ولكن لست أدري

## 2. Badmus' Translation:

The translator, Badmus, Murtada, a Nigerian University lecturer and translator has delivered the poem in English as follows:

I came, I know not, yet came this way:  
I saw a path-along it made my way,  
I must go on- or say I yea or nay!  
How I have come? How did I find the way?  
I do not know!  
Am I new here, or have I been before?  
Completely free, or inferior?  
O' I would that I were blessed with knowledge, for....  
I do not know!

### 3. Analysis of the original and translated poem:

Most of Abou Madi's poems carry on this atmosphere of vagueness, and mysterious, trembling uncertainty. In most of his poems, it is only when all seems lost and the poet's spirit runs into tears of sorrow does he get a hint of what he has been looking for. Such expressions of extreme individual malaise which grew in pained atmospheres of vagueness and perplexity became one of the hallmarks of this *Mahjar* poetry, and of romantic poetry in general. The poet translator, therefore, Badmus in the case of this translation, is to give an outlet to a long series of statements of confusion and metaphysical doubt, without offering any solutions or evidence of deep thought about the problems raised. The language of the poem, being subtle and allusive, creates powerful atmospheric effects, that a creative translator has to understand, retain and render with more or less the same sense of bewildered metaphysical elegance, and the same sense of bitter realism and depth of perception, rarely present in the *Mahjar* writers and in romantic poetry in the Arab world as a whole.

Highly imaginative and a deep thinker, yet Abu Madi never leaves the framework of clarity and simplicity. His verse is smooth and eloquent and his ideas are revealed in clear bright terms. His work also holds that extra dimension of imaginative power which on occasion takes it beyond the limits of the romantic experience, and lends it a permanent value which transcends the style of his immediate generation. (Mahdi, 1983: 170).

In fact, many factors helped to shape Abu Madi's poetic style. A good grounding in grammar and prosody that he acquired in his formative years in Alexandria gave him a solid base for his verse, Abu Madi is indeed credited with a more thorough grasp of the rules of poetry than any other *Mahjar* poet. His verse is more 'Arabic' in texture and also free from blemishes than theirs. (Ibid.).

To return to "I don't know", by Badmus, the translation is achieved in such a way where its philosophical and pathetic attractiveness are retained. In regards to AbouMadi's poetry, the translator's care and attention were on the symbols and images which are rich in impressions and suggestions, for his duty is to "make an art from art" (Charents, 2012:2).

In fact, we are witnessing a poetic creation involving the idea of harmony and reciprocity between ideas, impressions, impulses and all means of expression (Meschonnic, 1995: 515). The translator seeks to give images, figures, etc., to enhance a semantic distinction, as well as an equivalent and metric parallelism. In this effort, few are those who have the talent to grasp the deep and symbolic meaning of the poetic message, to be able to draw the sound effects it generates. The translator, in examining words, he, actually, breaks them down not according to their verbal units, but according to the concepts which they contain. Therefore, poetic translation suggests an analysis in three key aspects:

- the emotional aspect;
- the logical aspect;
- the functional aspect.

The emotional aspect ensures the valuation of communication between the poet and the translator, aiming his intuition and his sensitivity (Newmark, 2004: 4).

The logical aspect is centred on the semantic content of concepts.

The functional aspect is intended for a potential practice of the communicative orientation.

Therefore, the courage of creativity in poetic translation necessarily requires a certain competence for carrying out this analysis. This skill includes necessarily a linguistic and an artistic proficiency (Francis, 2011: 97). John Dryden (English poet, literary critic and translator), in his article “The Three Types of Translation” writes about this: “No man is capable of translating poetry besides a genius to that art”. He also adds, that “the translator of poetry is to be the master of both of his author’s language and of his own”.

Without attempting to analyse cautiously Badmus’ translation, either semantically, stylistically, etc., we notice that the translator's parallel reasoning to the original poet has established similarities to Abou Madi’s imagining. In the translation, the idea is present, and the words that hold it are also present.

Through the effects of the words the poets use in their poems they create imagery. The poems which include such details generate our memories, stimulate our feelings, and command our response. The ideas in poetry are essential, but the real value of a poem consists in the words that work their magic by allowing us to approach a poem is similar to Francis’s “Catch implies: expect to be surprised; stay on our toes; and concentrate on the delivery”. This all is done by the words which must be under close examination of a translator as they carry the whole emotional and psychological world of a unique poet.

Therefore, much depends on the translator. He can show where the “treasure lies”, he knows that the poem he is translating is created with the most attentive instances of the mind, its translation has to be appealing because it is meant to be read and valued by others. Hence, the translator must equate the poet, the original artist, and be inspired by the poem. Parallel to it he offers “other sort” of translation, where, in a sense, he is definitely making a new poem, which is based on the original, but transfuses some new spirit. (Ezra Pound, 2007:227) As Susan Bassnett says: “It is precisely the ability to say it my way, to breathe new life into an existing work of art in order to make it accessible to a widened audience who would be denied that

contact because of a language barrier that makes translation an art and not some kind of second-rate literary activity". (Bassnett, 1997:11).

### **Conclusion:**

To conclude, all translation is a question of choice, an attempt to capture the sense of the connotative power of the original while facing the fact that such a creative capturing can happen only rarely. For a translator, reading a poem involves constant interpretation and re-construction of relationships among its many elements. Translating a poem involves then the imposition of another set of requirements and expectations on what is already an extremely complicated process. Reading a translation sensitively should involve entering the world of the translation itself and not into some twilight zone between original and translation. Reading and judging a translation should involve an understanding of what the translation does on its own and not in comparison to what the original does, for that is the only way in which a translation can get a whole hearing for itself. And that is the only way in which translation will be recognized and accepted as an integral and genuine art form, whose aesthetic responsibility and success lie in its ability to enrich the literary tradition creatively and in assimilative ways.

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