

# Challenges of Arabic into English Literary Translation: An Analytical Study of the Translation into English of Iraqi Short Stories

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## *Abstract*

*Literary translation, among other types of translation, projects a lot of challenges for translators especially those dealing with disparate languages like Arabic and English. This study investigates the English translation of two short stories by the Iraqi writer Karim Abid. The study highlights two main challenges: linguistic and cultural. The study cites illustrative examples where points of misunderstanding the original text, mistranslation, lack of adequate translation, interference in the original text, etc. are explored. It is concluded that translating Arabic short stories into English is an arduous and daunting task due to the many obstacles and hardships facing even a professional translator. Therefore, literary translators should have the potential and talent to cope with the invincible hardships of this type of translation. As such, part and parcel of their tools is the application of specific strategies and procedures that are necessary to get over them. Besides, it has been shown that this type of translation is highly creative.*

*Key Words: challenges, literary translation, linguistic difficulties, cultural difficulties, short stories.*

## **1. Introduction**

Translation has played, from time immemorial, a key role in bringing different nations together through direct communication including exchanging views, experiences, information, etc. In our present time, with all the technological breakthroughs it is witnessing, the role of translation has become even greater. Among the various types of translation, literary translation proved to be one of the main methods of communication across cultures. Peoples of various languages are now able to read literary masterpieces in different literary genres in their own national languages, thanks to the arduous efforts of literary translators.

The present study sheds light on the English translation by Eric Winkel, an American scholar and translator, of a collection of Iraqi short stories, *Nights of Mr. Salman*, by Karim Abid, an Iraqi short story writer. Such a topic has been chosen due primarily to the rare studies written on translating Arabic short stories into English, especially the Iraqi short

stories. The study will particularly explore the hardships that faced the translation of the stories into English with an emphasis on the lexical, syntactic, semantic, as well as the cultural aspects. To unmask the expected challenges of literary translation, many examples of the translated texts are cited; some alternative translations have been suggested by the researcher. The aim is to make literary translation difficulties more tangible.

### 1.1 Aim of the Study

The present study aims at critically exploring the translation of Eric Winkel of two short stories by Karim Abid, namely “Love Story” and “A Sound in the Orchard”. A particular emphasis will be focused on revealing the linguistic and cultural difficulties diagnosed in the translation.

### 1.2 Hypothesis of the Study

The study hypothesizes that any literary translator, irrespective of his/her linguistic competence and rich translation experience, would encounter hardships and challenges in translating Arabic short stories into English. Some of these obstacles, especially the cultural ones, are rather insurmountable.

### 1.3 Scope of the Study

The study is limited to analyze and compare the original text and the translated text, and then identify the problematic areas (linguistic and cultural) of two stories of Karim Abid's anthology entitled *Nights of Mr. Salman*. The study is confined to tackle the translated texts from the lexical, grammatical, syntactic, semantic and cultural aspects. Other linguistic aspects such as pragmatics, speech acts, discourse analysis, etc are excluded. The two stories are representative of the narrative style of the author and also the cultural features of the respective community.

### 1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the major difficulties facing literary translators in translating Arabic short stories into English?
2. What are the main reasons behind these difficulties?
3. Are linguistic challenges of literary translation more knotty than cultural challenges or vice versa?

## 2. Literature Review

As far as the researcher is aware, only scarce studies on the difficulties of translating Arabic short stories into English have been undertaken. As to the translation of Iraqi short stories into English, no previous academic study has been published.

In this context, a Ph.D. study entitled *An Analysis of Literary Translation* by Muftah S. Lataiwish (1995), investigated five Arabic short stories written by Nagib Mahfuz and Yahya Haqqi, two well-known Egyptian writers, primarily chosen for translational analysis and assessment. To highlight the linguistic and cultural difficulties of literary translation, the researcher undertook a translation test for a number of Libyan students, Department of English, Qar Yunis University, Libya. Students were asked to translate the five stories into English. Students' renditions were compared with a typical translation into English of these stories by M. Badawi, Denys J. Davies, AkefAbadir, and Roger Allen. Lataiwish comes to the conclusion that "the linguistic problems were manifest in a series of recurrent grammatical inadequacies and errors, and also semantic problems." (p. 270)

In another study by Mohammad Almarazig (2013) entitled "Some Linguistic Losses in Translating the Short Story," the researcher studies the translation into English of a short story entitled "A Glance" written by Yusuf Idris, an Egyptian short story writer. The story has been translated into English by Elizabeth Jacquette. In this study, the syntactic, semantic, and cultural losses are investigated in the translated text. Such losses have been attributed to the differences between the SL and the TL including cultural terms and idiomatic expressions.

Ala' EddinBanikalef and Abu Naser study "The Difficulties in Translating Culture-Specific Expressions from Arabic into English" (2019) tackled the translation into English of Dr. Abdul Rahman Muneef's Arabic novel entitled مدن الملح (Cities of Salt). The researcher gave carefully-chosen expressions to 11 students from the Department of Translation, Jadara University, Jordan. The testees were asked to translate these expressions into English. Students' translations were then compared with Peter Theroux's typical translation of the novel into English. The study comes to the conclusion that the main reasons behind the challenges and hardships facing advanced-level Arab student in translating literary texts into English are attributed to lack of translation experience, students' incompetence in the TL, cultural barriers in addition to their inadequate knowledge of translation techniques and strategies.

In a study entitled "Handling Semantic Repetition when Translating Arabic Short Stories: The Case of an Excerpt from The Book of The Dead," by Amer Al-Adwan and Mamon Abuorabia aledwan (2019), the researchers explore the translation of the short story "An Excerpt from The Book of The Dead" by the Libyan short story writer Ahmad Faqih, translated into English by Ronak Husni and Daniel Newman. The study shows that the translators of the story have resorted to certain shifts and strategies such as retention, compression, modification, deletion, etc. when translating semantic repetition into English.

### **3. Material and Methodology**

The study is in two parts: theoretical and practical. It adopts ‘the qualitative research approach’. The data of the study is gathered through an analysis and evaluation of two short stories chosen from Karim Abid's anthology as representative of his narrative style, let alone their dexterous depiction of the Iraqi social, especially rural, milieu. The Arabic and English texts are compared to identify the areas of difficulty, linguistic and cultural, that have faced the translator. The translator's renditions are presented, both lexically and syntactically, accompanied by illustrative examples. Their translation assessment includes parameters such as linguistic accuracy, deviation from L1 norms, equivalence, over-translation, under-translation, semantic and syntactic features, besides the cultural aspects. As the translator is a native speaker of English, it is the intention of the present paper to discern his attentiveness to the subtle nuances and peculiarities of certain Arabic expressions, words, and cultural concepts.

Many examples of Eric Winkel's translation are cited for clarification and evaluation; some suggested alternative translations by the researcher are proposed. Primarily a comparative text analysis of two Arabic texts and their English translations, the study is based on the translator's command of English, together with his fair knowledge of Arabic. The diagnosed spots of mistranslation, inaccurate translation, L1 interference, etc., should highlight the big challenges facing translators of literature. The reasons behind the difficulties are pinpointed and conclusions arrived at.

### **4. Literary Translation: Attributes and Difficulties**

The translation of literature is a noticeably challenging task especially when the translation includes two linguistically and culturally divergent languages such as Arabic and English. Literary translation enjoys a unique and discrete status compared with other types of translation. Due to the nature of literary translation, literary translators find themselves facing a lot of challenges ranging from moderate to daunting and invincible ones. They often attribute equal importance to both form and content of the texts they are translating. They therefore endeavor to preserve the syntactic structures, meaning, style, and tone of the original text in their translations. The text to be translated is then considered in its totality and not in its constituent parts (the words). This is a main reason why Arab EFL advanced-level students encounter obstacles in literary translation as they pay due attention to vocabulary items and literal renderings. (Lataiwish, 1995; Almarazig, 2013).

Another problem is that of translating emotions, feelings, humor, etc. Such a problem is not associated with linguistic aspects only, but rather with cultural aspects as well. Literary translators, in fact, translate more

than the meanings required; they translate the 'messages' contained in the SL text.

The translator also has to be aware of the effect latent in the original text. He / She needs to be highly competent to catch such an effect as it is closely related to the recipients' responses. Here, the literary translator should translate the text communicatively to obtain the required result (Newmark, 1988). Literary translators should be capable of reading between the lines, connecting the dots, and fathoming implicit meanings to secure a successful rendition into the target language.

One noticeable difficulty in translating literary texts is that of handling vocabulary items. Sometimes, this problem arises from lack of understanding the SL text. It may also be due to the absence of equivalents or the existence of a number of lexical counterparts. That is, some words are not "lexicalized" in the target language (Nida, 1964). The translator may therefore be obliged to opt for an approximate word instead. Another option for the translator is to use 'paraphrase' in an attempt to explain the word to arrive at the intended meaning, as any misinterpretation of the sought-after meaning could well conduce to pragmatic problems.

Moreover, literary translation performs an aesthetic function. In literary works, especially poetry, fiction and the short story, language is used as a tool of beauty to convey the themes, ideas, or points of view of the authors concerned. The aesthetic aspects in the literary text can be negatively affected when the translator misinterprets them. This should add a burden to the literary translator who should manipulate such aspects very carefully and skillfully.

These linguistic challenges are not the only hindrances facing literary translators. They, however, should be involved in handling cultural aspects as well. They should be sensitive to the manifold cultural features taking into account that language is a reservoir of thoughts, traditions, norms, behavior, lifestyle, etc., of the society concerned. The translation of cultural aspects may pose harder problems than semantic or linguistic aspects in an attempt to achieve an accurate and satisfactory translation as they are rather abstruse and can easily be misinterpreted (Nida, 1964; Newmark, 2001).

The distinctive style adopted by the author is another problem for literary translators. In their translations, they should work hard to preserve such a style. For some authors, however, it may be necessary to read carefully more than one work of the same author to ascertain his/her distinguishing characteristics.

It has now become evident that literary translation does not imply conveyance of form or content or both from L1 into L2. It is rather a creative process where the competent translator produces a rather 'new'

text. The translated text is far from being a replica of the SL text. In this context, Wechsler (1988) argues that literary translation requires from the translator to be the second author of the same text. (Cited in Al-Adwan and Aledwan, 2019) The translated text should thus become a reproduction of the original text. More than that, literary translation is in fact a “creation of a new original for a different readership.” (Bassnett, 2014, p. 177).

In the translation of novels, short stories or plays, the translator encounters the problem of coping with the ‘dialect’. Here, it is a common practice to use a dialect of the target language. Yet, as a decision-maker, the literary translator is confronted with the problem of choosing a specific dialect. Furthermore, the translator may need to undertake certain phonetic or morphological modifications to keep up with the target dialect. (Tawfeeq, 2020)

## **5. Discussion and Results**

### **5.1 Introductory Remarks**

The translation of short stories into other languages, including disparate ones, has increased noticeably lately because such translated texts have become a cultural and educational tool for students let alone the common readers (Syahrir, 2021). Linguistically speaking, the short story is distinguished by its precision, intense use of details, compactness, and economic use of words. Short story writers always strive to express deep meanings using only short spaces. Besides, short story leading authors such as Chekhov, Maupassant, O. Henry, Hemingway, and many others, use figurative language and stylistic techniques proficiently.

The present study has chosen Karim Abid’s collection of short stories entitled *Nights of Mr. Salman* (Sayyab Books, London, 2010). The author Karim Abid is an Iraqi prolific writer of short stories and poetry. He published articles and creative writings in local newspapers. His stories shed light on the inner conflicts of an array of personalities belonging to various life environments. They delineate a lucid picture of the Iraqi society especially the southern part of the country.

The stories were translated by Eric Winkel, a Ph.D. U.S. scholar and a translator. He is a man of broad experience including teaching in universities in different countries and working in an academic center. Abid’s anthology has six short stories. Due to the limited scope of this study, only two of these stories have been chosen as representative of these stories.

The present study seeks to investigate the linguistic and cultural barriers diagnosed in Eric Winkel's translation of two of Karim Abid’s anthology. As the stories reflect the cultural milieu of southern Iraq, the translator

tried hard to be faithful to the original text and has been keen to disclose the intended meaning. Be that as it may, a number of linguistic and cultural hurdles were unavoidable. By the way, Abid's use of standard Arabic in his stories should have facilitated the translator's task.

## 5.2 Types of Difficulties

The study will focus on investigating, with illustrative examples, the lexical, syntactic, semantic and cultural challenges diagnosed in the translation of the two stories.

### 5.2.1 Linguistic Difficulties

The translator of Abid's stories should have found his task thorny and knotty. As literary writers pay almost equally due attention to both form and content of their writings, linguistic aspects thus assume special importance.

#### 5.2.1.1 Lexical Difficulties

In the story entitled *قصة حب* (Love Story, pp. 13 – 33), the author writes *ظللت (ظلت) شيرين تتحدث عن أحزانها وذكرياتها وذكرياتها* (p. 15), translated by Winkel into "She kept on talking about her sorrows and sad memories ...". The word *وذكرياتها* is translated as "and sad memories". In fact, the original text uses two separate words, namely *أحزانها* (her sorrows), and *وذكرياتها* (memories). The word 'sad' is unnecessarily added as a modifier. The word 'memories' may well include happy moments as well. The translator here uses the addition strategy where it is not needed—some sort of interference. The author uses the phrase *في شارع خال*, translated into "empty streets" where the original singular is rendered into plural. On p. 17, Winkel translates the word *ضجيج* into 'sounds'—an inaccurate rendering. This is not the real meaning of the word; a better option is the word 'clamor' or 'turmoil'. The phrase *حين تعصرها* is mistranslated into "hugged me". It should have been translated into "... when you press my fingers", according to the context. The author uses the word *بحيرة* (lake), p. 25, which is mistranslated into "sea".

Lexical items continue to create hurdles for literary translators. Lack of equivalents between L1 and L2, besides misunderstanding the original text, are two basic reasons for lexical challenges. In Karim Abid's second story entitled *ضجيج البساتين* (A Sound in the Orchard), the phrase *رائحة القهوة* is translated into "the smells of coffee" (p. 37). The translation, however, does not reflect a full picture of the intended meaning in Arabic. An 'addition' strategy is needed here to complete the picture by stating "Arabic coffee"—only bitter black coffee is served in such occasions in Iraqi rural areas. The phrase *ورنة فناجينها*, translated into "clang of cups", is not accurate. A better lexical expressive alternative is "twinkle of cups", as the word 'twinkle' means a series of short and soft ringing sounds. It would be better to add the adjectives 'intermittent' and 'rhythmic' to the

noun 'twinkle' to delineate a vivid picture of the Arab coffee ceremony. The word المبتل is wrongly translated into "virginal"; the correct translation is simply "wet". The phrase بالزغاريد والأغاني (p. 39) is translated inaccurately into "the ululations of the singers". The translator here misunderstands the original text. First, the word الزغاريد means "the trilling cries of joy" especially performed by women. The word chosen by the translator, i.e. "ululations" subsumes the meaning 'wailing' or 'howling'—a contradiction to the wedding occasion. These trilling joyous sounds accompany the gunshots as is expressed in the original text. The translator could have resorted to the strategy of 'addition' by stating the "trilling cries of women". He should have translated the word الأغاني into "singing" as he has wrongly attributed the trilling cries into singers (men) and not women. The phrase في ثيابه العسكرية غير المرتبة is mistranslated into "his usual military uniform". He should have translated it into "his disorderly military uniform" to give the required meaning. The expression صوراً عدة is translated into "lots of pictures". This is a clear misunderstanding of the Arabic numerical system, as the word عدة actually means 'several' or 'some'. The translator also confuses the pronouns in Arabic when the phrase عندما جاءهم is translated into "... when they snuck into ...", turning the singular pronoun 'he' into the plural 'they'. The word أوصتها is wrongly translated into "ordered", originally meaning 'advised'.

The phrase عتمة الليل (p. 43) is mistranslated into "the black olive trees". The phrase simply means 'the darkness or dimness of night'. The expression "olive trees" is completely imposed on the text. Also, the statement وسحبها ألى البستان بهدوء is translated into "... and Mahmud grabbed her by her hand and took her off to the orchard and peace". He seems to have misunderstood the word بهدوء, an adverb in Arabic. The translator turned it into a noun, therefore mismatching the original meaning. He should have said 'quietly' and not "piece". The phrase ضجيج ههش is also wrongly translated into "a happy noise". The translator is seemingly misguided by the Arabic verb form of the word, i.e. ههش, meaning 'to feel happy'. The required meaning is "brittle noise". The statement وأحفر الأرض بالخنجر is translated into "I stabbed the earth". In fact, the word "stabbed" does not mean حفر; it rather means طعن, meaning "to push a knife into somebody"—a completely different verb. He should have used the word "dig". The word طبق (p. 45) is inaccurately translated into "tray". In rural areas, dough and then loaves are put in a rather big knitted hand-made plate made of fronds or reed. The translator could have resorted to calque or loan translation and used tabag for it, accompanied by a gloss or a footnote. The phrase بلمساته الباردة اللذيذة (p. 47) is translated into "with its touch," omitting the two adjectives الباردة اللذيذة (cold and tasteful), thus divesting the text of two important modifiers. The word شوكة is completely misunderstood by the translator, and rendered wrongly accordingly. It is translated into "a fork". The word



شوكة in this context means “a twig of a thorny plant”, which is locally used by farmers as a firewood in baking loaves. The statement *كي يتلون بحناء الفرحة* is translated into “... to bring about the joy”. Here, a ‘deletion’ strategy is unskillfully adopted by the translator. The translation should read as follows “so that the moon would be colored with the henna of joy”.

The phrase *وطلت تسبح ...* (p. 49) is wrongly translated into “eternally singing” instead of “swimming with ....” The word *هواجس* is translated into “disconcernation”—in fact, this word is not part of the English lexicon. A suitable word is ‘obsessions’. The phrase *عثرات الأيام* is wrongly translated into “for some days” confusing the word *عثرات* with the word *عشرات*. The phrase *الجنود المكلفين* (p. 55) is rendered as a “commissioned militia”, a translation which is incompatible with reality. In Iraq, during the period covered by the story, there were ‘commissioned soldiers’ as part of the compulsory military service for young men. The translator seems to be unaware of this.

#### 5.2.1.2 Syntactic Difficulties

Syntactic structures of language take translators into more challenging areas. As Arabic and English are two linguistically different languages, the burden on the literary translator is certainly more cumbersome. He / She therefore needs to undertake some adjustments and strategies to manipulate thorny areas. In his story “A Love Story”, the author states on p. 15 *لكنني لم أتوقع أن الأمر سيصل الى هذا الحد*, translated into “Still, I wasn’t prepared for it to go this far”. The translator resorts to ‘communicative translation’ where he seeks to retain the intended meaning without sticking literally to the syntactic structure of the original text. The author used a rather long and complex sentence (pp. 15-16) that goes as follows: *وبعد أستغرافها في هذه الحالة لم أعد أشعر بأنها تقصد تأنيبي أو تجاهلي بعد أنقراطي الطويل بسبب سفري الذي أستمر خمس سنوات لأكمال دراستي في باريس ، دون أن أهتم كثيرا بالتواصل معها لثقتي الزائدة بأنها ستنتظر أكثر من ذلك الى أن أعود ، لكنها نسيت أو أضطرت (فتزوجت)*. Any literal translation of such a sentence will surely lead to a syntactically unfamiliar English sentence. The translator tends to divide this rather long sentence into 3 sentences: “... with her being engrossed in this state, I couldn’t tell whether she wanted to punish me nor ignore me, for my long separation, for the journey I took for five years of higher education in Paris. I wasn’t too worried about staying in touch with her, as I was sure-- too sure-- that she would wait longer than she did for me until I returned. But she forgot, or was forced to marry.”

In the story “A Sound in the Orchard”, the phrase *وجسدها الهش الحزين* (p. 37) is rendered as “and her body bright, sad”. The translator seems to be under the influence of Arabic in that the two adjectives *الهش الحزين* follow the noun *جسدها*. He should have translated it as “and her frail and sad body”. The phrase *وأصوات إطلاق الرصاص بين وقت وآخر* is translated as “and the sounds of celebratory gunshots discharged now and then into the sky.” The translator here skillfully adopts the ‘addition’ strategy for the

sake of clarification; the words 'celebratory' and 'to the sky' serve both syntactic and cultural aspects. The author uses the phrase *عندما جاءهم* (p. 39) meaning "... when he came ...". The translator, however, mistranslates the third person pronoun 'he' into 'they'. As this mistaken pronoun is repeated a few times in the translation, one may conclude that this particularly may be attributed to some misunderstanding of the original text. Also, the phrase *والمشاعل تهز وتهز معها عتمة الليل* (p. 43), where the pronoun here is mistakenly attributed to the noun 'Laila' whereas the original text relates the pronoun to *المشاعل* (torches). Therefore, an English native speaker translator needs to work collaboratively with an Arabic informant to clarify and unmask linguistic nuances of this sort.

An example of inaccurate translation is noticed on page 45 when the word *صورك* (pictures), plural, is translated into "picture" (singular). This is repeated in other places impacting the theme of the story, as the word "pictures" symbolizes the happy memories of the past. Besides, the two phrases "... your face" and "There was still another picture" are added to the translation—an example of unnecessary addition strategy. The sentence *لقد تهشمت روجي وأنا أحفر الأرض كي أدفن صورك* is translated into "My spirit was smashed and I stabbed the earth to bury your picture ...." The translation is not functionally an accurate equivalent of the original text. The translator should have used the active voice form of the verb "... was smashed", i.e. 'smashed up' as the idea is closely related to the woman's personal frustration and psychological defeat, and not the influence of any other factor. The phrase *وأنأ أحفر الأرض* should have been translated using 'past continuous tense' instead of 'simple past' to convey the intended meaning. The sentence then should be rendered as follows: "My spirit smashed up while I was digging the earth to bury your pictures." The following statement *تهشمت روجي* (My spirit was smashed) is repeated to emphasize the idea. The translated text wrongly incorporates this phrase into the preceding sentence "... your picture that destroyed my spirit", an indicator of the translator's personal interpretation of the text. Even the pronoun in the phrase *من يحفر لها* is mistranslated here, as the author really means "the pictures" (them) while the translator opts for "her", a pronoun that may refer to the woman.

The past continuous tense is also appropriately needed in translating the phrase *وهي ترتب قطع العجين وتجاوره* (p. 45) translated into "... she prepared the pieces of dough and lined them up." The phrase should read as follows: "... while she was laying out ... and lining up them up". The same inappropriate tense is also used in translating the statement *أخذت النار* translated into "... she ate dates and threw the pits into the fire." The tense needs correcting into "... and started eating dates and throwing pits into the fire."

A misuse of the proper tense is also observed in the statement *كانت تستنشق الهواء بعمق وتكلم الأشجار* (p. 49), where the translator uses the simple

past tense. The past continuous tense is definitely more harmonious with the meaning and image portrayed: “She was inhaling the air deeply and talking to the trees ....” Instead of the translator’s option “She inhaled the air deeply and spoke to the trees...”.

### 5.2.1.3 Semantic Difficulties

Semantic aspects in translation are pertinent to the meaning intended by the author. In the first story, the author writes *وأحيانا ترانا في المرآة* (p. 15), translated into “Sometimes she would see us, staring in the mirror.” The word “staring” is added unnecessarily to the text, therefore imparting a meaning not stated in the original context. The phrase *حين نعصرها أي (أصابعي)* (p. 17), meaning ‘... when you press my fingers ...’ is mistranslated into “hugged me”, which is far away from the aimed-at meaning. The statement *أنني بسبب غلطتي معها لم أتزوج* (p. 21) is also rendered inaccurately. The narrator, according to the original story, attributes the fault of not marrying her to himself. The translator, however, proposes an opposite idea when he renders the text into “... that it’s her fault I’m still not married”.

The phrase *وتصلي على النبي* (p. 37) is translated as “while saying the ritual blessings”. The translation, however, is not adequate as it gives a general impression only. In a rural community in southern Iraq, saying God’s blessings and peace upon Prophet Mohammad, in such occasions, is an ingrained tradition which is only partially expressed in Winkel’s translation. The statement *الله أستغفرت* is translated into “asked forgiveness”. The translation should have included the word ‘God’ to be “asked God’s forgiveness” to denote the specific divine forgiveness.

The phrase *وتصاعد أطلاق النار بالزغاريد والأغاني* (p. 39) is translated as “... and the sound of gunshots mixed with the ululations of the singers”. The translation is not adequate from a semantic perspective. To approximate the original text, the translation can be reshaped as follows: “...and the escalating gunshots were accompanied with joyous trilling sounds of joy and singing...”. The word “ululations” is not appropriate as it implies ‘mourning’ and ‘howling’, which contradicts the atmosphere of the wedding celebrations. Besides, these joyous sounds are uttered by women only while the translator attributes that to “the singers”, a sheer interference in the text, let alone the fact that the original text points to one singer only and not “singers”.

The phrase *وأن يأتي بالقمر الى شفيتها* (p. 47) is translated as “... and the moon would come to her lips ....”. In fact, the Arabic text projects a metaphorical meaning encompassing the idea that the man himself, Sabih, would bring the moon to her as a sign of profound love. The translation, therefore, exhibits a converse idea by stating that the moon will come to her directly. The phrase *بأن يحني كفيها بيديه* seems especially problematic for the translator. He translates it as “...he would take her hand in his ...”. As such,

he either misreads the word *يَحْنِي* (to henna) for *يَحْنِي* (to bend or twist), or misunderstands the word being a typically Iraqi culture-specific word. The phrase *كي يتلون بحناء الفرح* is only partially translated into “to bring about the joy”. A more accurate translation is “... so that it (the moon) would be colored with the henna of joy”.

The phrase *وروحه التعبى من عثرات الأيام* (p., 51) is wrongly translated into “... and (his) spirit stilled, weary, for some days”. An appropriate rendering is “... and his weary soul impacted by the many problems he has faced”. In the phrase “... for some days,” the word “some” is most probably an example of not recognizing the real meaning of the word *عثرات* (troubles and problems) and confusing it with *عشرات* (some). The phrase *سيقاضونه أمام الله* (p. 55) is translated into “... would call him to witness before God”. Semantically, this translation is not correct from a legally religious perspective. It should have been translated as “... would prosecute him on Judgment Day”.

#### 5.2.2 Cultural Difficulties

Translation problems facing literary translators are not confined to linguistic aspects only. Rather, cultural aspects constitute more obstacles to them. These cultural challenges originate due to the big differences between the two languages concerned (Arabic and English) in reflecting lifestyle, ways of thinking, national identity, traditions, customs, norms, etc. In this respect, Newmark (2001) considers ‘culture’ as “the greatest obstacle to translation, at least to the achievement of an accurate and decent translation” (p. 328). Moreover, cultural difficulties are even more problematic and harder than linguistic ones. (Lataiwish, 1995; Brooks, 1968).

In the story “A Sound in the Orchard”, the phrase *وتصلي على النبي* (p. 37) is translated into “... saying the ritual blessings”. The translation is inadequate as it gives a general impression only. The phrase here is Arabic culture-specific embodying an ingrained religious ritual especially practiced by common people. This is only partially expressed by the translator. Here, the woman vows God’s blessings and peace upon Prophet Mohammad while washing her daughter—a ritual well-known in Iraqi southern rural areas. By so doing, the translation obliterates the local color. The phrase could have been translated as follows “while saying God’s blessings and peace upon Prophet Mohammad”. For the mother, such a ritual is a benediction and a good omen for her daughter. The expression *رائحة القهوة ورنة فناجينها*, translated into “...and the smells of coffee and clang of cups ...”, is also culture-specific. First, the word ‘Arabic’ should be added to the word ‘coffee’ to be “Arabic coffee”, which is served purely black and rather bitter in such an occasion. The phrase *رنة فناجينها*, translated into “clang of cups”, is not quite adequate, as this word implies a “loud ringing sound of metal being struck” (Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary). In such occasions, Arabic coffee is served

by a specific person who gives coffee to celebrators, sticking to certain strict traditions while tinkling his cups in a melodious manner. The ‘image’ is missing in the translation.

The word *دشاديش*, p. 39, is translated into “white outfits” or “white uniform” (p. 42). The translation is far from adequate here. The word ‘outfit’ implies that this type of clothes is worn for a particular occasion or purpose. The translator should have borrowed the word from Arabic into English, i.e. *dishdasha* with an explanatory footnote. Borrowing or calque is sometimes important in translation as it adds “a shade of specificity in the foreign object or institution.” (Fawcett, 1997:34). It further preserves a foreignizing element and fidelity, thus creating a local touch. By the way, the *dishdasha* is part and parcel of rural men’s customary clothes. The phrase *بالزغاريد والأغاني* is translated into “ululations of the singers”. The translation is not correct, as the translator seems to misunderstand the context. What is going on in the story is a wedding party—a highly joyous and ecstatic occasion. The word “ululations” gives the impression that it is a sad event where people howl and wail.

The word *الطبق* (p. 45) is translated into “tray”. In the Iraqi southern countryside areas, women use a hand-made tray made of palm leaves. It is part of their traditional handicraft. The translator could have opted for the word *tabag*. The phrase *بأن يحبّي كفيها بيديه* (p. 47) is translated into “he would take her hand in his ...”, where an important cultural manifestation is absent. The word *حناء* is left out although it is culture-specific being part of the cultural traditions in the countryside areas and suburbs of Iraq. The translator should have borrowed the word into English “henna” with a footnote to elucidate the meaning. As such, another alien element would be added to the translation, which is of interest to the foreign reader, no doubt. Such a ‘deletion’ strategy is also adopted in translating the phrases *كي يتلون بحناء الفرح*, translated into “... bring about the joy” and *أن القمر سيظل ملونا بحناء فرحنا* into “... the moon would change color with our joy”.

In translating the statement *بقيت آثار أصابعه على الحناء ، تلك التي وشم بها ... أبواب الولي الصالح وحيطانه ، السيد الذي مات عاشقا، السيد سليل النبي* (p. 49), the translation seems awkward and inadequate. It goes as follows “... there still remained the trace on his fingers of the henna, with which he daubed the doors of the shrine of Salih, the master who died from unrequited love, the master who was a descendent of the Prophet.” Paradoxically, the translator tends here to translate the word *الحناء* into “henna”—a term the translator has already ignored. Again, the translator misunderstands the religious ritual delineated here by the author. First, the traces of fingers are left on the henna that “daubed” the doors, and not the interpretation given by the translator, where he daubed the doors with henna using his fingers—another religious ritual. The phrase *الولي الصالح* seems quite misleading for the translator. The word *ولي* means ‘a

holy man' (a saint in Christian sense), while the word *الصالح* is not used in the translation as a proper name as it has been wrongly interpreted by the translator; it rather means 'virtuous' or 'upright', an adjective. The word *السيد* is translated into "master", which is totally irrelevant and meaningless in all its various meanings. The word, in fact, means a person who is supposed to be a descendant of the family of Prophet Mohammad. Such a person is highly respected and revered in rural communities. He is marked by a distinctive dress on his head. The translator again brings about a cultural gap, so bereaving the foreign reader of an interesting cultural point. He could have used the loan word 'sayyed' with an explanatory note.

The cultural aspects of literary texts may sometimes then constitute invincible obstacles for translators especially those who are not speakers of the language concerned. This is directly attributed to the peculiar nature of each language drawn by its own ways of lexicalizing cultural aspects (mainly concepts and meanings). A literary translator therefore has to be bicultural and not only linguistically bilingual.

## 6. Conclusion

It has become evident from the findings of the present study that literary translation, among other types of translation, is an arduous and knotty discipline. Due to the distinctive and peculiar nature of the language of literature, translators of literature should be highly experienced, skillful, talented and well-versed in this field. With all these aspects, an experienced translator like Eric Winkel has encountered a lot of challenges, both linguistic and cultural, in translating Karim Abid's short stories into English. In fact, even highly experienced translators cannot shun encountering a plethora of linguistic and cultural hardships in their literary translations. Linguistic and cultural disparities between divergent languages like Arabic and English put an extra onus on literary translators to explore appropriate outlets for the hindrances cropping up now and then. Literary translators thus find themselves obliged to adopt certain adjustments including strategies such as addition, deletion, paraphrase, calque, substitution, condensation, expansion, description, etc. to cope with the linguistic subtleties and peculiarities expected. These findings go in conformity with the present research paper's hypothesis (1.3) regarding the manifold challenges of literary translation.

Literary translation is not concerned with conveying equivalent words or meanings only; it is rather a recreative process which gives priority to the context, the spirit of the SL text and the original author's intention. The literary translator, indeed, needs to "be the second author of the source text". (Wechsler, 1998, quoted in Al-Adwan and Aledwan, 2019). This is especially true when it comes to cultural aspects. In this context,

BaniKalef and Abu Naser (2019) maintain that some expressions are "specific to a given culture in terms of their linguistic structure, semantic denotation, and their socio-cognitive relevance."(p. 81)

## 7. Recommendations

The study comes out with the following recommendations:

- a. Students of translation (both M.A. and B.A. levels) should be trained to refine their creative and cognitive abilities to be more prepared to cope with literary texts.
- b. They should be encouraged and helped to read works of various literary genres to promote their linguistic and cultural reservoirs. This would surely help them in better understanding of literary texts and then translating them.
- c. Future academic studies on literary translation need to shed more light on the Arabic short stories, novels, plays and poetry. Studies are still scarce in Arabic-English literary translation. Therefore, collaborative work between Arab and Western universities is direly needed to undertake high-quality research on literary translation.

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