

Nira Caridi

Creativity in Translating Poetry

Introspective Study

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to track **poetry translation processes** from a native language, Hebrew, into a second language, Arabic, and reflect them on the basis of self-reporting. It focuses on a collection of poems, including thirty-one written by Nissim Caridi, most of which appear in two compilations published in 1989 and 1991 **‘Misholei Dror’** – (*Paths of Freedom*) and **‘Ba’boker Ba’boker Ane’nei Techelet’**– (*On a Morning of Light Blue Clouds*) and on the poem **‘Haya La’ad’**- (*Lives Forever*), published, like many others, after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, God rest his soul.

The study is empiric and introspective, documenting and describing phenomena while focusing on multifarious aspects of unique to the translation of poetry, **creativity** and diverse modes of expression.

From a methodological point of view, analysing my own translation process in a prism of personal practice and experience, while referring to and maintaining an affinity with models and theories of poetry translation processes, could introduce noise, or even “pollution” to the objective research process. The study’s stated methodological limits in the analysis of this poetry collection, therefore, relate to the theoretical and research literature review

The hypothesis at the core of this study is that in order to preserve the source text, poetry requires particular translation skills in three central areas: content, shape, rhythm and sound.

A. Content: An attempt is made to express and reflect accurately both the source text's overt message and the "spirit" concealed between the lines of the poem that convey additional meanings and nuances.

B. Shape: Achieving a faithful rendition of the text in two main axes:

1. **Grammatical-syntactical structures** – reviewing the gap between the normative grammatical-syntactical structures in the source language and those of the target language – a gap which sometimes has to diverge from the source language's structure to an alternative structure in the target language.

2. **Artistic elements** – choosing appropriate translation strategies in order to create/manufacture a good, faithful rendition of the source text by reconstructing its artistic elements, or, alternatively, compensating for their loss in cases where they cannot be adequately expressed in the target language.

C. Rhythm and Sound: The gap created between the tonal-melodic structure of the poem in the target text and that of the source text often results in the need to move away from the direct denotation of one expression or another, or to add words which did not exist in the source text. The objective is to retain appropriate rhyming that will enhance the translated poem – the target text – and reconstruct the poem's tonal-melodic facet. In my opinion, this facet constitutes an important element without which the value of the poetic experience for the Arab target reader, who is accustomed to rhythmic Arabic poetry, would be damaged inestimably.

As part of the **literary review**, the following subjects are presented:

- Theoretical models that are concerned with **poetry translation processes** in relation to the genre's distinctive characteristics, and the translational difficulties that result.

- The issue of **translational directionality** from the aspect of the debate with respect to which translational directionality is preferable – the accepted traditional approach of translating from a second language into a mother tongue or vice versa.
- **A chronological, historical review** of translations of literary works from Hebrew to Arabic in accordance with Kiel’s study.
- **Positioning the translated corpus** both in relation to the “multi-system” theory, and as translation into a minority language, while examining its status in the “multi-system” of the target literature and its culture.
- Discussing the issue of **visibility** – examining translation as a visible or invisible craft subject to strategies chosen by the translator, which either do not aspire to adjust the translation to the norms of the target language, or which consciously adjust the source text to norms, ideologies and values that govern the target language at any given time.
- **“Upgrading”** the source text – presentation of some ethical aspects of this issue through a discussion on whether a translator is allowed to “upgrade” the source text, and if so, to what extent, and shedding light on the consequences resulting from such practice.
- **Sharing relevant features** – introducing the problematic character of the attempt to restore the relevant features of a source text; in other words, the specific traits characterizing the source text that are naturally genre-dependant and derived from its character and essence.
- **The compensation mechanism** – an overview of the many and varied tactics available to translators to compensate for a translational loss.
- A debate on **intertextuality** – a definition of the concept and a presentation of its consequences on translation and translation research.
- The concept of **paradigm** – choosing between the diverse lexical alternatives that arise during the process of translation.
- The use of **binominals** of **synonyms** and **synonym “relatives”** – that is, the use of synonyms in sequence, either **free**, or **conjoint** combinations.

The mirroring process, which is the principal part of the paper, deals with three central subjects:

- a. **The process of translation in three poems**, which involves examining the different phases – source versus target text.
- b. **The process of translation in a profile of artistic tools**, including mapping the artistic tools in the source text, while examining their reconstruction or non-reconstruction in the target text.
- c. **Presentation of the inner struggles, difficulties and obstacles that accompany the translational process** in relation to three main areas of reference: lexical, rhythm and rhyming, grammar and syntax.

The unique contribution made by this study is its presentation of an internal and external translational journey capable of reflecting the translational process on the actual experience and work of translating, as well as on the translator's inner struggles and frustration on the one hand, and the challenge posed by translation – specifically the translation of poetry – on the other. The underlying significance of the study's contribution lies in its mapping of the translation process and its presentation of the strategies applied all with the objective of producing an appropriate, adequate, high-quality translation that faithfully reflects the spirit of the source text in relation to content, while simultaneously aspiring to achieve acceptance from the target reader as a pleasant experience in keeping with his or her language, culture and spiritual heritage.

These contributions have the power to *promote* the craft of translation and ensure that it will create/manufacture work that inspires deep emotional identification in the target reader, often leaving the impression that it is an authentic source text written in the reader's own language.

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