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Investigating Ethnolinguistic Theory across Language Communities

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ABSTRACT

In 1990, Prof. M. A. Sa'Adeddin proposed his ethnolinguistic theory whose aim is to reach a viable theory that can account for the various cultural barriers of translation across language communities. With a very practical interest in teaching students how to understand meaning of a given text before going on to translate it, this researcher analysed some texts in the light of the ethnolinguistic theory. It is almost taken for granted that for one to know the individual words of a sentence, so to speak, does not guarantee a full understanding of the sentence and eventually of the text. Problems related to the reading phase in the translating process can be ascribed to failure on the part of the translator or trainee to account for such areas as addresser-addressee, norm of interpretation, intertextuality and text acts. What is striking, though, is the fact the concept of 'equivalence' itself seems to need reformulation in the light of Sa'Adeddin's ethnolinguistic theory, which depends mainly on shifting focus from the text to the translator who will play the role of the comparative agent.

The Ethnolinguistic Theory of Sa'Adeddin has yet to be tested. To test the theory, the researcher chose the most culture-bound text that defied all students of English at the English department at an Arab university, namely Isra University. The ethnolingusitic theory was then applied. Relevant analysis and discussion in this paper has proved the validity of this theory with the recommendation of using it in teaching translation and in translating.

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

This paper seeks to contribute to previous efforts on the pedagogy of translator training, with the idea that our translation students – at least in my country Jordan- are in need of more practical and viable training and fewer theoretical presentations on how translation can be done and then mastered at a later stage. In a previous paper (Abu-Risha: 2006), my concern was to establish the necessary rubrics and courses needed to be introduced into an efficient translation curriculum. One of those proposed courses related to Reading Skills which will be dealt with in this research.

When asked a simple answer to the question: "What does translating involve?" one would assert that it is a process that involves three successive steps: reading, thinking (of how to solve the problem of non-equivalence) then rendering, or to put it differently: reading, decoding then encoding. It would therefore be very logical to say that to improve the skills of a translation trainee, each of the aforementioned steps must be dealt with effectively. Reading, being the first step in this tripartite

process, seems to be instrumental in rendering a correct translation, for any incorrect reading will lead to incorrect translation.

There can be a multitude of problems facing students in reading for translation purposes, beginning with unfamiliar words, difficult collocations, or difficult structure on the phrase and clause levels (see Baker 1992). But even a simple text that uses no sophisticated words or structure can be misleading for the translator if it is culture-specific and in fact "no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its centre the structure of natural language" (Lotman 1978: 211-232).

Any study of translating problems at one isolated level, therefore, would not suffice for the training of translators. And a translation theory that concerns itself only with one level (lexical problems for example) would be doomed to fail to account for the problems of translating. To explain this, let us see the following interesting verses Nos. 71 and 73 from Surat Al-Zumar from the Holy Quran:

وسيق الذين كفروا إلى جهنم زمرا حتى إذا جاؤوها فتحت أبوابها...

wa seeqa allazena kafaroo ila jahannama zumaran hatta iza ja'oha futihat abwabuha

. وسيق الذين اتقوا ربهم إلى جهنم زمر حتى إذا جاؤوها وفتحت أبوابها...

wa seeqa allazena 'amanoo ilal jannati zumaran hatta iza ja'oha wa futihat abwabuha [1]

(Holy Quran 1983: 466)

A good translation of the word *seeqa* (سيق) that occurred in the two verses would likely be "were driven" and "were escorted" respectively. Choosing the correct sense of the word in the target language, here English, is solely dependent on context. Another interesting point, culturally speaking, is the cohesive device *wa* (و), the equivalent of the conjunction 'and' in English, that has been used only in the second verse. The conjunction wa (و) serves here not only as a cohesive device but also as a temporal partition between two phases, for while the infidels find themselves thrown into the hellfire on reaching the Gates of Hell, the believers in the second verse have to wait until the Prophet arrives in Heaven, opens the Gates and then is the first one to enter[2]. So there is a temporal distance between the arrival of the believers and the opening of the gates, which is linguistically represented by the use of the conjunction *wa* (و).

Cultural awareness which is triggered in texts, is the set of values and beliefs which are prevalent within a given society or section of a society. It could refer to the achievements of a society in art, music, theatre and literature, to the habits, customs, social behaviour and assumptions about the world by a group of people, or could refer, as social discourse, to the social knowledge and interactive skills which are required in addition to the language system (McCarthy & Carter 1994: 150-151).

To look at a text from a cultural point of view means to "explore the ways in which forms of language, from individual words to complete structures, encode something of the beliefs and values held by the language user" (*ibid*: 150). When the text is full of the 'signs' that trigger cultural awareness, it becomes very difficult for the translator to understand what he or she reads, not to mention to know what to write in the target language. This means that special techniques should be devised in order to make a cultural text understandable.

So, the main instrumental factor, or the so called focal point, of the whole translation process is the translator himself or herself. This assumption seems to be in line with Sorvali, who stressed that the translator is a creative being whose role must by no means be overlooked (Sorvali 1998).

Again, ethnolinguistic theory (Sa'Adeddin 1990) tried to solve the problem of equivalence in translation by shifting focus from the text to the translator. According to ethnolinguistic theory, the translator plays a number of interrelated roles. The translator is a reader of the source text (ST), a perceiver and a producer of the target text (TT). Most importantly, the translator is an ethnographer because he or she deals with the experience of the source language and that of the target language. The translator according to this view is a comparative agent who tries to match the experience of the ST to that of the TT. Thus, Sa'Adeddin agrees with Beaugrande that "equivalence is the equivalence of the participants" (Beaugrande & Dressler 1981).

2. Rationale, Objectives and Methodology

"What is your judgment on breaking one's fasting in a Ramadan[3] day if the sun does not set until midnight?" This was the question asked by a 'fool' to a *faqeeh*[4] and that question was enough to have him deemed a fool by the *faqeeh*. Calling the man a fool seems to have also been affirmed through the inclusion of this anecdote among other authentic ones in a splendid collection by Ibn Al-Jawzi. (Ibn Al-Jawzi 2007)

Elsewhere on the Internet (see for instance Islam QA), however, you read about places in this world where the sun does not set for a whole period of six months, a fact which refutes the 'stupidity' of the man's strange question to the *faqeeh*.

In the light of present knowledge about Earth and the Sun, when the above anecdote is looked upon by the reader without its context, the enquirer would not be deemed stupid at all. An informed reader would likely feel at a loss to understand the intention of one who tells a

decontextualised version of the story. It is unlikely that the very word 'stupid' would spring into the 'informed' reader's mind in the light of the facts revealed by astronomy. Conversely, in our modern times, this question is wholly legitimate and requires the *fuqaha* (Jurisprudents) to give a plausible answer.

It is good and equally easy to say that the key to translating such an anecdote would be 'context'. But, what is context? Is it the 'text surrounding the word or the passage' or "the circumstances or events that form the environment within which something exists or takes place", as defined by Encarta Dictionary (Microsoft Encarta 1999)? What are the components of context? Would it include "participants in speech events, the action taking place, other relevant features useful in making statements about meaning?" (Hatim & Mason 1990: 37) Or is it pragmatics (who is talking to whom, when, where under what conditions and in what manner?) with its speech acts and text acts that would better define what 'context' is?[5] An equally important and legitimate question to ask is: even after deciding what context is, how can the translator benefit from the contextual components of a text in rendering an idiomatic translation into the other language?

Going back to Ibn Al-Jawzi's anecdote, the contextual challenge is tremendous. Let us first have a literal translation of the anecdote. For the purposes of clarity, a literal translation is used to preserve the form of the original Arabic (see appendix):

> **The sitting companion of Abi Yousof**
> Taher Al-Zahri reportedly said: "A man used to sit in the company of Abu Yousof, then he kept silent for long, then Abu Yousof said to him: "Won't you talk?" He said: "I will. When does a fasting person break his fasting?" He said: "When the sun sets." He said: "Then, what if it did not set until midnight?" Then Abu Yousof laughed and said: "You were right in keeping silent; I was wrong in trying to make you talk" Then he cited long-metered lines of poetry: I wonder at the self-belittling rusty-tongued, and the silence of the erudite. Silence is the cover of man's mind. Let one speak to be an open book!" Reported from Abul Hasan Al-Madani is that he said: A donkey of Abi Al-Jahm bin Atiyyah was stolen, so he said: "By God! My Lord! No one else could have taken my donkey except You, and you know its whereabouts, so give it back to me." (Al-Jawzi 2007. Literal translation by the author)

Problematic areas in the original Arabic are plentiful and must be taken into account by the translator. Reproduced below is the ethnolinguistic checklist based on ethnolinguistic theory, followed by the explanation of some points therein in relation to the above cited anecdote:

Sa'Adeddin's Heuristic Checklist- The Ethnolinguistic Theory (Explanation of the items is given based on the above anecdote)

A. Message Content Formative Element
1. Norm of Interpretation

- All Muslims, adults at least, know it as a basic fact, that Muslims must fast in Ramadan all the day until the sun sets.

- People were unlikely to know about distant areas where the sun remains unset for a consecutive six months period.

2. Norm of Interaction
Writer to reader with the writer showing a good mastery of Arabic.

3. Text End
3.1. Main Goal
Preserving the quality of written Arabic

3.2. Sub-Goal
Entertaining the reader and possibly making him/her laugh and making the reader learn from the faults of others. Ben Jonson's "To mix profit with your pleasure" (Johnson 1962: 8) fits here.

4. Genre
Narrative with a line of poetry, not uncommon in Arabic narratives. It also has the reporting characteristic of the Prophet's tradition[6].

5. Key
Serious. (Humour is not achieved through verbal utterances.)

6. Topic
6.1. Main Topic
The sitting companion of Abu-Yousof

6.2. Sub topic(s)
Story of Abil Jahm bin Atiyyah

7. Text Situation
7.1. Setting
A part of a chapter in a book about anecdotes

7.2. Scene
Somewhere during the Abbasid era

8. Participants
8.1. Sender
The sender by definition is the transmitter, "who codes the signal that is sent through the communication channel to the receiver" (Renkema 1993: 33). In our case, the sender is the same as the addresser. Should the anecdote be narrated by a newspaper columnist, the addresser would be the columnist. This would affect inter alia the wording, structure and text end of the original anecdote.

8.2. Addresser
Ibn Al-Jawzi

8.3. Receiver/Audience
The receiver's role is not to passively receive the text but to decode. The receivers of this given text are the same as the addresseesS. (Should the anecdote, as suggested earlier, be published in a newspaper, then the newspaper readers are the immediate audience while readers in the Abbasid era are to be the direct addressees).

8.4. Addressee
- Immediate Audience: All readers of Arabic in general.
- Intended audience: People living in the Abbasid era especially those who need to improve their Arabic rhetoric. They seem to live close to the writer as he mentions the names of a number of people.

9. Channel
Written as spoken, Arabic prose developed to address the ear. (This must be kept in mind to know how utterances in Arabic, made to address the ear, should be translated into English, which usually addresses the eye.)

10. Variety of Expression

B. Text Acts Structure
A given text according to the text act analysis is divided into sequences. Each sequence has a theme and a function (a text act) [my own comment]

C. Message Form Constituents
1. Print Substance (In some cases, Sound Substance)
1.1. System of orthography: Arabic

1.2. Paragraphing
Two anecdotes are provided in one paragraph instead of having them in two separate paragraphs. This could mean that the writer might feel the first anecdote is not funny enough so that he adds immediately another one to amuse the reader and to magnify the effect of the text on him/her.

1.3. Punctuation
The Arabic text, typical for Arabic at large, does not use punctuation as used in English. Instead, cohesive devices are used like: *fa* 'then, so, therefore' and *wa* 'and'. These as Sa'Adeddin indicates "mark the boundaries of anticipatory constituents" (Sa'Adeddin 1990: 29).

2. Text grammatical dependencies
2.1 (Macro) grammatical dependencies – Cohesion
2.1.1. Junctives

Wa 'and' and *fa* 'so, then' are used extensively in the anecdote to maintain cohesion. *Wa* at the very beginning of the anecdote gives the indication that this one has been preceded by other anecdotes. As for *fa*, it is employed to introduce an event that happened immediately after another one.

2.1.2. Grammatical/ Information structure cohesion

2.1.3. Ellipsis

2.1.4. Parallelism, etc.

2.2. (Micro) grammatical dependencies
2.2.1. Sentences
Run-on sentences are provided in Arabic. The boundary between two sentences is usually marked through intonation. The reader is expected to know how intonation is used by the writer if the text is to be read aloud.

2.2.2. Clauses

2.2.3. Phrases

With regard to translation training, I have taught translation and reading skills for six years at about seven universities and institutions in Jordan. It appeared to me that students who were not sufficiently exposed enough to the English culture (which is the broader context of any authentic text written by an English writer or a semi-native English writer at least) failed to render an acceptable translation of English texts into Arabic. Reading skills students also failed to answer questions of comprehension. One student even said: "I checked all the words in the dictionary, went through the text again, but understood nothing!"

The first problem stems form their ignorance of the experiential and communal memories of the English people. Such ignorance left an unbridgeable gap in understanding the source text, and it was not uncommon that students tended to fill this gap in the light of their own native Arabic experiential memory, which might account for the so-called negative transfer in translation. The result would be a distorted and somehow meaningless translation.

The second problem lies in the misconception, cherished among students of translation and students of reading skills alike, that the monolingual dictionary is the magical wand that would solve all problems when dealing with new texts for them.

The third and most significant problem is that students are not equipped enough with reading and translation strategies that would enable them to understand and then translate the text.

With the aim of accounting for the cultural difficulties encountered by trainees/translators at work, a highly culture-specific text has been chosen to examine it from an ethnolinguistic perspective. The text was chosen because it was taught by me on an advanced course in reading skills for second and third year students of English Language, Literature and Translation at Al-Isra University, Jordan. All 60 students found it impossible to comprehend the text they were assigned to read. Sa'Adeddin's approach was followed to see whether they could understand the text or not. Sa'Adeddin in fact suggested "grouping Dell Hyme's categories in a hierarchy comprising Message Content and Message Form linked by the level of 'Text Acts' which refers to 'the ideas as sequentially mapped on text structure in relation to the norm of interaction in a given language community" (Sa'Adeddin 1990: 22).

This paper will not however look into all elements of the ethnolinguistic theory. The textual analysis will be confined to Message Content Formative Element and the Text Act Structure.

3. Corpus Analysis and Discussion

The following is an ethnolinguistic reading of "New Face of Ageism", an article that was reproduced by Cambridge University Press in a book aiming to teach reading skills called *Reading 4* (Greenball and Pye 2003). The article can be found in the appendix.

3.1. Message Content Formative Element

3.1.1 Norm of Interpretation

Knowledge of how people in the Western world look at old people. This could be further explained in details as follows:

- "The world or this corner of it" refers to the Western world. Here students should be alert that what they are going to read in the article may not be compatible with their own experiential memory.

- "benign grandparents": Students need to have background information about cancer. Benign tumours are almost harmless while malignant ones are fatal. This phrase was confusing to students, who were Arabs. I asked them about how they look at old people. The old were in the eyes of the students highly respectable people in society. Kind, wise and loving are among the many positive adjectives given by students to characterise old people.

- "Orthopaedic boots, walking frames and Horlicks" are also not common attributes given to old people in the students' experiential memory. Horlicks is a brand of hot malt drink particularly popular with old people.

- "Open University degrees". An open university accepts students regardless of their age.

- "Joan Collins and Jane Fonda": Two actresses in the West. They look very young although they are in fact old. Students here may match these two characters with the well known Arab singer Sabah, who looks attractive although she is old.

- "You didn't have to swap *denim* for *crimplene*, when the free bus *pass* arrived."
Denim, the fabric of jeans, is a symbol of youth while crimplene is a soft fabric used in the manufacture of clothes, especially popular with older people

- In the UK people who are over 60 are entitled to a free bus pass. It has now become a joke among people who are about to retire.

Thus the above means: "When a person becomes old, he or she does not need to stop wearing clothes that are suitable for the young only and wear, instead, special clothes suitable for old people."

- "… at the age when *our* foremothers were spent and sagging": In the past, old people –in the West of course- did not take care of their appearance but today many old people are quite glamorous. It is very important here to note that the pronoun 'our' refers to the Western people. It is not a general 'our' that could refer to all human beings.

- "these women were lithe and sizzling, effervescing with sex": Examples of glamorous older people such as are Joan Collins, a British actress, and who are now sex symbols at the age of 60+.

- "… ageing is less about running a marathon and more about staff in residential homes intruding without knocking when residents are in the loo": An example of bad practice at residential care homes for old people (staff not allowing the old residents the privacy of going to the toilet on their own).

- "Dundee cake": Another example of a kind of cake, from Scotland, that is associated with old people.

- "Peter Pan is not an appropriate icon for our greying times": Peter Pan is a fictional character who never got old – the author feels this should not be the role model for old people. We should enjoy getting old!

3.1.2. Norm of Interaction: (insider to insider)

An English woman is talking to people who understand English and who share with the writer the same experiential memory, so it is from an insider to an insider. In translation or in teaching the text as a reading comprehension exercise for Arab students, the norm of interaction will change into insider-outsider, which requires that the translator explains in footnotes some important points that are not likely to be understood by the target readers of the translation.

3.1.3 Text End

- Main Goal: giving a general idea of how old people are looked at in the Western world.

- Sub Goal: arguing that the two stereotypes should be abandoned in favour of a compromise.

3.1.4 Genre

A newspaper opinion

3.1.5 Key

Serious but sarcastic sometimes in dealing with things the writer is opposing.

3.1.6 Topic

Current stereotypes of old people in the Western world.

3.1.7 Text Situation

Setting: An article in a book aimed at enhancing the reading comprehension skills of foreign students. The text has been detached from its real source.

3.1.8 Participants

- Sender: Cambridge University Press writers of *Reading 4*
- Addresser: a female writer on a British newspaper
- Immediate Audience: British readers only
- Intended Audience: Learners of English as a foreign language.

3.1.9 Channel

Written.

3.1.10 Variety of Expression

Standard English but colloquial English can be sensed in the writer's use of contractions.

3.2. Text Act Structure
It is important for a text analyst to consider the semiotic dimension of the text at hand as it

> regulates the interaction of the various discoursal elements as 'signs'. The interaction takes place, on the one hand, between various signs within texts and, on the other hand, between the producer of these signs and the intended receivers" (Hatim and Mason 1997: 101)

Therefore, the reader should sometimes consider certain elements of the text not as mere utterances (i.e., words, phrases etc.) but also as a sort of 'living sign' which triggers a network of interactions that must be appreciated if a text is to be optimally understood. It is of course equally important that these interactions are understood and correctly rendered into the target language by the translator.

Looking into the semiotics of the text entails a text-act analysis, which could be charted (for the purposes of this study) as follows:

1- Paragraph (1)

	Text Act	Utterance(s)
Sequence 1 Thesis (1) cited to be opposed	Setting the scene 1	"Until recently ... proper domain"
	Setting the scene 2	"But then it all began ... rejuvenated"
	Aspect of Scene 2	"Postmenopausal ... achievers"
	-Counter argument 1 of sequence 1 -Thesis (2) cited to be substantiated	"But ageism ... face lift"

2- Paragraph (2)

Text Act	Utterance(s)
Aspect 2 of scene 2	"if old people ... master Swahili"

3- Paragraphs (3), (4), (5) and (6):

Text Act	Utterance(s)
- Aspect 3 of scene 2 - Thesis 3 cited to be opposed	"At first … effervescing with sex"
Counter argument 2 of thesis 3	"But something wasn't right"
Substantiation of counter argument 2	"The new way … social crime"
Thesis 4 cited to be substantiated	"In some ways … one was"
Substantiation of thesis 4	"Celebrities … their differences"
- Setting scene 3 - Thesis 5 cited to be opposed	"There's a seemingly … she retorted"
- Counter argument 3	"I used to … olds look like"

4- Paragraphs (7) and (8)

Text Act	Utterance(s)
Substantiation of counter argument 3	"Those who've … punished for it"
Substantiation of counter argument 3	"The new images … feel old?"

5- Paragraphs (9) and (10)

Text Act	Utterance(s)
Substantiation of thesis 4	"If you feel … lack the right attitudes of face cream"

6- Paragraph (11)

Text Act	Utterance(s)
Thesis 6 cited to be substantiated	"But perhaps we shouldn't … ageing"
Substantiation of thesis 6	"it's only a response … loo"

7- Paragraphs (12) and (13):

	Text Act	Utterance(s)
Sequence 2 Conclusion of the whole article with directive hints	- Thesis 7 cited to be substantiated (Part 1) - The gist of the whole article*	"It's no return ... I'm touting"
	Substantiation of thesis 7	"Clearly we … allowed"
	Theses 7 continued (Part 2)	"Nor do I…..one of them"
	Thesis 7 continued (Part 3)	"It's the preoccupation … times"

Recognising the semiotic dimension of certain utterances would help us better form an idea of the norm of interpretation or interaction of a given text. This recognition would decide which method to use in translation: literal or free. If the semiotics of an utterance is not preserved in the target text, then the intertextual link the ST sign triggers would be effaced. Let me call the process here 'orphanisation', whereby the link between the sign and the intertextual world no longer exists in the target text. Below is an explanatory table of some signs relevant to our discussion:

Sign	Reference is made to	Frame of reference	Comment
Benign	Type of cancer	Experiential memory (presumably universal)	Literal translation is possible
Orthopaedic	Disabled old people	Experiential memory (presumably universal)	Literal translation is possible
Horlicks	Toothless old people	Experiential memory (Arabs are excluded as they unlikely use Horlicks)	Literal translation would lead to 'orphanising' the sign. For the purpose of Arabic-English translators, perhaps using the word "Cerelac", a similar product

			known to Arabs, would revive the intertextual link.
Postmenopausal	Women	Feminine writer-reader relation	Male discourse is dominant in Arabic and this sign will not be understood unless reference is made to the "gentle (he) reader" following Arabic norms of addressing readers.
leotarded achievers	Old people practising aerobics	Experiential memory (Arabs are excluded)	Literal translation is possible but with a footnote or commentary
Jane Fonda	Old people looking young	Experiential memory (Arabs are excluded)	The best way is to translate it with an illustration. Example: ….Jane Fonda, who looks young like the famous (female) singer Sabah.
Peter Pan	Everlasting youth	Experiential memory (Arabs are excluded)	Literal translation will be vague while free translation would orphanise the counter-textuality between this sign and other ones. The best solution is literal translation with an explanation or comment.

From a semiotic perspective, the reader/translator will be able, in general, to group the signs presented in the text as follows:

1- Group A: Some signs that are related to the earlier stereotype of old people:

An intertextual link should be established in the mind of the reader of the article. When translating this article, special attention must be paid to these signs. The translator should, when necessary, illustrate these signs as related to earlier stereotypes of old people. For example, the translator can translate "benign grandparents" with a further explanation as, despite the fact that the word "benign" means "harmless", it can also signify relations with cancer, which also suits meaning here. The explanation could be like: "…who are dealt with like cancer patients but not like burdensome Alzheimer sufferers, who need care as if they were children."

- benign grandparents
- walking frames
- Alzheimer sufferers
- Horlicks
- orthopaedic boots
- crimplene
- free bus pass
- "old" old ones
- residential homes
- Dundee cake

2- Group B: Some signs that are related to the new stereotype of the old people:

- aerobics
- face-lift
- run marathons
- denim
- Joan Collins and Jane Fonda
- effervescing with sex
- "This is what 50 looks like"
- face cream

It is important here for the reader to understand that these signs are set as opposite to the signs mentioned in Group A. In other words there is a counter-textuality between signs in Group A and those in Group B. This counter-textual phenomenon is important where the interaction of a sign from Group A with a sign from Group B can create in the reader meaning that is not overtly expressed by the writer, and even in some cases, it may lead the reader to subjectively perceive meaning unintended by the writer.

To explain this very last point, I want to refer one more time to a personal experience where I taught "New Face of Ageism" to students at the

English Department at Isra University, in Jordan. The students were all native speakers of Arabic and they had spent all their lives in Arab communities. Not surprisingly, the interaction between all signs mentioned in Group A with all of those in Group B led them to understand and say that Western civilisation lags behind Arab civilisation simply because for those students, as members of Arab communities, respecting the old is and must be the normal practice of my people, i.e. it is redundant to say that it is a humanitarian thing to respect the old.

In this situation, i.e. the class where "New Face of Ageism" was taught, students reached the 'meaning' that "Western Civilisation is lagging behind the Arab civilisation", which can hardly be said an implied intention by the writer. This makes Derrida's assertion of 'infinite referral of signs' hold ground:

> …signification, broadly conceived, always refers to other signs, and that one can never reach a sign that refers only to itself. He [Derrida] suggests that 'writing is not a sign of a sign, except if one says it of all signs, which would be more profoundly true', and this process of infinite referral, of never arriving at meaning itself, is the notion of 'writing' that he wants to emphasise.

(Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2006).

It is crucial, in this regard, to further explain the idea of 'infinite referral of signs' by touching upon another example, this time from the Holy Quran. The first two verses uttered by every Muslim before reading any chapter from the Quran are the following (Main Sign):

<div dir="rtl">أعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم</div>

Transliteration: *a'oozo billahi minal shaytan alrajeem*
Translation: I seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan.

<div dir="rtl">بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم</div>

Transliteration: *bismil lahi arrahman arraheem*
Translation: In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful

Following the textual principle of coherence (Beaugrande and Dressler 1981), the above two verses, since *always* uttered consecutively, must have a semantic relationship so that they can make sense to the reader. Since extracting extra meaning is the domain of subjective reading of the text, I will explain in these lines how the semiotic interaction has taken place in my mind when reading the two verses.

The first verse is a supplication by any Muslim to God asking Him for protection –an armour, so to speak- against the evils of the devil. The immediate coming of the second verse would give an extra meaning that cannot be captured when reading each of the two verses individually. This extra meaning is: The armour that is given to humankind to use against Evil is simply "Mercy". This proposition is now a sign itself and needs to be asserted. A semiotic interaction has taken place between this sign on the one hand and *three* separate signs in my experiential memory on the other one. These three separate signs are as follows:

Sign (1): In Dr. Faustus, Mephistopheles, the devil, asserts to his interlocutor, Dr. Faustus, that as far as he is deprived of God's everlasting blessings, his dwelling shall be "Hell" wherever he goes:

> MEPHISTOPHELES: Unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer,
> Conspir'd against our God with Lucifer,
> And are for ever *damn'd* with Lucifer.
> FAUSTUS: *Where are you damn'd?*
> MEPHISTOPHELES: In hell.
> FAUSTUS: How comes it, then, that thou art out of hell?
> MEPHISTOPHELES: Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it:
> Think'st thou that I, that saw the face of God,
> And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
> Am not *tormented with ten thousand hells,*
> *In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss?*
> O, Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,
> Which strike a terror to my fainting soul!
> (Marlowe 1966: 24), emphasis added

Sign (2): the word "damned" has the Arabic counterpart " ملعون " (*mal'oon*). This Arabic word means in religious terms (Expelled from the *mercy* of God). (Ministry of Islamic Affairs 2002)

Sign (3): In Prophet Muhammad's [Peace be upon Him, thereafter PBUH] traditions, Ibn Hanbal reported a man as saying "I was once in company with the Prophet [PBUH] when the Prophet's camel tumbled. I said "Damned be the Devil". The Prophet [PBUH] said: "Never say: Damned be the devil" or otherwise the devil would grow bigger and bigger until he becomes of the a house size and would answer "With my Power!", but say "*bismillah*" [a contraction of 'In the Name of God the Compassionate the *Merciful*]' and he would get smaller and smaller until his size becomes like that of a fly." (Ibn-Katheer 1999: Vol 1, 101)

The subjective interaction of the above three signs with the Main Sign, i.e. the two verses, can be mapped as follows:
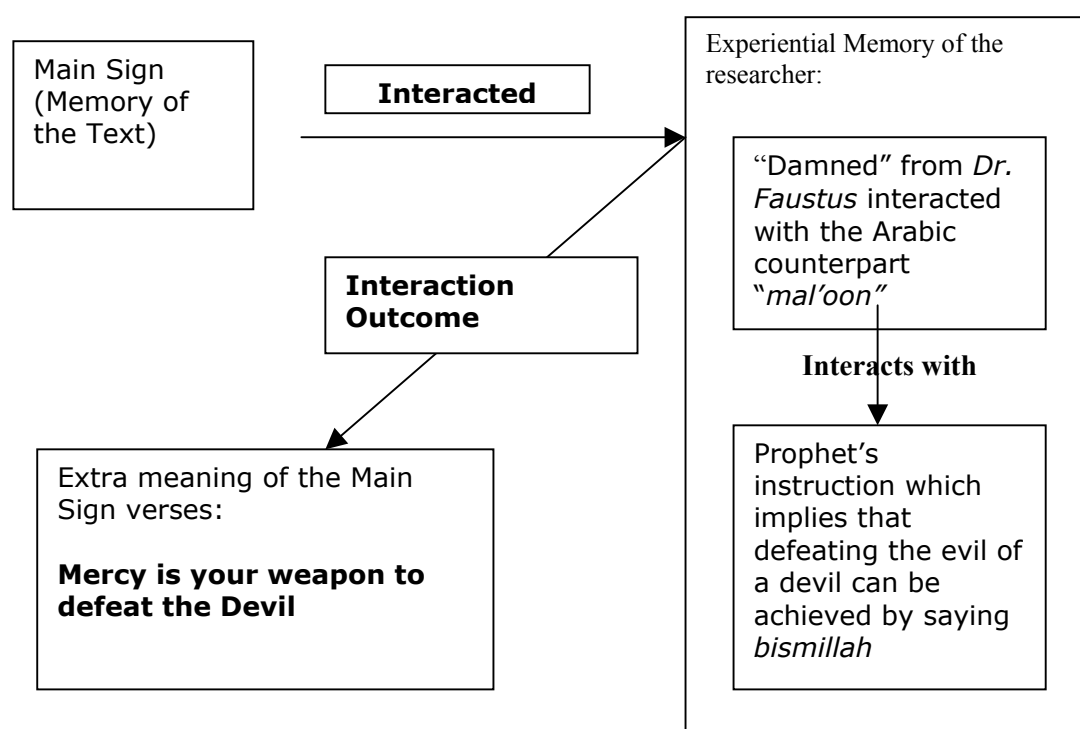
Based on the above analysis, therefore, one might reach the subjective conclusion that mercy can be used as a good weapon to defeat the Devil. The point here, I stress, is not to confirm whether this subjective meaning is true or false. Rather, it is the "Birth of the Reader" which I want to assert, a reader whose experiential memory vividly interacts with the text he or she is reading, which makes him or her capture extra meaning from the text even if such a meaning is not and is never intended by its writer.

To further explain the point already raised above about the semiotic interaction and extraction of extra meaning, reference will be made here to a criticism on George Sale's translation of the Meanings of the Holy Quran (Abdurrahman 2006) that can be analysed from an ethnolinguistic point of view. Abdul-Rahman criticises Sale's translation of " وكذلك جعلناكم أمة وسطا"[7] (Al-Quran Al-Kareem 1983: Verse No. 143, 22), as "Thus we have *placed* you O *Arabian* intermediate nation." [emphasis added] (Sale 1923: 17) Abdul-Rahman's criticism is of the addition of the word "Arabian", but I will also add a criticism of the word "placed". Focusing on the role of the translator in extracting meaning, we can claim that Sale, in his role as an ethnographer, read the original verse in a number of ways among which are:
- Participants
- Sender: Muhammad, a person who claimed prophethood
- Addresser: Same as above
- Receiver/Audience: people who have newly embraced Islam.

- Addressee: people living on the Arabian Peninsula at the time that Prophet's Muhammad [PBUH] claimed prophethood.

From an Islamic point of view, the addresser is God and the addressee is any Muslim in any place and at any time. Therefore it would be wrong to use the word "placed" as it confines the addressee to one piece of land, and thus should be replaced with "made".

3. Conclusion

The ethnolinguistic theory emerges as a suggestion by Sa'Adeddin[8] to deal with the translating problem by placing more emphasis on the role of the translator as an ethnographer. Some parts of this theory have been investigated in light of some material, namely an article called "New Face of Ageism", which has been taught to English literature students at a Jordanian university in an advanced reading skill course. The discussion of the material, as shown in this paper, proved the theory to be helpful in identifying some areas that are vital for the translator in translating a highly culture-specific text. These areas included, inter alia, knowledge of the text sender, norm of interpretation, norm of interaction, and the text receiver. It was obvious also that the interaction in the mind of the translator when reading a text may lead to the extraction of a meaning that could have neither been explicitly nor implicitly intended by the original writer.

4. Recommendations
In the light of the above discussion, the author has come out with the following recommendations to be taken into consideration by trainees, translators and academicians/researchers:

-     The ethnolinguistic theory is helpful in determining the areas that shape the meaning of a given text, especially when it is highly cultural. It is therefore is recommended that this theory be introduced into the curricula of translation trainees at University level on translation courses and also in language skill courses such as reading courses.

-     It is recommended that translators take this theory into consideration in their daily work. The same text can be translated in two different ways if there is a change for instance in the immediate addressee or in the norm of interpretation.

-     More extensive research is required to better gauge the viability of the ethnolinguistic theory involving a bigger corpus in different registers. The experimented text in this paper falls more or less under the journalistic register, which entails that the theory's findings might differ when the theory is applied on texts with other registers (i.e. legal, medical, etc.)

-       Since reading courses are essential components of a translation college programme, instructors are advised to encourage their students to act the roles of "ethnographers" when reading. A conscious and systematic reading is essential for the preparation of a translator who is capable of making the correct decision first in determining the intended meaning of the text and second in matching the experience presented in the given text with the expectations of the target readership.

-       The translator is likely to be exposed to a variety of text registers on a daily basis. This would call curriculum developers at college level to develop reading courses following a DSP (Discourse for Special Purposes) approach, where students can learn the different linguistic mechanisms of each text genre, which will certainly be of great help for students after they graduate and pursue translating as a career.

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Appendices

1- New face of ageism

* Explanations of cultural codes are given in bold between brackets. These explanations have been provided by Cambridge University Press who also provided me with information regarding the norm of interpretation of the text. They are acknowledged with thanks.

Growing old has not got any easier. ANNE KARPF observes a new set of stereotypes .

UNTIL recently the world —or this corner of it— was an indisputably ageist place. The old were either benign grandparents or burdensome Alzheimer sufferers, orthopaedic boots [**special shoes designed for old people**], walking frames [a metal frame to support walking] and Horlicks [**a brand of hot malt drink particularly popular with old people**] were their proper domain [**the usual things**]. But then it all began to change. The image of ageing became rejuvenated. Post-menopausal you might be, but post-aerobics? Never. Increasingly, old people are depicted not as dentured cronies but as leotarded achievers. But ageism hasn't gone away; it's had a face-lift .

If old people are now less likely to be invariably portrayed as passive victims, the new stereotype has stepped in smartly to take its place. Now the increasingly popular visual images of the old are on safari climbing mountains; they effortlessly lap Olympic-seized pools, run marathons, complete Open University degrees, master Swahili .

At first, the new images seemed refreshing and liberating. It was a relief to know that you didn't have to swap denim for crimplene [**denim, the fabric of jeans, is a symbol of youth while crimplene is a soft fabric used in the manufacture of clothes, used to especially popular with older people**] when the free bus pass arrived [**In the UK people who are over 60 are entitled to a free bus pass; now it has become a joke among people who are about to retire**]. The threshold of 'old' visibly shifted, and the early images of the later Joan Collins and Jane Fonda seemed to totally redefine the lifespan: at the age when our foremothers were spent and sagging [**in the past, old people did not take care of their appearance but today many old people are quite glamorous**], these women were lithe and sizzling, effervescing with sex [**examples of glamorous older people such as are Joan Collins, a British actress, who is now a kind of sex symbol at the age of 60+**].

But something wasn't right. The new way of valueing older people was to highlight their youthfulness. These older people were being celebrated for looking and acting young. Ageing had become a social crime .

In some ways this new stereotype of the 'young old' is even more oppressive than the 'old old' one was .

Celebrities with their Hormone Replacement Therapy smiles and marathon-running pensioners [**an example to highlight how some old people are doing things we normally associate with a younger generation**] may inspire some, but to others they represent [**not everyone likes this new role model where older people constantly try to look and act younger than they are**] an unattainable aspiration. And like the previous stereotypes, the new ones still lump old people together as a category rather than acknowledging their differences.

There's a seemingly charming story about the American feminist Gloria Steinem. On her 50th birthday an admirer came up and told her that she didn't look 50. "This is what 50 looks like," she retorted. I used to like that story until it struck me that she was wrong: no, this is what some 50-year-olds look like .

Those who've had materially or emotionally harder lives, who were widowed young or brought up kids alone, those whose genetic inheritance didn't include infinitely elastic skin or unshrinking bones, whose faces are mapped with past exertion and present fatigue, don't look like Gloria Steinem. But they shouldn't be punished for it .

The new images of ageing have brought their own ghastly truisms. "Ladies and Gentlemen, You Are Only As Old As You Feel." They keep saying that. But what if you feel old?

If you feel old and have had enough, if life seems less inviting and more depleting, we'd rather not know. Just as we like our disabled people smiling and exceptional (the blind mountain-climber, the deaf musician) [**examples to support the idea that society enjoys hearing stories about exceptional people with disabilities, we don't like to hear about the ordinary disabled people**] so we want the oldies that have bags of energy, who've never felt better, who are endlessly self-regenerating and amazing for their age" [**society also likes those exceptional old people who seem younger than they are**], not those who merely show it, (The revolution will have occurred when "you look your age" is a compliment.) [**The author argues that society is still ageist and this will not change until we accept people for what they are**] We have reached such a pitch that instead of admiring and learning from those who feel they've had enough and are ready to die,

[the image of the exceptional old person has now become the role model, almost] we're forever trying to jolly them up and yank them back to life .

Look how they could be: like the American 92-year-old featured last week on ITV's 'First Tuesday' who's had 60 years of good health because, the doctors say, he's psychologically healthy. In the 1980s we were told it was our fault if we fell ill (we didn't eat properly or exercise enough); now it's our fault if we age. We lack the right attitudes or face cream [**a cosmetic moisturising cream marketed as something to make your skin look younger**].

But perhaps we shouldn't be hard on the new stereotype of ageing —it's only a response to the previous one. When everyone was portraying old people in a negative way, one antidote was to reverse the image, deny ageing, and remake the old as glamorous and athletic, even if for most old people in our society ageing is less about running a marathon and more about staff in residential homes intruding without knocking when residents are in the loo [**an example of bad practice at residential care homes for old people (staff not allowing the old residents the privacy of going to the toilet on their own**].

It's no return to the crimplene [**see note above re the soft fabric**] and Dundee cake [**another example of a kind of cake, from Scotland, that is associated with old people**] image of old age that I'm touting [**supporting**]. Clearly we are capable of living far more fully in old age than previous stereotypes allowed .

Nor do I deny the importance of helping old people to retain their vitality and develop their creativity as long as they want. And, of course, there are the healthy old. I hope I'll be one of them. It's the preoccupation with the exceptional, those who defy their age, and our obsession with juvenescence that wants discarding. Peter Pan is not an appropriate icon for our greying times [**Peter Pan is the fictional character who never got old – the author feels this should not be the role model for old people – we should enjoy getting old.**]

2-Ibn Al-Jawzi's Anecdote (Arabic Origin)

جليس أبي يوسف: وعن طاهر الزهري قال: كان رجل يجلس إلى أبي يوسف فيطيل الصمت فقال له أبو يوسف: ألا تتكلم قال: بلى متى يفطر الصائم قال: إذا غابت الشمس قال: فإن لم تغب إلى نصف الليل فضحك أبو يوسف وقال: أصبت في صمتك وأخطأت في استدعائي لنطقك ثم قال: الطويل: عجبت لإزراء العيي بنفسه وصمت الذي كان بالصمت أعلما وفي الصمت ستر للعيي وإنما صحيفة لب المرء أن يتكلما عن أبي الحسن المدني قال: سرق لأبي الجهم بن عطية حمار فقال: لا والله يا رب ما أخذ حماري غيرك وأنت تعرف موضعه فاردده علي.

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[1] Literal translation of the two verses are respectively "…and those who disbelieved [in God] were driven to Hell in groups so as when they arrive there, its [Hell's] gates are opened…" and "…and those who believed [in God] were escorted to Paradise so as when they arrive there *and* when its gates are open…" (Al-Quran Al-Kareem Surat Al-Zumar 1983: Nos. 71-72, 466)

[2] For more information, see: Hadeeth Nos. 7033 in Al-Albani (2006). See also the interpretation of the above mentioned verses in Ibin Katheer's Interpretation of the Great Quran in *Mawsoo'at Taleb Al-Ilm Al-Shar'i (A Compact CD, Version Year: 1999) by MediaSoft.*

[3] Ramadan is a month that extends to 29-30 days every year according to the lunar calendar adopted by Muslims. Every day, a Muslim must refrain from eating, drinking and having sexual intercourse from sun rising up till sun set. The end of the month is marked with a festive called '*Eid Al-Fiter*' (The Fasting Breaking Feast).

[4] Someone versed in Islamic jurisprudence who can articulate judgments on the various practices and religious behaviour of Muslims.

[5] Pragmatics is taught at postgraduate level at the University of Jordan. Interestingly, the official Arabic translation for the course which focuses on it is "Science of Linguistic Context".

[6] Ibn Al-Jawzi in his mentioned book frequently uses the expression "It is reported that…" to indicate that the story he is telling is authentic. In the Prophet's traditions, a Muslim is encouraged not to lie even in jest "…and I shall be the leader of a house in the middle of Heavens that would belong to one who refrained from lying even in jest." (Translation of a Prophet's tradition. See *Maktabat Kotob Al-Albani Hadeeth* (1999, No. 4800). Noteworthy is that telling an imaginary joke nowadays is quite common among Muslims although this is commonly deemed by Islamic jurisprudents as tantamount to lying.

[7] Literal translation: "We have made you an intermediate nation."

[8] He said to me personally, and very modestly, that the ethnolinguistic theory is in an "experimental phase", meaning that more analysis in light of the theory should be made to test its validity. The same idea has been overtly pronounced by Sa'Adeddin (Sa'Adeddin 1990).