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Are Translators Traitors?

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Abstract

To call "Translation" the act of dishonesty and betrayal is not true and should not be taken as a matter of faith. Translators translate specific subjects from one language to another. Throughout this process some differences occur-more or less- in the text translated. In fact, translators should not be named "Traitors", as they do their best to bridge the gap between different cultures in the world. The question to be raised here could be: How far are translators considered traitors? In order to get possible answers and precise replies, the researchers have distributed a questionnaire among (20) Tourism and Business male and female students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences in the Sultanate of Oman. The result is really amazing; translators are doing their job in a fair and sincere way to bridge the gap between all cultures around the globe, though there might be some drawbacks, but that is exceptional. Discussion, recommendations, and clarifications are highlighted in detail throughout this paper.

Keywords: betray, confrontation, culture, invasion, language, rivalry, translation

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Introduction

Although translation plays an important role in bridging the gap between cultures, it-from time to time- faces some harsh words and tough criticism. No matter what accusation translation may receive, it remains an essential job that serves the whole world and highlights the bright side of literature. As human beings, translators- like other people- err and make mistakes, but this does not give the right to the audience to delete their bright side and just focus on the slight and negative hints. Translators work under physical and psychological pressure and work hard to introduce and produce magnificent pieces of literature. The Italian saying has started condemning translators and accused them of being traitors. Moreira ((n.d), Para. 2) highlights this accusation as follows: "Let's start with the dictum 'translator, traitor.' People capable of reading texts or watching films in their original languages almost always grumble about the quality of the translation found in books and subtitles. Which of us has not overheard someone muttering in the movie theatre, "hmm, but the character didn't say that: the translator is useless." This paper discusses in depth the accusation of translators of being Traitors.

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Study Problem

A number of times translators are accused of being traitors. How far is that true? This is really a problem that needs a global study and clarification.

Study Objectives

This study aims to discuss the accusation of calling translators traitors. It highlights a number of comments –positive or negative-raised by different academic and nonacademic classes in the society, even scholars and the elite, and see which overweighs the other.

Study Questions

-are translators really traitors?

-what makes the audience accuse translators as traitors?

-how do translators defend themselves against this accusation?

Literature Review

According to Malmkjær, (2012, Para. 1) "Translation is an activity that aims at conveying meaning or meanings of a given linguistic discourse from one language to another. Translation can be defined in terms of sameness of meaning across languages". Translation goes very deep in history when people utilized it as a way of conveying their thoughts and ideas by using symbols and codes to express feelings while communicating.

As the days went by- during the evolution of Man- people needed to find a means of expressing their thoughts and feelings with those who lived in distant and remote areas. With the societal development and rise of language, it became a must to use a language to convey ideas to others. However, in the modern era, it is observed that "Translation and Translators" have become- to some extent- a matter of controversy. Translators, as a result, have become accused of being "Traitors". This paper will highlight merits and downfalls of both translation and translators. Let us start with a very famous Italian saying that has spoiled and negatively affected translators. "A well-known Italian saying declares traduttore, traditore, 'Translator, traitor,' implying this sneaky species is congenitally incapable of remaining faithful to the original text" (Moreira, (n.d), Para. 1). There are many viewpoints that highlight this matter- translation. One of them describes translation as the piece of literature in which the reader does not see or think of the translator—he/she should be invisible. That means the audience enjoys reading paying no attention to the translator, or maybe the original writer. "For most people, a good translation is one that looks nothing like a translation. In other words, the translator should be invisible, their work limited to conveying the original's meaning in a fluent and natural style" (Moreira, (n.d), Para. 1). Good translators should be subjective and not personally intervene in the piece they are working on. "For most critics, a good translation is one that bears no living resemblance to a translation and where the translator manages to convey the meaning of the original text. This

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attitude completely negates the translator's essential intervention in the text" (Moreira, (n.d), Para. 1).

Moreover, translation has been considered an act of dishonesty and betrayal to the original text. If this really happens, that is an extreme betrayal, but was that done on purpose, or unintentionally? "Translation has often been regarded as an act of 'betrayal', for the impossibility of transferring the exact same messages between different languages" (Abdel Fattah, 2022, Para. 1). Translators are not all traitors; on the contrary, many are faithful and do their best in doing their job well according to high caliber measurements. "A 'faithful' translator to the humanitarian mission contributes to acceptance and humanitarian access" (Abdel Fattah, 2022, Para. 1).

Sometimes translation takes another way of controversy—virtual fight. Here comes the reason beyond the Italian saying "Traduttore, traditore". It is because the French translated Dante' Devine Comedy in a way considered by the Italians incorrect and dishonest, which made the Italians furious and considered that work as Betrayal.

> The historic rivalry between Italy and France has not been confined to battlefields. Beyond the invasions and military confrontations, the cultural rivalry between the two countries dates back to before the Renaissance. Philosophers, writers, artists, and scholars on both sides were competing to be at the forefront of the European 'rebirth'. Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy influenced the Renaissance and became universally considered one of world literature's greatest poems. When French translators translated Dante into their own language, the Italians were infuriated, claiming that French translations 'betrayed' the original text, failing to convey its lexical and phonological beauty. (Abdel Fattah, 2022, Para. 3)

The academic attack continues between Italy and France because of Dante's masterpiece. As a result, translators have gained- maybe unfairly- other titles or descriptions—poor writers, re-writers, evil transgressors, etc.

> Such rivalry was behind the famous Italian proverb 'traduttore, traditore' that describes the translator as a 'traitor'; a 'betrayer'. As a humanitarian translator, this is only one among the many charges I have faced throughout my professional career. Translators are sometimes seen as 'poor writers' or 're-writers', 'evil transgressors', or in most cases 'literal transferrers' of the original text/language that inevitably gains or loses nuances and shades in their target rendering" (Abdel Fattah, 2022, Para. 4).

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Italians' saying should not be treated as a matter of faith; it might have been declared at a moment of anger which should be reconsidered. Abdel Fattah (2022, Para. 17) concludes that: "Based on my own personal and professional experience, I have no doubt – in today's context – that Italians have had second thoughts about their proverb 'Traduttore, traditore'". In general, translating a certain work is enjoyable for those-translators- who love their job, though some, unintentionally, had downfalls that happen from time to time. "To translate written work, especially colourful prose or poetry, is an exercise both punctuated by glee and fraught with anxiety. The ethical pitfalls of translation are many, and synonyms somehow never quite enough" (Moran, 2017, Para. 1). Professional translators excel in their work and never do things that spoil their history. They never betray or produce bad outcome. "Translators are facilitators above all: they should consequently aim *not* to betray their readers' expectations of loyalty to an original" (Moran, 2017, Para.13).

Translation could be treated as "Give and Take" process. The writer gives his/her product, the translator takes it and starts his/her job. No matter what the text misses or loses after being translated, there is much to win and gain. There is always hope to find a very great output.

> No matter how self-effacing or otherwise a translator may be – and regardless of whether they intend to reflect or to recreate texts – there is at least one point on which we can be hopeful: that there will always be as much to be gained, as to be lost, in translation (Moran, 2017, Para.15).

The Palestinian novelist and translator "Jabra Ibrahim Jabra" is considered as one of the great translators--he translated texts from English to Arabic and vice versa. Readers cannot judge which is which -- which is translated to the other: Arabic to English or English to Arabic. This is due to his excellence, loyalty, and honesty towards the text. "Nevertheless, assuming the attitude that translation both does and should exist, we are already faced with several issues. For example, how loyal must a translator be to an original text? What responsibilities do they hold?" (Moran, 2017, Para. 5). Others accuse translation as an evil or an open travesty that has no strong and honest effect on the audience or the literature of a certain region. "For some, translation is the poor cousin of literature, a necessary evil if not an outright travesty—summed up by the old Italian play on words, *traduttore, traditore* (translator, traitor)" (Polizzotti,2018, Para. 1). For some critics, translation is a way of cross-cultural mutual understanding and reciprocal respect and literary enrichment. "For others, translation is the royal road to cross-cultural understanding and literary enrichment" (Polizzotti,2019, Para. 1). Another merit of translation is that it is both a craft and an art; genius hack work that connects many parts together. "skirts the boundaries between art and craft, originality and replication, altruism and commerce, genius and hack work." (Polizzotti,2019, Para. 2).

Proficient and efficient translators exert time for checking and sifting any text they translate, amending all bad sides of it to introduce a sort of a *masterpiece*. This normally happens with technical translation.

> We craft fluent translations as if they were originally written in the target language, no matter how bad the source is. And who gets all the credit for it? Most of the times,

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> especially in technical translation, as is my case, the author, of course. We avoid misunderstandings, noises, and bad reputation. We facilitate communication not only by simply translating from one language to the other but also by improving the quality of the source. (Carol's Adventures in Translation, 2017, Paras. 5-6).

What is meant by to "perfect ourselves" in translation? It is a sign of doing well in translating texts. No matter how bad the text is, the professional translator can produce an excellent outcome due to hardwork, efficiency and experience. At last, this will be automatic and natural and gives the translator credit.

> And I even dare say translations are usually way better texts than most of the original writings out there because our job is to perfect ourselves, day after day, translation after translation. Our job is to enable communication between languages and cultures, and to do so naturally. (Carol's Adventures in Translation, 2017, Para. 7).

In fact, there are a number of translations. Some depend on the traditional way that one translates the text literally—word-for-word- the second approach of translating- praised by many critics- is "thought –for thought" translation, which is considered the most prestigious one.

> A committee of scholars assembled to produce a translation typically adopts an overarching philosophy of translation. In simplest terms, there are two. The first is called "formal equivalence," which seeks to account for virtually every word in the original text by producing its English counterpart in translation. This is "word-for-word" or "literal" translation. The second is called "dynamic equivalence." This approach seeks to capture the thought of the original verse in context, and then re-create that thought using whatever English words are most precise. This is "thought-for-thought" translation. But adopting an approach does not mean that all the translators will apply it equally. There is also a matter of interpretation. When the biblical text allows more than one translation due to ambiguity in the context, grammar, or word usage, a translator needs to make his or her own decision—which can lead to controversy (Heiser, 2018, Para. 2)

Before accusing translators of the Bible or the holy Qur'an, the audience should admit that they (translators) are dealing with a heavy burden. They are doing their best to get a perfect text. "Translation isn't just a matter of matching words of one language to words of another. Rather than consider Bible translators as traitors, we need to be sympathetic to their burden. Reading multiple translations can reveal the complexities of the process" (Heiser, 2018, Para. 8).

Betrayal and disloyalty might be said against countries- not only texts. Some translators work with what their countries consider "*enemies*" and guide them to sensitive places that their countries possess such as nuclear reactors, mass destruction weapons, etc. This is much of a crime and betrayal and considered high treason. Some -so called- translators become cheap when they support invaders just for money. No sincere and loyal person accepts this at all. The fate of such translators is "Death".

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> In recent years, a series of reports have appeared in the British press about the fate of Iraqi interpreters employed by the British forces in Basra. As well as the day-to-day risk of death or injury in the course of their work, interpreters have been vulnerable to reprisals from insurgents who view them as collaborators and traitors (Mairs, 2011, Para. 1).

Another example of translators who were tricked into betraying their countries is an Afghani teenager who started working with the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. He joined this job for financial purposes; his family was needy, and his father was sick. He did that to help his family. His end was expected from the very moment he started his work as an interpreter—death.

> Sakhidad Afghan was 19 when he started working as an interpreter for the U.S. military in Afghanistan, in 2009. His father was sick and he wanted to help support their extended family of 18. In his first year, he saw combat with the Marines in the Battle of Marjah, but he remained an interpreter until the fall of 2014, when American troops drew down and his job disappeared. By then he'd received an anonymous death threat over the phone (Frail, 2016, Para. 1).

Sakhidad was the worst example of Afghani people, as Taliban declared later on. He was murdered and tortured by Taliban Movement and warned others who cooperate with the U.S. troops.

> Days later, one of his brothers got a phone call from a cousin, asking him to come over and look at a picture that had been posted on Facebook. The picture was of Sakhidad; he had been tortured and killed and left by the side of the road. He was 24. A letter bearing the Taliban flag was found stuffed into a pants pocket. It warned that three of his brothers, who also worked for coalition forces, were in for the same. (Frail, 2016, Para. 2).

Once, a war could have started between the superpower countries because of the misunderstanding of a certain word translated by an interpreter. All fields of translation may cause problems if care is not taken. "Translation can be particularly hazardous in an area such as politics, where even a slight misinterpretation of a word or phrase can potentially lead to a speech giving completely the wrong message" (Jessica, 2020, Para. 4).

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Translators should be aware of the elements of literature and cultural backgrounds of some countries in order not to mislead the audience. “Puns are notoriously hard to translate so this is not a surprise but it unfortunately leads to translated works of literature bearing many differences to their original. The use of idiomatic language in literature also presents great difficulties” (Jessica, 2020, Para. 7). Is it an easy task to translate poetry? Could the translator utilize his translation in using the proper rhyme scheme and foot? This caused Voltaire to express his dissatisfaction about this kind of translation. “As Voltaire said: ‘It is impossible to translate poetry. Can you translate music?’ “(Jessica, 2020, Para. 7).

Questionnaire Analysis

To get more information about the matter whether translators are traitors, the researchers distributed a survey among (20) Fourth - year Tourism and Business majors at Ibri College – University of Technology and Applied Sciences in the Sultanate of Oman. The study was conducted by means of a questionnaire consisting of (10) questions: (5) Yes/No, and (5) Agree/ Disagree.

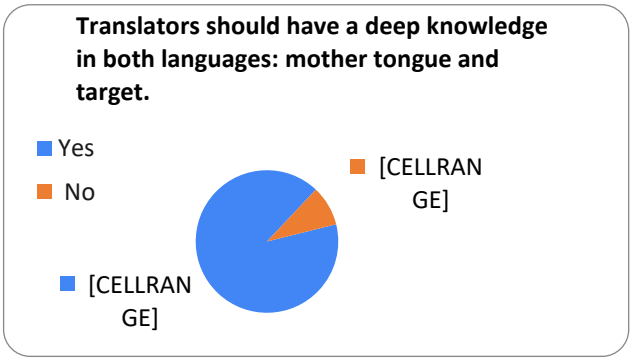
Yes/No

Figure 1:

1. Translators should have a deep knowledge in both languages: mother tongue and target.

(A) Yes (B) No

Translators should have a deep knowledge in both languages: mother tongue and target.	**Yes**	**No**
	20	**2**
	90.91%	**9.09%**



Without a good amount of knowledge in both languages, translation seems incomplete, as there are some vocabulary and usages that the excellent translator should be aware of. The score seems high (90.91 %) for “Yes”, while it is (9.09) for the opposite, which is positive.

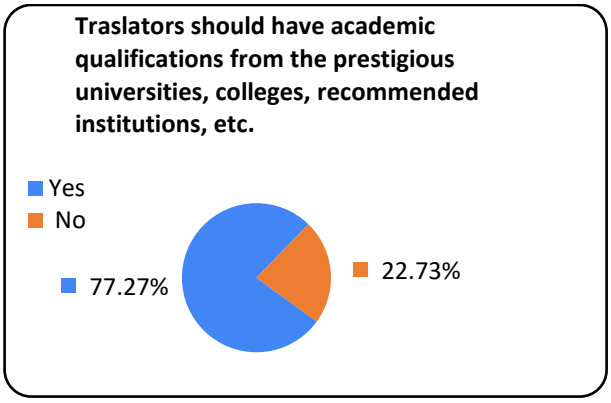
Figure 2:

2. Translators should have academic qualifications from prestigious universities, colleges, recommended institutions, etc.

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(A) Yes (B) No

Translators should have academic qualifications from the prestigious universities, colleges, recommended institutions, etc.	**Yes**	**No**
	17	**5**
	77.27%	**22.73%**



Regarding qualifications, (77.27%) are for the option that translators should have certificates from a recommended academic institution. Most problems in translation occur when translators are not so qualified enough to distinguish between clear-cut and vague pieces of literature.

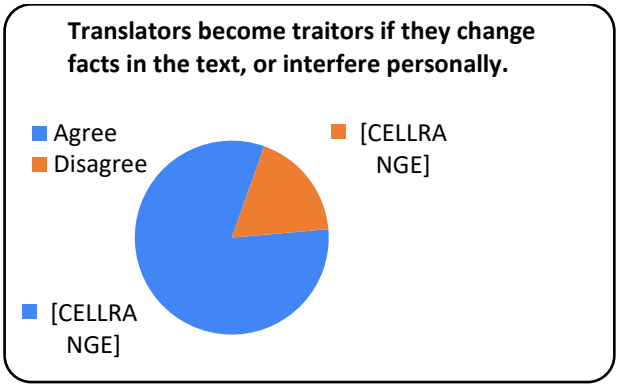
Agree/ Disagree

Figure 3:

3. Translators become traitors if they change facts in the text, or interfere personally.

(A) Agree (B) Disagree

Translators become traitors if they change facts in the text, or interfere personally.	**Agree**	**Disagree**
	18	**4**
	81.82%	**18.18%**



To avoid the title: *Translators are Traitors*, it is a must that translators be honest and fair, and not expressing their personal opinions; it is a job to be highly respected, especially when translating live speeches in conferences**.**

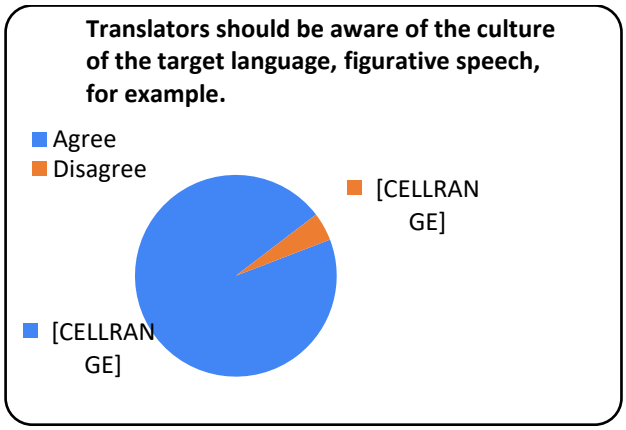
Figure 4:

4. Translators should be aware of the culture of the target language, figurative speech, for example.

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(A) Agree (B) Disagree

	Agree	Disagree
Translators should be aware of the culture of the target language, figurative speech, for example.	21	1
	95.45 %	4.55%



The culture of the target language is of high importance; sometimes there are specific usages of some words that have more than one meaning; pun, for example. This is a merit for translators to introduce a precise piece of translation.

Population of the study

The researchers have referred to a group of Omani students at Ibri College. They are all in the Fourth year, aged between 22-23. They study Tourism and Business. They come from different parts of the Sultanate of Oman: some come from villages, others from cities, coastal regions and Muscat, the capital city of the Sultanate of Oman.

Recommendations

-since translators work under severe pressure, they have to first relax, read the text critically, ask more experienced colleagues, or refer to dependable and prestigious references—up-to-date dictionaries, thesauri, etc.

-translators should own specialized dictionaries on different majors to get the most proper definition or equivalent expression of certain words.

-no matter how skillful translators are; they should have a good background on the culture of the nations they work on their literature.

-interpreters, when translating live, should be aware when doing their job, as ONE word might change the whole situation up-side down.

-translators should keep themselves updated with what is related to their profession.

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-translators should attend conferences-local or international- workshops, seminars, etc.

- special care should be taken when translating religious books-the Bible and/or the Holy Qur'an- as it is a sensitive arena.

-translators should be careful when translating advertisements and commercials- one mistake can be hazardous.

Conclusion

Translation is an important and humanitarian job that bridges the gap between cultures. Moreover, it enhances mutual communication between people. It is unfair to call translators traitors, as they are human beings who, by nature, err. Their merits overweigh their unintended mistakes. Our students at Ibri College praise translation and translators alike. Translators are loyal to their profession and produce masterpieces that people enjoy and benefit from.

Acknowledgment

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About the Researchers

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