

**Showqi Bahumaid<sup>1</sup>**

## **CULTURE-BOUND TERMS IN ARABIC-ENGLISH TRANSLATION: DIFFICULTIES AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **ABSTRACT**

Translation has been essentially viewed as a cross-cultural encounter in which the translator acts as an intercultural mediator. In performing this enormous task, the translator should possess, among other things, adequate skills for handling culture-bound terms. This study investigates the difficulties faced by graduate translator trainees in the American University of Sharjah and the University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates in rendering Arabic culture-bound terms into English. It further examines the extent of the translator trainees' awareness of the translation strategies they employ in their renditions of those terms. A test involving a carefully selected sample of fifteen Arabic culture bound terms used in contextualized sentences was designed as a research instrument. The terms were drawn from several cultural categories and presented varying levels of difficulty of rendition.

The informants were allowed to use dictionaries and search the Internet while taking the test. No time limit was set for the test. The results have revealed the informants' rather low performance in translating Arabic culture-bound terms into English. Four major types of errors were made by the informants: incorrect meaning, under-translation, omission and transliteration errors. The errors have been mainly attributed to the informants' lack of awareness of the significance of the translation brief while translating, inadequate proficiency in handling idiomatic culture-bound terms, insufficient training in transliteration and improper use of dictionaries. Implications of the study for translator trainers and lexicographers have been explained by the researcher.

**Keywords:** culture-bound terms; translation problems; translation strategies

### **1. Introduction**

Numerous definitions of the term 'culture' have been attempted by various writers. In this article, the writer employs the all-embracing definition of culture provided in the Oxford Dictionary of English (2011) which refers to the inherited knowledge, values, feelings, activities, traditions, customs, attitudes, beliefs, ideas, arts, social behavior and organizations, and the way of life shared by a particular organization, country, or group of people or society. In the discourse of culture, the aspect most relevant to our study is the category of words that are rooted in a particular culture and are unknown to other cultures; these have been termed 'cultural words' (Newmark 1988: 93), 'culture-specific items' (Baker 1992: 21), 'cultureme' (Nord 1997: 34), 'culture-specific references' (Gambier 2007: 159) and 'culture-specific

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of English Language and Literature, University of Sharjah, P.O. 27272, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates; sbahumaid@sharjah.ac.ae

concepts' (Ordudari 2007), among others. In this article, such expressions are labeled, following Harvey's (2003) more precise designation 'culture-bound terms' (CBTs).

CBTs constitute a serious 'trouble spot' for translators especially when the source and target languages belong to rather distant cultures as is the case with English and Arabic. The present study addresses the specific difficulties faced by translator trainees in rendering Arabic CBTs into English. The study's rationale, data, research instrument and informants are discussed in Section 2.3 below.

## 2. Culture-bound terms in Arabic-English translation

Translating CBTs presents a problem for the translator since they do not exist in the TL culture or the TL usually has no equivalents for those terms (Bing 2006). Here, a lexical gap is created in the TL thus leaving the translator with no option but to search for appropriate means to transfer the concepts denoted by those terms to that language. The magnitude of such a problem depends on the extent of differences between SL and TL. Hence, translation between languages of distant cultures such as English and Arabic is more difficult than translating between languages that are culturally related or similar, such as English and German. Three major sources of difficulty of translating CBTs may be identified. First, a CBT denoting a physical feature in the SL culture which is unknown in the TL culture. For example, the English simile *as white as snow* will be difficult to translate into Arabic since Arabs have little experience with 'snow' hence translators tend to use the non-corresponding but functionally equivalent Arabic simile *?abyaD kalHali:b / kalquTn كالحليب / كالقطن* (as white as milk / cotton) (for transliteration convention, see Appendix 1).

Second, a CBT that has no equivalent in the TL as it denotes a concept which does not exist in the target culture would constitute a translation difficulty. Many Islamic concepts would fall into this category. An example would be the translation of the Arabic CBT *<sup>C</sup>aqi:qah عقيقة* (viz. a goat to slaughter and distribute to the poor on the occasion of having a new baby) into English as the target culture lacks this concept. Here, a gloss will have to be provided by the translator in their rendition of the term. Third, the rendition of a CBT designating a name of a person or institution which is unknown to the target reader would be problematic. For example, in the Arabic expression *ka:na: miTHla <sup>C</sup>antar wa <sup>C</sup>ablah كانا مثل عنتر وعبلة* (literally they were like Antar and Ablah), reference is made to the well-known figures of love and romance in ancient Arab social history. Here, translators may opt for using the translation strategy of foreignization (Venuti 1998) by retaining the Arabic names in their rendition followed by a gloss. Alternatively, a translator may use a cultural equivalent e.g. *They were like Romeo and Juliette*. In this case, the translation strategy of domestication is employed. Translation strategy is used in this paper, following Loescher (1991: 8), to mean "a potentially conscious procedure for solving a problem faced in translating a text, or any segment of it."

### **3. The present study**

#### **3.1 Justification**

A number of studies have been conducted on cultural problems in Arabic-English translation (Barkho 1987; Aziz 1999; Shunnaq 2000; Abdel-Hafez 2002; Ghazala 2002; Faiq 2004; Homedi 2004; Bahameed 2008; Balfaqeeh 2009; al-Khaja 2011). Most of these studies have investigated CBTs that occur in specific registers (political, religious, etc.). Of the very few pedagogic-oriented sources on translating cultural texts, Mazid (2007) devotes a chapter on translating cultural references from Arabic into English by undergraduate students of linguistics in the UAE University. Mazid (2007: 126) concludes, among other things, that the students' renditions reflect literalism, avoidance and lack sensitivity to context and pragmatic function.

The present study focuses on CBTs that are drawn from different cultural domains and cut across various lexical categories. Such a study assumes even greater significance as it is grounded in a pedagogical context and highlight in particular the difficulties faced by translator trainees in rendering Arabic CBTs into English. A study of this kind, to the knowledge of the present writer, has not been hitherto attempted.

#### **3.2 Research hypothesis**

This study rests upon the following hypothesis: since CBTs permeate most linguistic registers and given the enormous distance between the source (Arab) and target (English) cultures, rendering Arabic CBTs into English is hypothesized to constitute a source of difficulty for translator trainees the extent of which will be determined by the amount of their knowledge of the Arab culture and the degree of their translation competence. More specifically, the study aims to assess the extent of difficulty faced by graduate students majoring in English-Arabic translation in rendering Arabic CBTs into English. It seeks answers to the following research questions:

- a. How difficult is translating Arabic CBTs into English for those graduate students?
- b. What are the major translation errors made by those translator trainees in their renditions of those CBTs?
- c. What are the implications of the present study of difficulties of translating CBTs for translation pedagogy?

### 3.3 Methodology

#### 3.3.1 Research instrument

For the purposes of the study, a ‘Test of Culture-bound Terms in Translation’ (TrTCBTs for short) was used as a research instrument. The test (Appendix 2) provided a translation brief which defined the context, purpose and readership of the text segments to be translated. It included eleven contextualized sentences drawn from a hypothetical article prepared by an Arab cultural center in Washington about the Arabs, their countries, language and culture. The article was assumed to have appeared in a widely read American daily newspaper. The purpose of the article was to provide readers with some facts about the Arabs, their land and way of life and promote greater understanding between Arabs and non-Arabs in the USA; its intended readership was educated native speakers of English who may have some general knowledge of the Arab world, but no specific expertise in Arabic or Islamic culture. The subjects were asked to give the most appropriate Arabic renditions of fifteen Arabic culture-bound expressions, which were underlined in the text.

The CBTs selected by the researcher for inclusion in the TrTCBTs presented some translation problems. We adopted Nord’s (1991: 150) definition of translation problems as “*those points, which prove a challenge for all translators in a particular language combination*”. In addition, The CBTs were drawn from several genres (religious, social, etc.).

Prior to the test, the subjects had been informed that they were allowed to use dictionaries and any other reference works. One of the subjects inquired if she could search the Internet while taking the test and the researcher permitted her and all other subjects to do so if they wished. No time limit was set for the test.

To ascertain the validity of the TrTCBTs, it was given, in a draft form, to two translation specialists who have taught translation courses to both undergraduate and postgraduate students and have published several translations of acknowledged worth. Both confirmed that the test was valid and suggested no changes, additions or omissions.

#### 3.3.2 Informants

A total of 10 students kindly accepted to take the TrTCBTs. Of these, five were registered in the academic year 2006/2007 in the Master Program in Translation (MPT) at the University of Sharjah (UoS) and the same number of students were enrolled in the M.A. program in English/Arabic/English Translation and Interpreting (MATI) at the American University of Sharjah (AUS). Most of the informants were in their second semester in their M.A. translation studies while a few were in their third. The native language of all the informants was Arabic. All the informants, except one, were female. It should be pointed out that the selection of these two Master programmes was made on the grounds that (a) they are the only postgraduate programmes in English-Arabic Translation offered in the United Arab Emirates where the researcher happened to work, (b) they have a comparable structure: AUS offers 36 credits, 27 of which are compulsory including a research thesis and 9 elective credits, while UoS offers 34 credits, 22 of which are compulsory including a dissertation and 12 elective

credits, (c) they offer similar courses in the two main areas of translation and linguistics, and (d) they offer, a 3-credit elective course on issues of culture in translation, titled ‘the cultural trend in translation studies’ at UoS, and ‘intercultural communication’ at AUS (see AUS, 2006 and UoS, 2006).

### 3.4 Limitations of the study

This study suffers from two limitations. First, only ten M.A. translation students took the TrTCBTs. Nevertheless, this rather small number could be considered acceptable on account of the fact that the student intake in such programs in Arab universities is generally limited. Secondly, the study was constrained by the rather small size of culture-specific terms (totaled 15) included in the TrTCBTs. However, those terms, as noted in Section 2.3.1 above, have been carefully selected to ensure that they are drawn from various registers, belong to different linguistic domains and present varying degrees of difficulty for rendering from English into Arabic. Having said this, the writer has to concede that in view of the limited number of CBTs included in the TrTCBTs, only some of the difficulties in rendering Arabic CBTs into English will be reflected in the study.

## 4. Results of the study

Despite the fact that the informants were allowed to use dictionaries and any other reference works, as well as to search the Internet while taking the TrTCBTs, and that no time limit was set for the test, their overall performance in the test was entirely unsatisfactory. Table (1) sums up the informants’ scores in the test.

Table 1. Overall scores of the informants in the CBTs translation test

Informant	No. of Correct Renditions	No. of Incorrect Renditions	No. of Test Items Not Attempted	Correct Renditions %
1	3	11	1	20.00
2	1	13	1	6.66
3	2	10	3	13.33
4	4	11	0	26.66
5	4	8	3	26.66
6	3	8	4	20.00
7	4	11	0	26.66
8	3	10	2	20.00
9	1	12	2	6.66
10	4	11	0	26.66

A close look at this table shows that the informants obtained very low scores in the Arabic-English rendition of CBTs. Four informants scored 27% while the rest obtained even lower scores: 20% (3 informants), 13% (1 informant) and 7% (2 informants). Overall, the informants provided a total of 29 correct renditions (19%), while the remaining items were either incorrect (105 items - 70%) or left blank (16 items - 11%). It should be noted that no

significant differences have been noticed in the performance of the informants registered in the MPT at UoS (informants 1-5) and those studying in the MATI at AUS (informants 6-10). The former provided 14 correct responses, 53 incorrect ones and 8 items left blank while the latter obtained 15 correct responses, 52 incorrect ones and 8 items 'not attempted'.

We shall now proceed to discuss the informants' correct and incorrect English renditions of the Arabic CBTs tested. In our discussion of these renditions, we shall refer to the answer key of the test (see Appendix 3).

#### 4.1 The informants' correct renditions of the CBTs

Several informants made some serious attempts at providing correct English renditions of the Arabic CBTs included in the test.

One of the main features of the informants' renditions was the provision of more than one plausible version of the same term. For example, the idiomatic Arabic CBT *ghariqa Hatta: uthunayhi fi: al<sup>c</sup>amal* غرق حتى أذنيه في العمل (lit. he got drowned up to his ears) was rendered as *He was up to his eyes in work* and *He was overwhelmed with work*. Similarly, the informants provided two acceptable English renditions for the Arabic idiomatic CBT *yanfax fi: qirbah maqTu:<sup>c</sup>ah* ينفخ في قربة مقطوعة (lit. he is blowing a bag that has some holes): *he tries to no avail* and *he is doing a useless job*. Abu-Ssaydeh (2006: 473), among others, has proposed another equivalent English idiomatic expression i.e. *flogging a dead horse*.

A further point to be made is that, in a rather rare instance, two of the informants made a good attempt at providing interesting renditions in which a well-known historical figure in the target culture was used. This has been noticed in the rendering of the Arabic culture – specific expression (lit. he was antar of his times) as *He was Hannibal of his times* and *He was like Richard, the lion's heart*. Although these two renditions diverged from the source language oriented version provided by the researcher (viz. 'Antar' of his times, a reference to <sup>c</sup>*antarah*, the hero of a well-known romance of Arab chivalry) they were considered plausible.

#### 4.2 Incorrect English renditions of the Arabic CBTs

Three major types of error have been observed in the informants' English renditions of the Arabic CBTs. Discussion of these errors and possible explanations of their causes will be made below.

##### 4.2.1 Errors of under-translation

The most common type of error made by the informants in their English renditions of the Arabic CBTs tested is that of under-translation. The error of 'under-translation' may be defined as an error where the translator omits in the target text any compensation, amplification or explicitation required in order to obtain an idiomatic translation that conforms to the presumed sense of the source text (Delisle et al. 1999: 197). Table (2) below indicates the informants' renditions involving under-translation.

Table 2. The informants' errors of 'under-translation'

Arabic CBTs	Informants' Incorrect English Renditions
<i>alniqa:b</i> النقاب (lit. face cover worn by some Muslim women)	veil face cover
<i>ali<sup>C</sup>tika:f</i> الاعتكاف (lit. seclusion, by some Muslims, in mosques for some time)	staying in the mosque living in the mosque keeping to the mosque sitting, praying and reading the Quran in the mosque to have the mosque as a sanctuary
<i>naSabu: lahu alxiya:m</i> نصبوا له الخيام (lit. they set up tents for him)	set up tents for him erected tents for him pitched up tents for him
<i>al<sup>C</sup>aTTa:r</i> العطار (lit. a perfumer)	perfumer druggist spice dealer
<i>al<sup>C</sup>u:d</i> العود (lit. the Arab lute)	lute al-'uud
<i>maHram</i> محرم (lit. one of the close unmarried male relatives of a female Muslim)	father, brother, husband and uncle unmarriageable person mahram
<i>albasbu:sah</i> البسبوسة (lit. a popular type of Arab pastry)	basboosa
<i>?um<sup>C</sup>ali</i> أم علي (lit. a popular type of Arab pastry)	umm Ali

The inappropriate English renditions of the Arabic CBTs provided by the informants on Table 2 above convey little information to their intended target readership about the concepts they indicate. Perhaps the least informative of these are the renditions involving the transliteration of the Arabic CBTs only. A gloss of each of those terms, along the lines suggested by the researcher (Appendix 2), is necessary to convey its precise meaning to its intended reader. Meanwhile, rendering the Arabic culture-specific expression *alniqa:b* النقاب (lit. face cover worn by some Muslim women) as *veil* has three pitfalls: (a) it confuses the Arabic superordinate *alHija:b* الحجاب (lit. veil worn by some Muslim women) with its hyponym *alniqa:b* (lit. face cover worn by some Muslim women), (b) it does not indicate the cultural specificity of the term, and (c) it is rather uninformative as it does not offer, to the target reader, any explanation of this type of veil worn by many Muslim women. We would therefore propose the following rendition for that Arabic CBT: *alniqa:b is a kind of veil, usually black, that covers a woman's face including or excluding the eyes and is often worn by female Muslims in some countries.*

Another rendition provided by the informants which suffers from the defects just discussed is that of the Arabic culture-specific term *al<sup>C</sup>aTTa:r* العطار (lit. a perfumer), as *perfumer*, *druggist* or *spice dealer*, presumably copied from such bilingual Arabic-English dictionaries as Wehr (1980: 620) and Baalbaki (1997: 766). A more appropriate rendition of this Arabic CBT, proposed by the present writer, would be: *al<sup>C</sup>aTTa:r is a person who sells and occasionally makes such things as incense, perfumes, drugs and spices.* Likewise, the informants' defective rendition of Arabic *al<sup>C</sup>u:d* العود as *lute* would be better replaced by the much more appropriate rendition proposed by Dickins et al. (2002:33) "*al<sup>C</sup> u.d is the Arab*

*lute which may be described as a short – necked lute, the strings of which are plucked with plectrum.”*

Further, the rendition of the Arabic CBT *naSabu: lahu alxiya:m* نصبوا له الخيام (lit. they set up tents for him) as *they pitched up / erected /set up tents for him* would sound meaningless to the target readers unless it is followed by the explanatory phrase: *which was the custom of Bedouins to show warm welcome and generosity to their guest*. An alternative functional rendition of this Arabic CBT proposed by the researcher would be *to lay out the red carpet for him*. As for the informants’ rendition of Arabic *maHram* محرم (lit. one of the close male unmarried relatives of a female Muslim) as *unmarriageable person*, probably copied from Baalbaki (1997: 989) or Wehr (1980: 172), it would sound ambiguous to the target reader. Meanwhile, rendering the same Arabic term as ‘*father, brother, husband and uncle*’ would be imprecise as it leaves several other male relatives who are considered, according to Islam, ‘unmarriageable’ to a female Muslim. We would therefore suggest the following as a more plausible English rendition of this Arabic CBT: *al-maHram is a male relative like father, son, brother, breast-brother, uncle, step-son and nephew, who, according to Islam, cannot be married to one of his female relatives*.

Finally, the five English renditions provided, by the informants, on Table 2 above for the Arabic culture-specific expression *ali<sup>c</sup>tika:f* الاعتكاف (lit. seclusion, by some Muslims, in mosques for some time) give a partial and rather imprecise meaning of that term. A more appropriate rendition that we would suggest is the following shortened version of the one originally proposed by Qaazi (1979: 27):

*al<sup>c</sup>tika:f* is an Islamic term that denotes seclusion in a mosque during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan for the purpose of worshipping Allah. A Muslim who performs this ritual is not allowed to leave the mosque except for a very short period of time and only for urgent purposes such as going to the toilet.

#### 4.2.2 Errors of ‘incorrect meaning’

In their attempts to render the Arabic CBTS into English, many informants made the frequent error of providing incorrect or imprecise meanings of those terms, as shown in the following table (Table 3).

Table 3. The informants’ translation errors of ‘incorrect meaning’

Arabic CBTs	Informants’ Incorrect English Renditions
<i>umdat alqaryah</i> عمدة القرية (lit. a person on whom the village totally depends)	mayor
<i>al<sup>c</sup>u:d</i> العود (lit. the Arab lute)	flute
<i>maHram</i> محرم (lit. one of the close unmarried male relatives of a female Muslim)	unmarried
<i>waqafa maktu:fa alyadayn</i> وقف مكتوف اليدين (lit. he stood with crossed hands)	He stood with empty hands.
<i>ghariqa Hatta: uthunayhi fi: al<sup>c</sup>amal</i> غرق حتى أذنيه في العمل (lit. he got drowned up to his ears)	He drowned to his ears. He sank at work.
<i>yanfax fi: qirbah maqTu<sup>c</sup>ah</i> ينفخ في قربة مقطوعة (lit. he is blowing a bag that has some holes)	He is hoping against hope.

Our analysis of the erroneous renditions mentioned in Table 3 above reveals that the most likely explanation of such renditions is the inadequate proficiency of some of the informants in the target language i.e. English. More specifically, those informants seem to face some difficulty in handling idiomatic culture specific expressions.

A case in point is the informants' rendition of Arabic *ghariqa Hatta: uthunayhi fi: al<sup>C</sup>amal* غرق حتى أذنيه في العمل as *he sank at work*, rather than providing its English functional equivalent *he was up to his eyes in work*. Likewise, one of the informants incorrectly rendered the Arabic idiomatic expression *waqafa maktu:fa alyadayn* وقف مكتوف اليدين (lit. he stood with crossed hands) as *He stood with empty hands*.

#### 4.2.3 Errors of omission

In making errors of omission, the translator fails to render a necessary element of information from the source text in the target text (Delisle et al. 1999: 165). A few errors of omission have been noticed in the informants' English renditions of Arabic CBTs. For example, the rendering, by some informants, of the Arabic CBT *<sup>C</sup>antar zama:nih* عنتر زمانه (lit. antar of his times') as *the bravest man, a very brave man* and *the strongest person* leaves out the key element in the source - language expression i.e. the reference to the heroic Arab figure *<sup>C</sup>antarah* عنتره, thus failing to convey the meaning of this culture-specific term to its intended readers. A more appropriate rendition of this term would be *Antarah of his times, a reference to Antarah, the hero of a well-known romance of Arab chivalry*. Similarly, the informants' renditions of the Arabic CBT *?ajwad min Ha:tim* أجود من حاتم (lit. more generous than Haatim) as *the most generous person* and *a very generous person* involve an error of omission as they make no mention of Hatim alTaai, who is considered the most generous man in Arab social history.

#### 4.2.4 Errors in the transliteration of Arabic CBTs

The informants' renditions in which improper transliterations of the Arabic culture-specific proper names were used clearly indicate that they had little training in this area. Indeed, readers of those renditions who are familiar with some common transliteration systems would easily recognize the informants' transliteration errors. Examples of such transliteration errors are *nekab* (lit. face cover worn by some Muslim women), *al-etekaf* (lit. staying, by some Muslims, in mosques during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan), *<sup>C</sup>ud* (lit. Arab lute), *<sup>C</sup>atar* (lit. a perfumer) and *maHaram* (lit. one of the close unmarriageable male relatives of a female Muslim).

### 5. Discussion of results

A number of significant aspects revealed in the test results will be discussed in this section. One of these concerns the difficulty encountered by most informants in handling the Islamic-oriented CBTs *ali<sup>C</sup>tika:f* الاعتكاف, *maHram* محرم, and *alniqa:b* النقاب. The problem of comprehending the precise meanings of those religious terms is augmented by the fact that equivalents for such terms are simply absent in the target culture. For this reason, translator

trainees should be particularly alerted to the major challenges posed by Islamic-bound terms which should be accorded special attention in the translation class in terms of both presentation and practice.

Another lexical category of CBTs which most informants have found particularly problematic is that of fixed phrases represented in idiomatic, proverbial and metaphorical expressions. The difficulty here lies in the semantically opaque nature of many such expressions and the possible existence of one or more items that are culturally rooted in the source culture. This is quite evident in, for example, the proverbial expression *sa<sup>C</sup>a: ?ila: Hatfihi biDilfiḥ* سعى إلى حتفه بظلفه (lit. he sought his death with his hoof), in which the translator will have to grapple with the precise designation of the cultural item *Dilf* ظلف (hoof) and, at the same time, attempt to reconstruct the meaning of the whole expression. Then comes the more intricate problem of finding the most appropriate English proverbial equivalent *to be hoisted on his own petard* which, rather unsurprisingly, none of the informants was able to produce.

On a more global note, the tendency to offer an *elective* course on cultural issues in translation as is the case in the two graduate programmes in which the informants are registered raises the following question: what if some students choose not to study this course? How can lack of knowledge of cultural issues in translation and, perhaps more importantly, practice in translating cultural texts be compensated? One possible suggestion that can be made here is the inclusion of a major unit on culture in translation in one of the compulsory courses offered to students.

## 6. Implications

As revealed in Section 3.2 above, the informants' performance in the CBTs translation test was rather unsatisfactory. They faced specific difficulties as reflected in the errors they have made in their renditions of the CBTs included in the test. In this section, the writer will examine the implications of these findings for translator trainers.

1. The inclusion of an elective credit course on culture in translation in the syllabi of postgraduate English-Arabic translation programmes reflects recognition of the need to develop the students' competence in tackling culture-specific issues in translation. This course should place particular emphasis on the following:
  - (a) Providing greater exposure to relevant materials about various aspects of the Arab culture. Enhancement of the students' knowledge of Arab culture would help them to handle the CBTs which occur in the texts set for translation.
  - (b) Providing extensive practice in the translation, into English, of a variety of Arabic CBTs that belong to different cultural categories (historical, social, religious, ecological, etc.). Prominence should be given here to the two highly problematic categories of Islamic-oriented CBTs and the fixed phrases category represented in idiomatic, proverbial and metaphorical expressions
  - (c) Increasing the awareness of translator trainees of the various translation procedures employed in the rendition of Arabic CBTs into English.
2. Introducing a major unit on culture in translation in one of the compulsory courses offered to students is essential to fill the possible gap in the training of students who choose not to take the elective course on culture in translation.
3. In setting a translation assignment, translator trainers should always provide a translation brief that defines the context, purpose and readership of the text to be

translated. Students should be made aware of the significance of taking the translation brief into account while translating.

4. The tendency among some postgraduate translator trainees in Arab universities to depend heavily on dictionaries while translating should be seriously addressed. This requires, as an initial step, changing the rampant attitude among those trainees of viewing a dictionary as 'the authority' on language rather than a useful tool for the translator.
5. Translator trainees in postgraduate English-Arabic translation programmes should be given sufficient practice in the transliteration of Arabic proper names.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has identified some of the difficulties faced by postgraduate students in rendering Arabic culture-bound terms into English. Implications of the study for translation pedagogy have been also discussed. Given the small number of informants participating in the study and the limited number of CBTs included in the translation test, more studies are needed in this area to support or refute its findings.

## REFERENCES

- Abu-Ssaydeh, A. 2006. *A Dictionary of English Idiomatic Expressions, Arabic-English*. Beirut: Dar al-Khayal Publishers.
- Al-Khaja, N. 2011. Strategies for translating UAE culture-specific items. A research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in English Language (Translation) in the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Sharjah.
- Aziz, Y. 1999. Cross-cultural translation and ideological shifts. *International Journal of Translation* 11/1 and 2, 29-83.
- Baalbaki, R. 1997. *Al-Mawrid: A Modern Arabic-English*. Beirut: Dar El-Elm Lil-Malayan.
- Baker, M. 1992. *In Other Words: A Course Book on Translation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Barkho, L.Y. 1987. Cultural problems of Arabic-English translation. *Babel* 31/3, 156-151.
- Delisle, J., H. Lee-Jahnke and M.C. Cormier. 1999. *Translation Terminology*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Dickins, J., S. Hervev and I. Higgins. 2002. *Thinking Arabic Translation: A Course in Translation Method*. London: Routledge.
- Faiq, S. 2004. The Cultural Encounter in Translating from Arabic. In: S. Faiq. (ed.). *Cultural Encounters in Translation from Arabic*. Clevedon, Buffalo and Toronto: Multilingual Matters, 1-13.
- Gambier, Y. 2007. *Doubts and Directions in Translation Studies*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ghazala, H. 2002. Cross-cultural links in translation, English-Arabic. *International Journal of Translation* 14/1, 137-162.
- Homeidi, M.A. 2004. Arabic translation across cultures. *Babel* 50/1, 13-27.
- Loescher, W. 1991. *Translation performance, translation process and translation strategies*. Tuebingen: Guten Narr.
- Mazid, B. 2007. *Politics of translation: power and ideology, culture and X-phemism in translation between Arabic and English*. München: Lincom Europa.
- Newmark, P. 1988. *A Textbook of Translation*, New York: Prentice Hall.
- Nord, C. 1991. *Text Analysis in Translation*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Nord, C. 1997. *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Ordudari, M. 2007. Translation Procedures, Strategies and Methods. *Translation Journal* 11/3. Available at: <http://translationjournal.net/journal//41culture.htm>. Accessed 4 February 2011.
- Qaazi, M.A. 1979. *A Concise Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, Chicago: Kazi Publications.

- Shunnaq, A. 2000. Arabic-English translation of political speeches. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 8/3, 207-228.
- Venuti, L. 1998. Strategies of translation. In: M. Baker. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of translation studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 240-244
- Wehr, H. 1980. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Beirut: Librarie du Liban; London: McDonald and Evans Ltd.

#### **INTERNET SOURCES**

- Abdel-Hafez, A. 2002. Cultural elements in the translation of Mahdfooz's *The Beginning and the End* and *Palace of Desire*. Available at: [http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/07\\_1/abdelhafiz15.htm](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/07_1/abdelhafiz15.htm) accessed 8 April 2008.
- AUS (American University of Sharjah), 2006. Graduate Degree Programs: Translation and Interpreting. Available at: [http://www.aus.edu/catalog/2006/grad/grad\\_Trans&Interpr.php](http://www.aus.edu/catalog/2006/grad/grad_Trans&Interpr.php) accessed 9 May 2007.
- Bahameed, A.S. 2008. Hindrences in Arabic-English Intercultural Translation. *Translation Journal* 12/1. Available at: <http://www.translationjournal.net/journal/43culture.htm> accessed 7 May 2011.
- Balfaqeeh, N. 2009. Strategies for Translating Idioms and Culturally-Bound Expressions within the Human Development Genre. Available at: [http://www.cels.bham.ac.uk/resources/essays/Noor\\_Balfaqeeh\\_822875Diss.pdf](http://www.cels.bham.ac.uk/resources/essays/Noor_Balfaqeeh_822875Diss.pdf) accessed 5 May 2011.
- Bing, H.X. 2006. Translating Cultural-Specific Items: a Descriptive Study. *Sino-US English Teaching* 3/12, 82-93. Available at: <http://www.linguist.org.cn/doc/su200612/su20061217.pdf> accessed 4 February 2011.
- Harvey, M. 2003. A beginner's course in legal translation: the case of culture-bound terms. Available at: <http://www.tradulex.org/Actes2000/harvey.pdf>. Accessed 3 April 2007.
- Oxford Dictionary of English, 2011. Available at: <http://www.oed.com> accessed 10 February 2011.
- UoS (University of Sharjah), 2006. Graduate Degree Programs: Master in English-Arabic Translation. Available at: [https://www.sharjah.ac.ae/English/Academics/College/Arts\\_and\\_Sciences/Departments\\_and\\_Programs/\\_english\\_Lang\\_Liter/Graduation\\_Requirements.aspx](https://www.sharjah.ac.ae/English/Academics/College/Arts_and_Sciences/Departments_and_Programs/_english_Lang_Liter/Graduation_Requirements.aspx) accessed 9 May 2007.

## Appendix 1

### Transliteration convention

In the transliteration of Arabic characters, the writer has utilized, for typological convenience, the following system which makes little use of diacritical marks:

- همزة ? voiceless glottal plosive
- TH ث voiceless inter-dental fricative
- j ج voiced palatal affricate
- H ح voiceless pharyngeal fricative
- x خ voiceless velar fricative
- th ذ voiced inter-dental fricative
- sh ش voiceless palatal fricative
- S ص voiceless alveo-dental fricative
- D ض voiced alveo-dental plosive
- T ط voiceless alveo-dental plosive
- Z ظ voiced interdental fricative
- ع<sup>c</sup> voiced pharyngeal fricative
- gh غ voiced velar fricative
- q ق voiceless uvular plosive
- Vowel length is indicated by a colon.

## Appendix 2

### Test of Culture-bound Terms in Translation

Dear M.A. student:

You have been commissioned by an Arab cultural centre in Washington to translate, into English, an article about the Arabs, their countries, language and culture. This article will appear in one of the city's widely-read daily newspapers. The purpose of the article is to provide readers with some facts about the Arabs, their land and way of life (social customs, religious beliefs, types of food and drink, clothes, forms of art, etc.), and promote greater understanding between Arabs and non-Arabs in the USA. The intended readership is educated native speakers of English who may have some general knowledge of the Arab world, but no specific expertise in Arabic or Islamic culture. Therefore, the translation is expected to be readily understandable to its intended readers.

Bearing in mind the context, purpose and readership of the target text, as defined above, give the MOST APPROPRIATE English renditions (in bold) of the underlined Arabic words.

1. ترتدي الكثير من النساء النقاب في عدد من الدول الإسلامية.  
*tartady alkaTHi:r min alnisa: ?i **alniqa:ba** fi: <sup>c</sup>adadin min alduwali al?isla:miyyah.*  
(lit. many women wear '**anniqaab**' - **face cover**- in a number of Muslim countries)
2. يقوم عمدة القرية بحل المشاكل الناشئة بين أفرادها.  
*yaqu:mu <sup>c</sup>**umdatu alqaryati** biHalli almasha:kilialna:shi?ati bayna afra:diha:*  
(lit. The **umdah of the village**, the person on whom the village totally depends, solves the problems that arise among its individual)
3. يلجأ بعض المسلمين إلى الإعتكاف في المساجد في العشر الأواخر من رمضان.

yalja?u ba<sup>C</sup>Du almuslimi:na ?ila: **ali<sup>C</sup>tika:fi** fy almasa:jidi fi: al<sup>C</sup>shri al?awa:xiri min ramaDa:n.

(lit. Some Muslims resort to **alitikaaf – seclusion** - in mosques during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan)

4. وكان من عادة البدو أنهم إذا وفد عليهم شخص ذو شأن نصبوا له الخيام.

wa ka:na min<sup>C</sup>a:dati albadwi ?annahum ?itha: wafada<sup>C</sup>alayhim shaxSun thu sha?nin **naSabu: lahu alxiya:m.**

(lit. It was the custom of Bedouins that if an important person visited them, they **set up tents for him**)

5. تشتغل أعداد كبيرة من العرب في مهن شعبية تقليدية ، فمنهم العطار والبقال .

tashtaghilu ?a<sup>C</sup>da:dun kabi:ratun min al<sup>C</sup>arabi fy mihanin sha<sup>C</sup>biyyatin taqli:diyyatin faminhum **al<sup>C</sup>aTTa:ru wa albaqqa:l.**

(lit. Large numbers of Arabs work in traditional occupations as **al-attaar – a perfumer-** and **al-baqqaal – a grocer**)

6. يعتبر العود من الآلات الموسيقية العربية الكلاسيكية .

yu<sup>C</sup> tabaru **al<sup>C</sup>u:du** min al?a:la:ti almu:si:qiyyati al<sup>C</sup>arabiyyati alkla:si:kiyyah.

(lit. **al-‘u:d – the Arab lute** – is considered one of the classical Arab musical instruments)

7. يرى بعض الفقهاء أنه لا يجوز لإمرأة السفر بمفردها بل مع مَحْرَمٍ .

yara: ba<sup>C</sup>Du alfuqaha: ?i ?annahu la: yaju:z li ?imra?atin alsafara bimufradiha: bal ma<sup>C</sup>a **maHram.**

(lit. Some Muslim scholars believe that, a woman is not allowed to travel alone but should be accompanied by **maHram - one of her close unmarriageable male relatives**)

8. من أنواع الحلويات الشعبية العربية (الكنافة) و (البسبوسة) و (أم علي).

min anwa:<sup>C</sup>i alHalawiyya:ti alsha<sup>C</sup>biyyati al<sup>C</sup>arabiyyati alkuna:fatu wa albasbu:satu wa ?**ummu<sup>C</sup> ali.**

(lit. Among the popular types of Arab pastries are al-kunaafa, al-basboosa and **um ‘ali**)

9. يصف العرب أشجع الشجعان في منطقتهم بأنه (عنتر زمانه)، كما يصفون الشخص الكريم للغاية بأنه (أجود من حاتم).

yaSifu al<sup>C</sup>arabu ?ashja<sup>C</sup>a alshuj<sup>C</sup>a:ni fi: manTiqatihim bi?annahu **antaru zama:nih kama: yaSifu:na alshaxSa alkari:ma lilgha;yah bi?annahu ?ajwadu min Ha:tim.**

(lit. Arabs describe the bravest man in their area as ‘**antar of his times**, and they refer to the most generous one as ‘**more generous than Haatim**)

10. تزخر اللغة العربية بالكثير من العبارات الإصطلاحية كقولهم (وقف مكتوف اليدين) و (غرق حتى أذنيه) – في العمل مثلاً.

tazxaru allughatu al<sup>C</sup>arabiyyatu bilkaTHi:ri min al<sup>C</sup>iba:ra:ti al?iSTila:Hiyyati kaqawlihim **waqafa maktu:fa alyadayni wa ghariqa Hatta: uthunayhi fi: al<sup>C</sup>amali maTHalan**

(lit. Arabic is full of idiomatic expressions such as ‘**he stood with crossed hands**’, and ‘**he got drowned up to his ears**’ as, for example, in work)

(11) من الأمثال الشعبية المتداولة قولهم (سعى إلى حتفه بظلفه) و (ينفخ في قربة مقطوعة).

min al?amTHa:li alsha<sup>C</sup>biyyati almutada:walah qawluhum sa<sup>C</sup>a: ?ila: **Hatfihi biDilfih wa yanfax fi: qirbah maqTu:<sup>C</sup>ah.**

(lit. Among the commonly used Arabic proverbs are ‘**he sought his death with his hoof**’ and ‘**he is blowing a bag that has some holes**’)

### Appendix 3

#### Test of Culture-bound Terms in Translation (Answer Key)

1. *alniqa:b* is a kind of veil, usually black, that covers a woman's face including or excluding the eyes and is often worn by female Muslims in some countries.
2. *<sup>C</sup>umdah* is chief or head of a village
3. *al?<sup>i</sup><sup>C</sup>tika:f* is an Islamic term that denotes seclusion in a mosque during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan for the purpose of worshipping Allah. A Muslim who performs this ritual is not allowed to leave the mosque except for a very short period of time and only for urgent purposes such as going to the toilet.
4. To use a modern analogy 'to lay out the red carpet' for some important person.
5. *al<sup>C</sup>aTTa:r* is a person who sells and occasionally makes such things as local incense, perfumes, drugs and spices.
6. *al<sup>C</sup>u:d* is the Arab lute which may be described as a short – necked lute, the strings of which are plucked with plectrum.
7. *almaHram* is a male relative like father, son, brother, breast-brother, uncle, step-son and nephew, who, according to Islam, cannot be married to one of his female relatives.
8. *albasbu:sa* is a popular type of Arab pastry made from semolina, eggs, sugar, ghee or butter, baking powder and vanilla drops.  
*?um <sup>C</sup>ali* (lit. Ali's mother) is a kind of Arab pastry made from a special type of bread, milk, sugar, cream, almonds and nuts; it is probably named after the woman who was the first to bake such a pastry.
9. *<sup>C</sup>antar of his times*, a reference to *<sup>C</sup>antarah*, the hero of a well-known romance of Arab chivalry.  
*More generous than Ha:tim*, a reference to *Ha:tim aTTa:?<sup>i</sup>:*, who is considered the most generous man in Arab social history.
10. *To sit on one's hands*.  
*Up to his eyes* (in work).
11. *Be hoisted on his own petard*.  
*To flog a dead horse*.