

2013

Issues in Translating Tarifit Tales

Hanan Bennoudi

Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, Université Ibn Zohr, Agadir, Maroc, h.bennoudi@uiz.ac.ma

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.aaru.edu.jo/dirassat>



Part of the [Linguistics Commons](#), and the [Translation Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bennoudi, Hanan (2013) "Issues in Translating Tarifit Tales," *Dirassat*. Vol. 16 : No. 16 , Article 17.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.aaru.edu.jo/dirassat/vol16/iss16/17>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Arab Journals Platform. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Dirassat* by an authorized editor. The journal is hosted on [Digital Commons](#), an Elsevier platform. For more information, please contact rakan@aarj.edu.jo, marah@aarj.edu.jo, u.murad@aarj.edu.jo.

Issues in Translating Tarifit Tales

Hanan Bennoudi

Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines

Université Ibn Zohr - Agadir

Introduction:

Oral literature is as old as man; it has existed in the Amazigh language for many centuries. Among the innumerable genres of oral literature, folk tales (Tinfas in Tarifit) remain the most important because they have played an important role in touching the heart of our collective being and permitted to people, young and old, to shift beyond the boundaries of reality. However, Tarifit tales have remained *terra incognita* to this day because they were shut down and stuffed in the family and village context. So, since a nation's culture is a combination of diverse voices which have a common goal: the need to tell their stories and recreate their myths; it is very important to translate these tales into English (and other foreign languages) so they can travel to other peoples and other

Tarifit: dialect of the Amazigh language spoken in the northern part of Morocco (the Rif)

cultures because cultural diversity includes ‘ appropriating’ works written in other languages in order to make other countries’ stories part of one’s own cultural repertoire. Because individuals from SL community are unable to understand words, expressions, or concepts used by the TL community, translation comes as a tool to communicate those ideas across time and space in order to minimize all risks of misunderstandings.

Translation and Culture:

Translation is not a mere language transfer. It is a process of rendering concepts from one language to another and an operation that implies beginning a process of approaching culture. According to Toury (1995) “translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions i.e. at least two sets of norm systems on each level” (56). In other words, translating as a process and translation as the result of this activity are inseparable from the concept of culture. Thanks to translation, new texts are introduced into a culture and this latter undergoes an innovation and embraces a new cultural awareness. In addition, it is thanks to cultural knowledge and

appreciation that translations build bridges among people from different hemispheres of the planet. A nation's culture flourishes by interacting with other cultures and the role of translation in this interaction is of paramount importance because it is thanks to translation that we know about other people, their norms and their behaviour. Besides, it is thanks to translation that cross-cultural contacts are improved and promoted, and the service that translators render to enhance cultures and nurture languages has been significant throughout history. Thus, Duff (1989) states that without translation:

There would be no 'Glasnost' or 'Perestroika',
no Cannes film festival, no Nobel Prize, no

advances in medicine, science, or engineering,
no international law, no Olympic games, no
Hamlet, no *Peace & War*. (7)

Many translation theorists emphasized the cultural dimension in translation. So, a good translator should be familiar with the culture, the customs and social settings of the source and target languages. This socio-cultural awareness can only improve the quality of translation. According to Hatim and Mason the social context in translating a text is probably a more important variable in its genre since "translating is a communicative process which takes place within a social context." (1990:2) Consequently, translation is a medium by which beliefs, customs, rituals and behaviours of a society/culture (source culture) are transmitted to the audience of another society/culture (target culture). This transfer has to be carried out very carefully by the translator because every culture expresses its idiosyncrasies in a way that is 'culture bound' i.e. cultural words, proverbs, idiomatic expressions and tales, whose origin and use are intrinsically and uniquely bound to the culture concerned, are not necessarily expressed in a similar way in source and target languages. Mona Baker confirms this by stating that "the way a language chooses to express or not express various meanings can not be depicted and only occasionally matches the way another language chooses to express the same reality" (1992:68). It is important to emphasize here that the process of transmitting cultural elements through translation is a complicated task because culture is a complex collection of experiences that condition daily life. One can hardly study translation as a linguistic system without referring to the socio-cultural background beyond it, as Malinowski explains "a language is essentially rooted in the reality of the culture...it can not be explained without constant reference to [the] broader context of verbal utterance"

(Quoted in Katan:2004,99). Therefore, beliefs, attitudes and feelings change from culture to culture. A source language may express a behaviour that is totally unknown to the target language audience. To illustrate, social relationships are a cultural element. In Moroccan Amazigh culture, people live in extended families which eventually result in showing respect to the elders by addressing them in a certain way. For instance, in Tarifit the eldest brother in a family is called '3zizi' while in Tashlhit he is called 'dadda'. Because of the absence of a word in target language that has the same evocative value of source language, both words can be literally translated by 'uncle' in English. In this context, "the literal translation does not secure referential and pragmatic equivalence to the original" (Newmark:1968,9). Moreover, symbols are not universal, what is considered a bad omen, whether an animal, a bird, may not symbolize the same thing in another culture. For instance an owl is a symbol of wisdom in the English culture but in all regions of Morocco (except in the region of Tighir, south of Morocco where it symbolizes wisdom) it is a bad omen standing for bad luck and sadness. So, no matter how competent a translator can be and how familiar s/he is with the linguistic and cultural background of SL and TL; there are always 'alien' words or concepts that can not be translated. Here the translator has to convey the message in anything but alien way which may cause misunderstanding or confusion to the target audience having a different cultural background (social standards, religion, norms, habits....etc).

Therefore, my translation of Tarifit folktales has begun after developing a reasonable but modest competence in both the source language and the target language and I was aware that it is not an easy task to transplant a text steeped in one culture, one history into another especially that myths and legends are major components of any culture and present major obstacles for a translator. The larger the distance is, the more difficult the translation process will be. However, when we translate an Amazigh tale into English, we are not only translating an individual performance but an example of a genre that is common to both traditions. So folk narrative is characterized by a high degree of translatability because we are helped by the fact that the folktale is a kind of universal genre whose narrative motif and tale types are shared by traditions that stretch from Morocco to India and from Spain to America.

The Translation Procedure:

Folktales are universal and they exist in all cultures. They are mythical, magical and extraordinary. They transmit a cultural heritage and they always produce the same fascination on young and old generations by teaching human values through dealing

with contrasts such as evil and good, rich and poor, justice and injustice...etc. Many of us had the chance to read one of the famous tales of Perrault, Grimms and Anderson; and travelled to a world of fairies, castles and ogresses through the pages of The Beauty & The Beast, Cinderella, Gretel & Hensel...But unfortunately, very few people are aware of the rich repertoire of Tarifit folktales. In these folktales, we are able to see ordinary moments in the lives of ordinary characters whose life is marked by extraordinary events that render their lives unreal and imaginary. We see men and women struggling to survive to jealousy, fear, regret, love...

However, translating these tales is not a simple matter of substituting words. The translator has to deal with all the usual non-equivalence between linguistic structures, social phenomena and the social and ideological frames by which these phenomena are 'read'. Therefore, the responsibility of the translator is to produce a text that reads comfortably and sounds 'natural' without violating the norms of the folktale style generally recognised within the community or destroy the features that endow the original text with its particular quality. . Here is an excerpt from a tale:

Source language: gizman, ira ijja ijjen wargaz imrk s thnain n timgharin.

Faulty translation: in the past, was there a man married to two women

Correct translation: once upon a time, there lived a man who had two wives

Benjamin (1966) argues that the task of the translator of a tale must "consist in finding the intended effect...upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original" (Quoted in Faiq 2004: 75). So, in my English translation of Tarifit tales, it was deemed appropriate and consistent with the spirit of the tale to add some words, omit others in order to give the reader the chance to follow the smooth transition of events which will fill his soul with emotions. For example, some of the tales I translated are loaded with religious, historical and religious references. To give the closest approximation of the source text, it was necessary to opt for explanatory footnotes because some of these allusions give a certain density to the language and need to be explicated in the translation in order to bring forth the richness and the spirit of the Tarifit tale to the reader. For instance, in the tale "The Tambourine"

One day, a beggar passed by the house and started singing and playing with his tambourine1.

We added the following footnote: '*Some beggars in most regions of Morocco ask for money or old clothes while playing with a tambourine and most of the time, they sing verses from the Koran.*'

However, some cultural references did not need a footnote because they were clear from the contextual surrounding. For example, the reference to demons possessing bodies has not been explicated because, I believe that a universal superstitious belief is shared in many cultures but gives the original flavor of a different culture. For example, ‘thusra’, ‘thargou’ or ‘nunja’ are replaced by one equivalent in the target language namely ‘ogress’. Also particularly challenging from the translation point of view was handling the absence of an item from the cultural repertoire of the target readers. For example the word

‘aqdih’ refers to a utensil made with mud used by people to store butter for a longer time because they did not have fridges. So, because there is no equivalent material existing in the target culture, the word is replaced by ‘container’. Another example is the word ‘ajun/ allun in Tashlhit/ bender in Arabic’ which refers to a musical instrument but since the target audience lacks the referent for the same instrument, we have opted for ‘Tambourine’ which is a near equivalent that would render a more approximate effect on the target audience.

On the other hand, I think that the translator has to keep the rhythm of the tale created by the imagery and the word-play. So, in many cases, for the sake of clarity, I needed to shorten and simplify the style without sacrificing the repetitive quality of the style of tale telling. At different places in the different tales I translated, there was a need to sacrifice stylistic idiosyncrasies because they were hard to preserve or they could impede comprehensibility by violating the norms of the target language, whereas as M. Baker states, “the use of common target patterns which are familiar to the target reader plays an important role in keeping the communication channels open” (1992:57). Consider the following excerpts from different tales:

Example 1:

Source Language: Adusha kaa minghay bash adirigh amshek ayajdid

Literal translation: I will give all that I have to be like you bird

Improved translation: I can give anything to be free like you little bird

Example 2:

Source language: ira yejja dlmiskine oughas khli mingha shen tarwa ines.

Literal translation: He was poor, he did not even have what his children would eat.

Improved translation: He was so poor he could not even provide his family with their daily bread.

Example 3:

Source language: iffagh ikem igour igour, ikda3 sb3a nidoura d sb3a nrbhpura.

Literal translation: he went out, walked and walked, crossed seven mountains and seven seas

Improved translation: he set out a journey across the seven hills and the seven streams

The important question of choosing a particular style in the target language and replacing a word by another is solved, I think, in the translator's subconscious during the reception of the original. I believe it is a natural process that takes place before the very act of translation begins. A translator's job is to follow the intertwining of hidden signals of the language of the original and those of the target language in order to achieve the desired adequacy of translation. When translating Tarifit folktales for a wide English readership, as a translator, I must think of the tales the reader listened to in his/her childhood but not succumb to the challenges of cultural assimilation. A translation needs to be fluent, yet not at the cost of forcing the source text into the substantive patterns of the target language.

On the other hand, when dealing with grammatical constructions, it is not a problematic matter because the translator has to respect the rules of grammar of the target language at all levels, otherwise the translation would read as a 'third language' as Duff would call it. However, it becomes difficult and problematic for the translator when the tale contains whole passages of rhymed prose made up of both concord of vocal arrays and repetitions of sounds and words (assonance, alliteration) and various patterns of morphonetic parallelism. Such a synergy of words should be carefully recast trying to retain the intended meaning and effect, otherwise the tale would suffer great losses and a clever translator is one who minimizes this loss. A syntactic rhythm is frequently established in the Tarifit tales on the basis of the repetition of two or three items, the stylistic function of this repetition is to establish a narrative rhythm because children love repetition and hate monotony; hence the need for keeping the rhythm in the translated tales into English. Consider the following passages:

we will go through the thicket, across the river and deep in the woods and will live there.

Hassan walked and walked; deep and deep in the woods and suddenly came across a big bird .

He will make our kingdom the worst of all kingdoms, the worst in all times.

Goodness gracious, goodness gracious!!!!

Conclusion:

Today, Tarifit folk tales are definitely vanishing; they must be collected and translated so that they could travel among different peoples and cultures. So my analysis is an attempt to pay homage to the continuity of Amazigh culture in general and to preserve the invaluable treasure of its oral literature by making it available to the people who can not read the language in which it was written.

The tales having been orally performed in the Amazigh dialect of Tarifit within the socio-cultural context of Moroccan family, rendering them into English involved translation not only from one language into another but from one semiotic and cultural system into another. So, the translation of these folk tales was an exceptional challenge for me. There is no English/Amazigh/English dictionary so everything was like in an uncanny chess game in which you invent your combinations of move from scratch. While translating, I tried to go through a mere cosmetic procedure so that the tale could read as closely as the original because the fact that it is a translation is not an excuse. When being read, the translated tales should provoke in our inner soul authentic and secret chords of the language of a living tale and transport us to an imaginary world full of supernatural things and beings. It seems to me that there is one important factor that governs every translation: that the relationship between reader/audience and the translated text should be as closely as possible to that between reader/ audience and the original text; and translators “have to be aware of the fact that readers’ expectations, their norms and values, are influenced by culture and that their comprehension of utterances is to a large extent determined by these expectations, norms and values” (Kussmaul:1995,70).

I hope my approach sheds some light on the different issues and problems that are encountered in the translation process especially while dealing with two languages which are fairly remote in time and space, and are steeped in two different cultures namely English and Tarifit.