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## Self-translate to manipulate

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### ABSTRACT

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Translation involves the carrying-over of texts to target audiences that have at their disposal an established system of representation with its own norms for the production and consumption of knowledge vis-à-vis self, others, objects, and events. Based on its own culture, this system animates and regulates issues of identity, similarity, and difference between sources and targets. Notwithstanding its generally noble mission, translation is not innocent. Translators manipulate information to achieve representations of sources acceptable to target audiences. Given this premise, the aim here is to examine instances from the self-translation by Heikal of *Autumn of Fury* from English (1983) into Arabic (1988). The discussion shows how through self-translation, the author-cum-translator manipulates the reading position of the target audience, shaping thus translation as process, product, and reception.

**Keywords:** manipulation, self-translation, representations, readers, culture.

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## 1. Introduction

Particularly since the 1980s, the view of culture-modelling through translation has ushered in questions that cannot be adequately answered by the conventionalised notions of equivalence, accuracy, fidelity, or source-text-oriented vs. target-text-oriented approaches to translation and translating. The focus in translation studies has shifted from (un)translatability to the cultural, political, and economic ramifications of translation; away from concerns with translated texts (cohesion, etc), toward treating translation as social, cultural, and political acts taking place within and attached to global and local relations of power and dominance. It should be noted that this shift has, not surprisingly, been

precipitated by work on orientalism, post-colonial and cultural studies, and by the questioning of the transparent and fluent strategies and practices of translating (representing) others.

Summing up this shift in focus in translation studies, Hatim (2012: 83–84) writes:

Under what may be termed ‘the ideology of translation’, translation theorists [...] have become interested in such aspects of the process as:

- the choice of works to be translated (what is valued and what is excluded)
- the power structure which controls the production and consumptions of translations
- who has access to translation and who is denied access?
- what is omitted, added or altered in seeking to control the message?

Translating then involves the transporting (carrying-over) of languages and their associated cultures to specific target reading constituencies. These constituencies have at their disposal established systems of representation, with norms and conventions for the production and consumption of meanings vis-à-vis people, objects and events. These systems ultimately yield a master discourse of translation through which identity and difference are marked and within which translating is carried out (Faiq 2019).

As such the master discourse animates the examination and representation of cultural identity, similarity and difference as well as the dynamics of intercultural encounters through translation; leading often to the production of target texts that bear almost no resemblance to the realities of the sources, but rather satisfy particular agendas of the translating culture (cf. Carbonell 2004).

One can find reasons for such practices by Anglo-American translators for example rendering foreign works, such as Arabic ones into English, since these practices reflect the political and economic power of the English language; but one finds it intriguing when an Arab translating his own work, originally written in English, back into Arabic for his fellow Arabs adopts the same manipulative strategy. The reference here is to Heikal’s translation of his *Autumn of Fury* (1983) from English into Arabic (1988) and his insistence on carrying out the translation process into Arabic, his native language, himself. The discussion of how Heikal deliberately manipulates Arab readers is limited to the front and back covers, the introductions of both the English (ET) and Arabic (AT) texts, and the conclusion (this conclusion only appears in the AT).

## 2. Translation and manipulation

Over the last three decades or so many scholars have stressed that translation, by necessity, involves manipulation of linguistic and cultural traditions,

particularly those emanating from the so-called third world. Translation transcends the functional, dynamic, and other prescriptions for equivalence or cultural transpositions. Between extremes, translators find themselves doing the job and balancing all too often contradictory theories against the axiology (value, worth, ethics) of translation as a profession.

In general terms, the two fundamental components of translation are culture and language, and because it brings the two together, translation is by necessity a multi-faceted multi-problematic process with different manifestations and realizations. Culture is defined in different, often competing, ways. For our purposes here, culture is seen as being of two types, macro and micro. Macro culture (mental culture) includes the knowledge that people need to have to function effectively in their social context. Generally, the basic elements of macro culture include history, religion, values, social organization, and language as shown in figure 1.

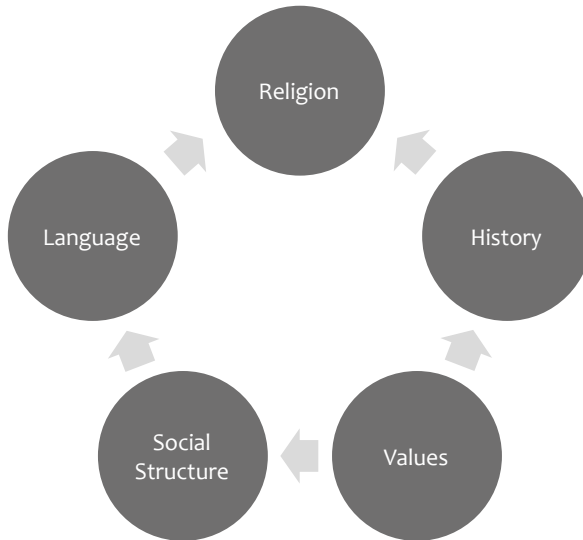


Figure 1: Elements of macro-culture

Religion, history, values, and social organization are interrelated (define each other together as one amalgam) and are all mediated via language. Through its language (or other systems of communication) a culture is a shared and learned behaviour that is transmitted across generations for the purposes of promoting group survival and growth as well as the demarcation of itself (as a group) vis-à-vis other cultures and their respective members (other groups). Macro culture is the prime motivator for representations and misrepresentations, including stereotypes, through translation.

Although language is considered an element of culture, it is rather one side of a coin whose other side is culture in its totality. They are both so intertwined that it is difficult to conceive of one without the other (Bassnett 1998). A very basic definition of language is that it is no more than the combination of a good grammar book and a good monolingual dictionary. However, these two do not capture what users actually do with the grammar rules and the words neatly listed in dictionaries. Instead use very much depends on users, and language assumes its importance as the mirror of the ways members of a macro- culture perceive reality, identity, self and other.

The second type of culture is micro (material culture), which generally refers to products and habits such as food, clothes, sleeping norms, marriage and divorce ceremonies, prayers, modes of transportation, habitat, flora and fauna, etc. The elements of micro-culture do not usually represent serious difficulties in translation (after all, fish is fish and the differences lie in how it is defined and prepared as food). Micro culture elements can be explained in footnotes, for example. When celebrating cultural differences, almost all media outlets and both governmental and non-governmental bodies unfortunately focus on aspects of micro culture (programs, shows, campaigns, festivals, etc, on different dance traditions, cuisines, and clothes) as instances of celebrating cultural otherness, ignoring along the way that macro culture is the central organ in intercultural encounters. Still, aspects of micro-culture may well become signatures (icons) reflecting macro-cultures and as such they trigger underlying perceptions derived from the system generated by a master discourse (turban, beard, veil, and camel are cases in point).

The representations of Arabs, for example, by and/or for the West are not just accounts of different places, cultures, and societies, but more importantly they are projections of certain Western fears and/or desires masqueraded as objective knowledge: consider the issue of the *Hijab* (head scarf) of Muslim school girls in France and the bearded Arab-looking man in the United States, for example. The Arab world is still translated/represented through monolingual eyes, whereby the same discursive strategies still prevail as Dallal (1998: 8) writes:

One of the ironies about multiculturalism is how parochial it is. Despite ever-increasing globalism, multiculturalism remains largely monolingual and limited to American culture: consider the absence of interest in Arabic literature and culture in Western Europe and the United States, despite the enormous and persistent attention paid to the Arab world and to Islam.

In such a context translation becomes “[...] a significant site for raising questions of representation, power, and historicity. The context is one of contested stories attempting to account for, to recount, the asymmetry and inequality of relations between peoples, races, languages” (Niranjana 1992:1). And since translations are generally representations of cultures as understood and

interpreted by translators, there is always an ideological dimension, albeit often camouflaged through source-attributions.

In the context of post-colonial Arab World, for example, and as Bassnett (1998) appropriately argues, translation projects favour the target readers so much so that source texts, their cultures and readers become insignificant. The target readers here are mainly Anglo-Americans, but also French and, to a lesser extent, Spanish (Carbonell 2004). Such a manipulation of knowledge, in the encounters between the Arab World and the West, for example, is not new, but it has become rather poignant and nasty. Today, the reporting by 24/7 news channels of the recent flood (tsunami for some) of refugees from Syria or Iraq reflects the headaches the Arabs cause the West. But the image of this headache-causing group emanates from an established system of representation (images), transmission (discursive strategies), and transculturation (circulation and consumption of images) (cf. Faiq 2005; Said 1995).

Translation is a challenging medium of intercultural encounters because it relates to how humans generate meanings, including misrepresentations of others. Gee (2004: xi) aptly posits: “In fact, we [humans] are so good at finding meaning that we very often run off too quickly with interpretations of what other people mean that are based on our own social and cultural worlds, not theirs. Too often we are wrong in ways that are hurtful”.

The treatment of translation from an ideological point of view in terms of power relationships, identity formation, self and other presupposes inherent manipulation. Referring to the Western European and American hegemonic considerations of all that is other, Venuti (1995) labels this manipulation through translation *invisibility* and *foreignization*, Kuhiwczak (1990) calls it *appropriation* and Carbonell (1996) labels it *subversion*. Kuhiwczak discusses the appropriated translation of central European literature into English, and Carbonell examines the ways mainstream European languages have subverted Arabic texts through translation.

In general terms, manipulation means playing with the truth conditions of information for particular purposes. Montgomery (2008, as cited in Sanatifar 2013: 98) demonstrates manipulation in a ‘nukespeak’ example:

Table 1: Examples of manipulated texts proposed by Montgomery (2008)

Original text	Manipulated text
Large nuclear bomb of immense destructive power	Strategic nuclear weapon
Small nuclear weapon of immense destructive power	Tactical nuclear weapon
Neutron bomb (destroys people not property)	Enhanced radiation weapon
Killing the civilian population	Demographic targeting

The example shows how the manipulated texts alter the knowledge generated by the original texts. The purpose is to likely pacify receivers by camouflaging the actual/real meanings of the original texts, namely that nuclear weapons are dangerous.

In translation, manipulation occurs mostly because the translator “striving to produce a text acceptable for the target community, has to manipulate between the various constraints under the influence of the political and literary power structures in a given society” (Kramina 2004: 37).

As with native texts, the reception process of translated ones is determined more by the shared knowledge of the translating community than by what the translated texts themselves contain. This is because translation “is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with signification at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems” (Bassnett/Trivedi 1999: 2).

A valid general perception is that authors and translators complement each other. But translators are frequently criticised for betraying authors through inaccurate and inappropriate (=manipulated) translations. The grounds for such criticism vary from the purely linguistic to the more functional, cultural and beyond. Few translators have been great authors in their own right, although most, if not all, modern cultures offer examples of authors who are also translators. The contributions of these authors as translators are usually well received since, on the one hand, translating is not their main job, and on the other, they are authors and are thus assumed to show more sense of and sensibility for the foreign works they translate.

On the main difference between ordinary and self-translators, Jung (2002: 30) says it “is the fact that self-translators can access their original intention and the original cultural context or literary intertext of their original work better than ordinary translators.” But it is safe to say that by and large translators have not been authors themselves. Those authors who sometimes assume the role of translator do so as an incidental way of further developing their own talents or as a tribute to other authors they admire. Block (1981: 124–125), for example, discusses three French authors who turned translators: Nerval, Baudelaire, and Gide, and concludes by arguing that the case of these three French authors suggests that

[...] the translator has need of the same imaginative qualities as the novelist, playwright, or poet, and that great translations require the simultaneous presence of unusual linguistic and literary talents in a single person. Translation in the hands of gifted writers is not reproduction but creation, fully deserving of the same informed critical response as other modes of literary endeavor.

It is equally true that authors rarely translate their own works; the task of translation being left to translators. Whereas in the past translations of great

works often took lengthy periods of time, now, with the globalization of human culture and publishers' desire for quick returns, most bestsellers are often hastily translated. Many authors consequently find themselves filing legal cases to prevent further publication of thrown-together translations of their works. Kuhniewicz (1990) gives the example of Milan Kundera, the East European novelist who has spent more time fighting and correcting inappropriate and often misleading translations of his novels in the West than channelling his energy into creating more novels.

When an author is his or her own translator, he or she engenders a situation which in turn generates a number of valid questions: What leads someone to decide to translate their own work in the first place? How do authors-cum-translators approach the source text (their own) and the translation process? What happens to the issues of position, power, visibility, fidelity, etc. in translations produced by authors of the source text? How, more importantly, does the author-cum-translator perceive the target readership, particularly if the latter shares the same native language and culture as the author turned translator? It is questions such as these that I attempt to address in the present article. My discussion of the infrequent situation of author-cum-translator focuses on *Autumn of Fury* (1983) written in English by Heikal (an Arab writer and intellectual) and the Arabic translation (1988) produced by Heikal himself, after expressing his dissatisfaction with an earlier rendering into Arabic by another translator (back-translations from Arabic into English are mine).

### 3. *Autumn of Fury* and reader manipulation

Written in English, *Autumn of Fury* (1983) gives an exciting account of the life of the late Egyptian president Anwar Sadat who was assassinated in October 1981 by members of his own army. The focus of the book is on Sadat's policies which, according to the author, have had disastrous ramifications for Egypt and the rest of the Arab World. I should note here that Heikal was imprisoned, along with a large number of others, by Sadat and was released after the assassination.

The front cover of the ET shows the main title *Autumn of Fury* followed by the subtitle 'The Assassination of Sadat'. Though Heikal keeps the main title of his book intact on the front cover of the AT, the subtitle, however, changes into, 'The story of the beginning and end of Anwar Sadat's era'.

This subtitle on the front cover of the AT is the first indication of Heikal's intentions to manipulate and appropriate Arab readers' reactions and the ways he wants them to interpret and read his text. His manipulation of the subtitle is a case of the highest levels of invisibility or what one can call visible invisibility. On the one hand, the front cover of the AT does not mention at all that it is a translation, but gives the impression that it is originally written in Arabic. On

the other hand, Heikal's manipulation is reflected in his use of what is culturally familiar, thus unchallenging, to Arab readers. The words he uses 'story, beginning and end, and era' all form part of the way Arabs generally perceive history and progress and hit at the very heart of their religious belief system (macro culture) which, compared with European equivalents, has a strong influence. In other words, it is easy for an Arab reader to accept the ideas of beginning and end of an era as these things are part of the divine will. The word assassination would have not triggered the same reaction in the readers of the AT. But to an English language reader, assassination sums up that mysterious, violent, fundamentalist, autocratic, exotic Arab World. Here, and like those Western translators who Venuti, Carbonell and Kuhlaczak, respectively refer to as invisible, subverters, and appropriationists, Heikal gives Western readers what is familiar to them: an Arab World where peace makers are assassinated.

Onto the introduction. Like any, written within an English tradition, the introduction of the ET runs to five pages setting the scene for the book and ending by the author acknowledging his debt to all those who helped him in any way, and reiterating the familiar statement that he alone assumes responsibility for any errors of fact or judgement. The translation of this introduction in the AT, runs more or less in the same way, until the last paragraph. All the Arab academics mentioned in the ET appear in the AT but one sentence is omitted: "Finally, I would again wish to thank my friend and colleague, Edward Hodgkin, for all the assistance he has given me in writing this book" (p. 7). Here, aware of the sensitivity of the issue, Heikal eliminates any reference to a non-Arab who assisted him because otherwise Arab readers may interpret the writing of the ET in the first place as some kind of a conspiracy designed to vilify the Arab World. They may conclude that Heikal is nothing less than an agent for the external enemies of Egypt and the Arab World. Heikal adds to the introduction in the AT the following statement: "And, I have tried to be no more than a witness of an important and strange period in Egypt's history" (p. 22). This statement is intended to direct readers of the AT who culturally believe that messengers are not to be harmed in any way regardless of the news they bring. By defining himself as a witness Heikal deliberately distances himself from the judgements he makes about Sadat and his presidency, and tries to make Arab readers believe that he is a mere "objective" reporter of events.

The translation of the introduction in the AT is preceded by two introductions: one for Egyptian readers and one for the wider Arab constituency. The two introductions, not found in the ET, go into details about the number of reasons why the book should be read in a particular way, i.e., that it simply chronicles events that led to what happened on 6 October 1981 (the assassination of Sadat) and not as an account of Heikal's own assessment of Sadat's rule. But it is a truism to say that language is both itself and its circumstances, and



that any text is bound to represent in varying degrees its socio-cultural context and the position of its author.

The two introductions in the AT run to 10 pages of explanations and instructions on how to approach the text. One of the reasons given by Heikal for deciding to undertake the translation of something written in English about something Arab back into Arabic is that the level of debate the book generated has been such that he could not let other translators do the job for this highly sensitive book. But even here Heikal manipulates the Arab readership by indicating that the outcry the ET created may be due to the fact that a lot of people benefitted during Sadat's rule, and consequently do not wish to see his legacy tarnished because they will ultimately lose all that they had previously amassed (AT: 14). This camouflaged reference to political and ultimately financial, corruption in the Arab World is cleverly intended by Heikal to turn all potential enemies into allies. Appealing further to Arab readers and ultimately hoping to shape their reading of the AT, Heikal labels Sadat's reign in Egypt an historical mistake which he maintains is worse than any crime. This is seemingly intended to play on the feelings of most Arabs who viewed Sadat as someone who weakened the Arab nation by going it alone and signing the Camp David peace treaty with Israel in 1979.

At the end of the AT Heikal includes two letters which do not appear in the ET. The first letter, one page and a half long, was written by Al-Hakim, an Egyptian writer, comparing Heikal's *Autumn of Fury* with a book he wrote himself about Nasser's rule. Al-Hakim wrote his one in Arabic, however. In his lengthy response to this letter of over eight pages Heikal expresses his dismay at all those Arabs who did not read the book, yet passed judgements and conclusions. But what is extremely interesting in Heikal's letter is that he states that his book *Autumn of Fury* "was not meant for the Arab World, otherwise he would have written it in Arabic" (AT: 473). Accordingly, the book was aimed at the outside English language reading world, the other, and not the Arabic reading world, us. Heikal's reply letter discusses the differences between his book and Al-Hakim's, and stresses that he, Heikal, did not receive any financial remuneration for carrying out the translation of his book into Arabic, although he acknowledges accepting with thanks six boxes of cigars from the publisher.

The back cover of the ET lists excerpts from reviews: "Compulsively readable, a formidable indictment of the Sadat's years, a riveting account, a brilliant sense of history, devastating [...] eloquent power." Such excerpts clearly indicate that the book was generously and well received by the English language reading world, most likely because it stays within the familiar, and because Heikal manages to successfully manipulate the English language readers by telling them what they are used to being told about the mysterious, violent and president-assassinating Arab World. The back cover of the AT, however, carries a paragraph written by none other than Heikal himself. The paragraph further tells the Arab

readers that they should remember the text as a mere account of the reasons that led to the assassination of Sadat and as an attempt to explain why Sadat's end came the way it did.

Another of Heikal's manipulatory ploys involves his use of photographs. In the ET 16 different photographs of Sadat are stacked together in one file, so to speak, between pages 156 and 157. They are not numbered and can be taken out without affecting the overall flow of the text. In the AT however, 33 photographs of Sadat are strategically spread throughout the text in a way that makes them form a sub-text without which the text itself will lose its structural design and its information flow.

#### 4. Conclusion

Within the semiotics of communication, the status of something being a text is conditioned by the shared and/or assumed knowledge that the author(s) and the reader(s) each positions himself/herself through a process of projecting onto the text their absent counterpart(s). Both author and reader can only occupy one position vis-à-vis a particular text. In the case of translation the same positions do not change dramatically. A translator assumes the role of a reader first, then endeavours to mirror the position of the author through translation.

In the case of *Autumn of Fury* however, the author finds himself in a complex position. He tries to manipulate the position which readers of the translation are assumed to occupy. He does so by blurring his reading position as a translator and his position as the author of the source, while all the time laying claim to objectivity in his translation. Heikal however, as our discussion of instances of his translation into Arabic of his English original text shows, subjectively manipulates Arab readers to position themselves where he wants them, not where their status as readers would normally allow them. He blurs the distances between author, reader, and translator, with the ultimate goal of steering Arab readers into a particular position and consequently a particular reading mode which makes their own interpretations of the text almost impossible.

The issue of manipulation stems from the fact that the ET itself represents an instance of translation, giving the English language readers what they are generally familiar with as represented and stereotyped through the politics and ideologies of the power dictated by the other: Anglo-American culture, Venuti's invisibility, Carbonell's subversion, or Kuhiwczak's appropriation. In this respect, the figure of the author and/or translator appears as authority to the unknown: Arab politics and culture; an exotic yet violent East (Carbonell 1996; 2004); the master discourse of Western translation from Arab culture.

The problem for Heikal is that what he made familiar and natural for the English language reading world and which, according to him, was not meant

for Arab readers, wants to be born again Arab. But this is not an easy task. How can one refamiliarize and renaturalize something Arab that was forcibly shaped for a particular non-Arab audience? Heikal's cunning strategy was to deploy a sustained and systematic manipulation of the reading position and ultimately Arab readers. He generally succeeds in renativizing what he denativized utilizing all powers available to him as the author (owner) of the English source text and as the translator/author (owner) of the Arabic target text. But in the process he made Arab readers look like deplorable small people, to use Kuhlman's (1990) words.

Heikal's Arabic translation of his own English book, belittlingly tells readers how to make meaning out of words. But, the question remains whether a self-translator can assume the right to be more manipulative, while we would cry foul were he or she an ordinary translator? The jury is out there, particularly that self-translation itself remains rather neglected in mainstream translation studies (Montini 2010) albeit it being the obvious site of translate to manipulate.

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