

Contributions of ancient Arabs to modern translation studies

"Al-jahiz and Hunayn ibn Ishaq as a model"

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Abstract:

It has long been said that translation is a practice that predates theorizing, and the debate continues to this day whether there is a science of translation itself. Through this research paper we aim to prove that theorizing in the field of translation is not new as it is generally recognized but the practice of translation has led since ancient times to an attempt to restrict it and establish standards and foundations on which modern translation studies were based. The Arabs had an ample share in this matter, as Al-jahiz was one of the first to touch on the subject of translation and some of what related to its process. Hunayn ibn Ishaq, having translated many works into Arabic, also developed his strategies during the transfer process.

Keywords: Translation; translation studies; Al-jahiz ; Hunayn ibn Ishaq.

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Résumé :

On dit depuis longtemps que la traduction est une pratique antérieure à la théorisation, et le débat se poursuit à ce jour sur l'existence d'une science de la traduction elle-même. À travers ce document de recherche, nous visons à prouver que la théorisation dans le domaine de la traduction n'est pas nouvelle comme elle est généralement reconnue, mais que la pratique de la traduction a conduit depuis l'Antiquité à tenter de la restreindre et d'établir des normes et des fondements sur lesquels les études de traduction modernes étaient basées. Les Arabes ont eu une large part dans cette affaire, car Al-jahiz a été l'un des premiers à aborder le sujet de la traduction et une partie de ce qui était lié à son processus. Hunayn ibn Ishaq, ayant traduit de nombreux ouvrages en arabe, a également développé ses propres stratégies pendant le processus de transfert.

Mot clés: Traduction; traductologie; Al-jahiz ; Hunayn ibn Ishaq.

إسهامات العرب القدامى في الدراسات الترجمية الحديثة "الجاحظ وحنين بن إسحاق أنموذجا"

الملخص:

لطالما قيل إن الترجمة ممارسة سبقت التنظير، كما أن الجدل لازال قائما إلى يومنا هذا إن كان هناك للترجمة علم قائم بحد ذاته. نروم من خلال هذه الورقة البحثية إثبات أن التنظير في مجال الترجمة ليس بجديد كما هو متعارف عليه، بل إن ممارسة الترجمة أفضى منذ القدم إلى محاولة التقعيد لها ووضع معايير وأسس قامت عليها الدراسات الترجمية الحديثة. وقد كان للعرب نصيب وافر في هذا الأمر، حيث كان الجاحظ من أوائل من تطرق لموضوع الترجمة وبعض ما تعلق بسيرورتها. كما أن حنين بن إسحاق، بحكم ترجمته للكثير من المؤلفات إلى اللغة العربية، قد وضع لنفسه استراتيجيات خاصة به أثناء عملية النقل.

كلمات مفتاحية: الترجمة؛ الدراسات الترجمية؛ الجاحظ؛ حنين بن إسحاق.

1. 1 Introduction

Translation has always been considered a part of social and cultural life. Although it has been theorized within the framework of a recognized discipline, namely, translation studies, only recently, after it was considered a branch of linguistics. Of course, before this theoretical stage many translators shared their experience in this field and tried to develop principles and approaches to translation. Although the West claims that they are the first to establish the rules and foundations of translation science, this does not negate that the ancient Arab scholars are greatly credited with demonstrating translation and interest in theorizing about it, and perhaps the most prominent one who touched on this topic is Al-jahiz, who is considered one of the first theorists of translation.

So, we wanted to highlight the beginnings of Translation Studies in the Arab heritage and to indicate the contributions of Al-jahiz in this field, that he is a professor of this ancient science, as well as the statement of the primacy of Arab linguists in addressing these topics, more than one thousand and two hundred years ago, as well as Hunayn ibn Ishaq, who no one can deny his contributions to translation theory and application, and that their opinions and ideas in this field are ahead of linguists in America and Europe, who they even repeat what the Arabs said in this field. Therefore, through our research paper, we will try to answer the following questions: to what extent did Arab linguists contribute to translation in theory and application, especially Al-Jahiz and Hunayn Ibn Ishaq ? What are the concepts related to translation that have been touched upon by these and have found an outlet for them in the science of modern translation theories ?

2. The nature of translation:

Translation is a special case of communication that connects different peoples and is a factor in the flourishing of cultures. Translation: Translation has become a fertile field for study teaching, and research.

The definitions of translation in Arabic have varied and differed. There has been a debate about its origin, whether it is Arabic or Arabized. In this regard, "Al-Tahawi" says that its meaning in Persian is the expression of one language in another. As for those who say it is Arabic, among them are Al-Firozabadi, Ibn Manzur, and Al-Zabidi.

And it can be said here that the term "translator" was addressed by most of the ancient Arabic dictionaries, which indicates the Arabs' interest in translation both theoretically and practically. This theoretical approach is represented by the "House of Wisdom" in Baghdad and the distinguished linguist Al-Jahiz, who made significant and beneficial theoretical contributions to translation.

And it was mentioned in "Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet," which is the modern dictionary published by the Arabic Language Dictionary in Cairo, that: "Translation - the translation of so-and-so: his biography and life (pl. تراجم), and translating speech: clarifying and explaining it, and - someone else's speech, and from him: transferring it from one language to another, and - for someone mentioning his translation, and the translator: the one who translates (pl. تراجم and تراجمه)." (Ibrahim & al., 1976, p. 175)

The definitions of translation have varied with the multitude of theories and theorists in the field of translation. Each definition has come according to the perspective of its author and their conception of the translation act and its outcomes. We will present a summary of the most

important definitions of translation, as "it is the transfer of spoken or written speech from the source language to the target language" (Al-Ba'labaki, 1990, 510).

It is also: "The process of converting spoken production in one language into spoken production in another language while preserving the fixed aspect of content, that is, the meaning" (As'ad Mufarred al-Din, 1989, 39).

The French linguist Jean René Ladamiral (2001) defines it as a special case of linguistic contact and convergence, and it broadly refers to any form of 'interlinguistic mediation' that enables the transfer of information between speakers of different languages.

Ladamiral explains that translation is not limited to a linguistic act or an automatic transfer from one language to another, but rather it is based on a linguistic and cognitive mediation between two linguistic systems. As linguist Georges Mounin (1963, p.6) defines it by saying: "The translating activity, a practical activity, is rapidly increasing in all fields."

The long-standing, ongoing, and renewed debate between translating meaning or structure and between literal or figurative translation has received a significant share of studies and research, resulting in definitions based on one school of thought or another.

No one could deny the role of translation as a vital intermediary between multiple languages and diverse cultures. Since the tongues of people diverged, and each group adopted a language, expressing their needs with it, and it became a vessel encompassing all that the members of that group could produce in knowledge, literature, and art. And since communication with others is an instinct that God has ingrained in people, translation has come to be a link and a necessity for understanding the thoughts of others. And the one who reflects on our era, the era of speed and the rapid flow of information in all its forms, realizes the importance of translation as a factor for the development of all humanity. That is because knowledge is not in a formal and singular language. And creativity, regardless of its type, is not exclusive to one people over another.

3. Translation Studies:

We cannot establish rules or theories in any field without passing through the door of application. The field of theorizing in translation is relative; a theorist may succeed in establishing rules and methods to follow in translation performance, or they may fail. And our view somewhat aligns with what Delisle (2001) said: "Translation is an activity where we follow the rules without having rules to apply. "Translation was initially a practice imposed by human political and economic activities, predating theory by many centuries. It then became a subject within applied linguistics studies (*linguistique appliquée*). The term "translation studies" was first coined by the

American James Holmes, and it was later translated into French as "traductologie" and into Arabic as "علم الترجمة" or "التَّرجُمِيَّة".

The term "traductologie" consists of two Greek words (traductio=translation) and (logos=science). Thus, "Translation Studies" is "that broad field of studies related to translation encompassing everything that involves the production of translations and the description of translations." (Guidère, 2008, p. 16).

Translation studies, as a science, examines the cognitive processes and underlying linguistic operations in any oral, written, or gestural rendition (translation) towards a language, to express an idea coming from another language (phonetic signs) (speech), drawings (writing), or gestures. When this work is not related to texts, one also speaks of "intermedial exchange" or "transformation" ... (Jakobson, 1963, p.44)

Brian Harris from the University of Montreal provided a simple definition in 1973; for him all of this refers to the linguistic analysis of the phenomenon of translation. However, contrary to what we sometimes read, neither Brian Harris nor Jean-René LADMIRAL coined the term "traductologie." (LADMIRAL, 1972) Harris himself acknowledges this in his article "What I Really Meant by the Word 'Translation'." According to Harris, this term was first used in 1968 by three Belgian researchers: R. Jouvin, B. Horbin and J.M. van der Meer.

4. Al-Jahiz:

Despite the modernity of the science of translation and the claims of Western theorists that its origin was in Europe and America, the works of Al-Jahiz come to refute this idea. In what follows, we will attempt to demonstrate this with evidence and in the words of Al-Jahiz himself:

4.1. Al-Jahiz and Translation:

He is Abu Othman Omar ibn Bahr ibn Mahbub, Al-Jahiz, the most famous writer of the second and third centuries of the Hijra and the most cultured among them. He was nicknamed Al-Jahiz due to his protruding eyes. He was born in Basra to a poor family. Al-Jahiz is considered the first Arab theorist of translation, as he discussed in his work "Al-Bayan wa Al-Tabyin," (The Art of Eloquence and Elucidation) which he meant to convey understanding and clarification or appearance and manifestation.

4.2. Translation and Translator conditions :

Al-Jahiz mentions a set of conditions for the translator's work and for them to be able to transfer this language to another, among these conditions are:

- His knowledge of the source and target languages is complete. The large number of translators who translate from one language to another support each other.

- His knowledge of correcting speech slips and the elimination of book copyists. because creating words is easier than correcting a word that has been omitted from the book.

- The words of God Almighty cannot be translated literally; rather, their meanings are conveyed and made comprehensible to people's minds.

Let's listen to him say on this matter: "The translator must have his expression in the same translation, in proportion to his knowledge in the same understanding, and he should be the most knowledgeable person in both the source and target languages, so that he is equal and proficient in both." And whenever we found him speaking in two tongues, we knew he had introduced injustice to both, because each of the two languages attracts the other, takes from it, and objects to it. How can the tongue's proficiency in both languages together be like its proficiency when it is limited to one, for it has only one strength?

If it speaks in one language, that strength is exhausted on it, and similarly, if it speaks in more than one language, and based on that, translation is possible for all languages. And the more difficult and narrower the field of knowledge, and the fewer the scholars in it, the harder it is for the translator and the more likely they are to make mistakes in it. And you will not find a translator who can match even one of these scholars.

Al-Jahiz (2003, pp. 92-93) also mentions that among the qualities of the translator is to consult the wise man or the knowledgeable philosopher... And the matter revolves around making each group understand according to their capacity, and imposing on them according to their status...

4.3. The Untranslatability:*

Al-Jahiz acknowledges the difficulty of translating poetry, and that it cannot be translated into other languages. Because it loses its weight, rhythm, and meaning, and it is not like prose which can be translated and transferred. Al-Jahiz confirms this by saying: "Poetry cannot be translated, nor can it be transferred. Whenever it is transformed, its structure is broken, its rhythm is lost, its beauty disappears, and the place of wonder is removed, unlike prose." And the prose that begins on that basis is better and more impactful than the prose that has transformed from metered poetry. He said: And all nations need governance in religion, governance in industries, and everything that sustains their livelihood and opens the doors of wisdom for them, and introduces them to the various means of living; their new is like their old, their black is like their red, their distant is like their near, and the need for this is universal among them. The books of India were transferred, the wisdom of Greece

was translated, and the literature of Persia was transformed. Some of it became even better, while some lost nothing. If the wisdom of the Arabs had been transformed, the miracle of meter would have been lost. However, if they had transformed it, they would have found nothing in its meanings that the Persians had not mentioned in their books which were written for their livelihood, intellect, and wisdom. These books were transferred from one nation to another, from one century to another, and from one language to another, until they reached us, and we were the last to inherit and examine them. It has been rightly said that books are more effective in limiting influence than architecture and poetry" (Aljahiz, 2003, p.53).

So, Al-Jahiz raised one of the most controversial issues in translation, which is the conflict between the possibility of translating any type of text, whether literary or otherwise...

4.4. Considering the audience:

Al-Jahiz emphasizes the necessity of considering and targeting the reader as the foundation of the entire process. He says in this regard: "Whoever writes a book should not write it except for people who are all numerous, all knowledgeable about matters, and all devoted to it. Then he should not be satisfied with that until he leaves his book unblemished, nor should he be satisfied with another point of view, for the beginning of the book is a temptation and a marvel. When nature settles, movement calms, humors retreat, and the soul returns to its fullness, he should review it again, pausing at its sections as one would pause at a taste whose weight in soundness is less than the weight of his fear of defect." (Didawi, 2000, 85).

Understanding the reader and the necessity of conveying meaning and making it easier for them is what Al-Jahiz pointed out when he said: "A book is in greater need of making its meanings clear than anything else, so that the listener does not need to rely on the narration within it. It requires a level of expression that elevates it above the words of the lowly and the filler, and reduces it from strange grammar and verbosity. It should not be overly refined, polished, or edited for if it is, it will only be understood by repeatedly clarifying it, because people have become accustomed to the straightforwardness of speech, and their understanding does not exceed their habits except by reversing them and adhering to them." (Didawi, 2000, 86).

. Hunayn ibn Ishaq:

Hunayn ibn Ishaq was a capable Christian physician from the Arab tribe of 'Abad, which was originally from Al-Heera in Iraq. He lived during the era of Al-Jahiz and absorbed the eloquence of the Arabic language, solidifying his skills and perfecting his craft. Hunayn stood out especially in translation, as he was able to translate Galen's books and his Commentaries on Hippocrates' books

accurately. This system was adopted by many translators of his era. He corrected many defective and erroneous translations. The Abbasid caliph Al-Ma'mun appointed him in charge of the House of wisdom and the translation bureau, he would give him some gold for translating books into Arabic.

5.1. Translation and Pragmatics:

His theory was closest to Al-Jahiz's rhetorical theory. The most important contributions of Ibn Ishaq are as follows:

- Taking the sentence as a unit for translation and adapting it with a matching sentence. Clarity to the utmost degree and precision in expression.
- The review and comparison of manuscripts.
- Translation based on request and purpose.
- The remarkable ability in the Arabic language, using a smooth and uncomplicated style.

That was the expository translation accomplished by Hunayn ibn Ishaq, which matched the criteria set by Al-Jahiz for the ideal translator, who must be knowledgeable about the subject precise, clear, reviewed, and simple and fluent.

5.2. Using Footnotes in translation

Hunayn was forced to add annotations to his digressions or in their footnotes in order to make the reader understand the differences of the Greek manuscripts and to disclose the doubts he had in one of those parts of the text. Then he is represented for this by Galen's book "Anatomy therapy", which was translated into Syriac by Ayyub al-rahawi and Hanin later corrected his Arabic translation by Habish.

5.3. literal translation versus free translation:

For Hunayn, translation was not a closed literal work, where he relied on reading the sentence and understanding it and then translating with a matching sentence whether it matches words or not, and the perception of the content the letter or part of the letter before transferring to another system that may not necessarily coincide quantitatively or literally.

6. Conclusion:

Through the review above, we conclude that the attempt to establish theories and rules for translation and the translator is not a recent endeavor, but Arab linguists were credited with laying the foundations and principles of translation studies. This did not stop at generalities, but Al-Jahiz

and other translators and language practitioners delved deeply into the details of this discipline with its concepts and terminologies, which opened the door wide for those who came after.

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