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**Between source and target text:  
Academic versus expert translation**

**Abstract:** It is fitting to speak of two approaches that are actually in use in translation practice: the academic approach, one attentive to the lexical minutiae and error-detection, the other an expertise-based approach which is oriented to the practice of communicating what is to reach the target reader without being bothered with the expressive dimension. The two approaches or models lead to two observable paths: the academics are concerned with linguistics as a prime source of analyzing the source and target texts to discover their niceties, while the experts are occupied with what the reader, who in most cases is ignorant of the source language, expects from a text published in a magazine or even a scientific manual. The present study is an attempt to explore the differences between the two approaches according to actual samples. The samples include public signs, newspaper articles, and literary texts.

**1. Introduction**

Translation is a field of diverse points of view. The differences that bedevil translation practice are usually attributed to an overemphasis on the lexical meaning, thus giving little room to expertise. This stands in opposition to the excessive dependence on experience as the best course amid any text, thus attaching scant attention to semantics books and subtleties of meaning. This preliminary observation does not mean that lexical leaning approaches are less sensitive to nuances of meaning, nor does it imply that expertise-based approaches are less accurate; rather that the two approaches do conduce towards *acceptable* versions that are consumed by the target readers. The same observation likewise does not echo the lame

dichotomy of literal versus meaning-based translations, since the situation tackled in this respect is particularly focused on a degree of liberty with the source text that willy-nilly necessitates a transfer of meaning rather than a documentary or interlinear translation (Munday, 2001:18-27). Nor does it refer obliquely to semantic versus communicative translation (cf. Newmark, 1982), for the latter usually tips the scale in favour of communicative translation in most of the cases.

It is therefore apposite to speak of two approaches that are actually practiced: the academic approach, which is attentive to the lexical minutiae and error-detection, and the expertise-based approach, which is oriented to the practice of communicating what is to reach the target reader without being bothered with the expressive dimension. The two approaches are introduced to every translator, to the surprise of many; any translator is first instructed on semantics and the importance of conveying the exact meaning as much as possible and as much as the confines of the target language can tolerate. Then, in the course of practice and proofreading, the staunch belief in the lexicality, so to speak, of the source text withers and more room is allowed for finding more collocationally and idiomatically appropriate accommodations. This is not the case with Catford's translation shifts (in Venuti, 2000): for Catford's is an approach that echoes the academic model mentioned above.

The two approaches or models lead to two observable paths: the academics are concerned with linguistics as a prime source of analyzing the source and target texts to discover their niceties, while the experts are occupied with what the reader, who in most cases is ignorant of the source language, expects from a text published in a magazine or even a scientific manual.<sup>1</sup> The academics might be practicing translators, but they are not translating for a living, while the experts are full-time translators who accrue much vocabulary and

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<sup>1</sup> The present discussion is not to be taken as applicable to religious texts, since they require extreme fidelity in dealing with the source text and a modicum of attention to idiomatic appropriateness.

stylistic variation as the 'tricks of the trade'. They are more adept in legal and scientific translation.

The present study is an attempt to explore the differences between the two approaches according to actual samples. The samples will vary from public signs to newspaper articles and literary texts. Yet the present attempt does not favour one approach to another, for both co-exist in actual descriptive studies, and are observable all the time.

## **2. Different Text Types as Media for Exploration**

### 2.1. Public Signs:

Consider the following sign:

REFRAIN FROM SMOKING PLEASE

Despite being simple and straightforward, the above string of words is a good starting-point for the dichotomy. Academics, when translating it into Arabic, will produce something like:

الرجاء الامتناع عن التدخين

Academics will readily grab the opportunity of finding a correspondence between the euphemistic 'please' and الرجاء and shifting the imperative into the Arabic infinitive to be politically correct. Experts would hasten and say:

ممنوع التدخين

The expert translator would have a legitimate excuse: the sign is usually written in this fashion in Arabic, thus equating 'No smoking' with 'Refrain from smoking, please' and brushing away all the euphemisms embedded. What the reader expects in the target language is a prohibition of smoking. What academics have seen is a prohibition of what one likes, since the verb 'refrain' connotes so.

The two approaches have their valid arguments. But here is the question: is there an approach that can conflate the two? The answer to this question will have to wait till the end.

## 2.2. The Historico-Journalistic Type:

Now consider the following source text:

يقول الملف السري لسيرة الرجل و المحفوظ بوزارة الخارجية أنه من مواليد 1897، خدم خلال الحرب العظمى (العالمية الأولى) في صفوف القوات التركية ثم القوات الألمانية... ملاكم جيد و سباح و لاعب تنس و قد بذل جهداً واضحاً في رعاية الرياضة في مصر، و استمر حتى أكتوبر عام 1930 رئيساً لنادي السيارات المصري

توفيت زوجته الأولى الإنجليزية الأصل في ظروف درامية و هو متزوج الآن من ابنة مدحت يكن باشا، و قد مكنته ثروتها من الاستغناء عن المبلغ السنوي الذي كان يدفعه له الملك فؤاد...

This text is taken from Al Ahram newspaper (2004). It is a good example of the historico-journalistic type, for it has MSA terms like *خدم في صفوف* and *ظروف درامية* among others, especially the use of the adverbial *الآن* despite speaking of past events.

Academics, when faced with this text, produced the following:

...The confidential dossier, kept in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, says that he was born in 1897, and served during the First World War in the Turkish Forces, then the German ones...He was a boxer of sorts, a swimmer, a tennis player. His effort in promoting sports in Egypt was prominent. He also remained, till October 1930, the president of the Egyptian Automobile Club. His first wife, who was of a British origin, passed away in heart-rending circumstances. He was now married to the daughter of Midhat Yakan Pasha. Her own riches gave him the opportunity to dispense with the annuity he used to receive from King Fouad...

Experts attempted the following<sup>2</sup>:

...The confidential file on him in the British Foreign Office archives furnishes a brief contemporary biography. Born in 1879, Halim served in WWI with the Turkish, then German armies. A proficient boxer, swimmer, and tennis player, he was active in promoting sports in Egypt. Until 1930, he was the president of the Egyptian Automobile Club.

The report continues: "His first wife, a Briton, died in tragic circumstances. He is currently married to the daughter of Midhat Yakan Pasha. Her personal fortune has

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2- This attempt was published by Al Ahram Weekly, 2004.

freed him from dependence upon the annual allowance he had received from King Fouad ....

The second attempt is eye-catching, rendered highly natural English.<sup>3</sup> The translator has succeeded in eschewing the unjustified paragraphing by opting for the clause "The report continues". What distinguishes the second attempt is the ability to communicate the intention, yet the translator used 'annual allowance' instead of 'annuity', probably because he did not know it. The academic translator opted for 'dossier', being semantically more appropriate. Emphasis is also maintained through sticking to the structure of the source sentences. However, the expert translator compensates for the loss of connotations by using 'British Foreign Office' instead of 'British Foreign Ministry'. The addition of 'archives' is also a smart move: files are kept in archives not the building itself. The opening sentence in the second attempt takes further recourse in the normal English paragraphing structure by making that sentence the topic sentence; this in turn justifies the division into two paragraphs made later. The academic translator's sole bold move is to ignore the paragraphing system of the source text, which leads to one long paragraph in the target text.

Yet the two versions are acceptable in the target language and equally readable. This fact makes the point of discussion here different from the idea of literal versus free or communicative versus semantic translation. An analysis of the lexical density and readability of the two versions leads to similar results.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1: The differences between the two versions including the complexity factor and other features

Textual Features	Academic Version	Expert Version
Total word count	61	59

<sup>3</sup> Naturality, which can be defined as 'a natural order of words in the original' is sometimes difficult to induct in TT; unnatural, or non-fluent, rendition is largely attributable to the unnatural flow of lexical items and phrasal structures in any given utterance. For more details see Darwish (1995, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> The analysis has been done using the online Text Analyzer at: <http://textanalyser.net>.

Number of different words	60	58
Complexity factor (Lexical Density)	98.4%	98.3%
Readability (Gunning-Fog Index) : (6-easy 20-hard)	8.8	7.3
Average Syllables per Word	1.63	1.79
Sentence count	6	9
Average sentence length (words)	18	11.75
Max sentence length (words)	42	18

As the table illustrates, the academic and expert versions are close in the complexity factor, number of different words, and average number of syllables per word. The division into 9 sentences in the expert version may be one good reason why the text is easier to read. Yet these figures explain little of the difference. The two versions are thus acceptable in the target language.

### 2.3. Literary Texts

Consider the following source text with its two translations:

The darkness grew apace; a cold wind began to blow in freshening gusts from the east, and the showering white flakes in the air increased in number. From the edges of the sea came a ripple and whisper. Beyond these lifeless sounds the world was silent. Silent? It would be hard to convey the stillness of it.

The academic translation was done by N. Fouad (in Kholoussy, 2000):

و سرعان ما اشتد الظلام—و أخذت ريح باردة تهب من الشرق هبات منعشة. و ازداد عدد ندف الثلوج في الهواء، و ارتفعت من ناحية البحر همسة و حركة. و كانت الدنيا فيما خلا هذه الأصوات التي لا حياة فيها ساكنة. ساكنة؟ إن من العسير أن أصور لكم سكونها....

The expert translation was done by I. Al-Mazny (ibid):

و أخذ الظلام يشتد و هبت ريح صرصر من الشرق، و كثرت الثلوج في الجو و ارتفعت من ناحية البحر همسة و حركة، و كانت الدنيا فيما خلا ذلك ساكنة. أقول ساكنة؟ إن من العسير أن أصور لكم سكونها و وقعه....

The dichotomy here is not again of literal versus free translation as Kholoussy sees (cf. Kholoussy, 2000). The two versions are equally readable and natural Arabic. The second

attempt is more succinct (41 words), but also geared towards conveying the intentions. What is striking here is the identical 'و كانت الدنيا فيما خلا' which is a proof of the common ground between academic and expert translations. But it seems that in literary translation, the divergences are not that wide: the atmosphere and mood of the source text play an important role.

### **3. Conclusions:**

The above discussion points to the fact that the observable differences between literal versus free translation and semantic versus communicative translations are telescoped in the case of academic versus expert translations. The rationale behind the novel view presented here is the acceptability of the two translations, and even their parallel existence (e.g. the case of Fouad's and Al-Mazny's translations). This co-existence illustrates that we are not dealing with mutually exclusive cases. The average reader would accept the two versions. Nor is the difference one of linguistic appropriateness, for the examples analyzed show that collocationally, all the versions are appropriate.

The differences are to be attributed to the sound or smart moves made by the translators; these moves usually find justifications that render them usable in other similar situations. Perhaps descriptive translation studies need to provide a sound examination of these observable differences which can be cast within the mould of the translator's experience, and exposure to well-written texts.

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