

SOME PROBLEMS IN THE "TRANSLATION" OF ENGLISH PROPER NAMES INTO ARABIC

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ABSTRACT

Of all the aspects and categories of language, proper names (PNs) may appear, at first sight, to be the least problematic or challenging in as far as the 'translatability' from one (source) language into another (target) language is concerned. However, when duly and profoundly approached, PNs would turn out to be much more notorious and slippery than otherwise. The present paper seeks to bring out and highlight cases of variation, inconsistency and instability that are so markedly observed in the 'translation' of English PNs into Arabic. Two major types of problems in the process of translating English PNs will be spotted, presented and extensively discussed with lots of illustrative and illuminating examples.

1.1 Introduction:

The term proper name (PN, hereafter) is generally used to cover two types of noun, a) names that are arbitrarily given to people, places, and things in general, e.g: *John, Alice, Dr Robert Williams, Great Britain, New York, Hyde Park, The Guardian, Marble Arch, Big Ben, Manchester United,...*etc., and b) proper nouns---nouns that have been converted into proper names, such as: *the Natural Museum, British Airways, the Labour Party,...*etc. However, it is not always easy to draw a clear-cut demarcation between the two; hence, they are most often used interchangeably.

PNs are definite nouns that denote specific (within context) referents. Whether they only have reference but no sense is still debatable (see in this connection Searle 134-41, and Lyons 219).

As for the classification of these nouns, they can be classified either on the basis of their internal syntactic structure (Sarkka), or on the basis of the type of referents to whom they are attached.

Syntactically, a PN can belong to any one of the following categories:

1. Central Proper Names (CPN)---names that cannot be further analysed in terms of their syntactic structure, e.g: *Mary, London, Sweden, Venus,....etc.*
2. Extended Proper Names (EPN)---these consist of a CPN plus a descriptor(s) that denotes their semantic category and sets them apart from other co-members, e.g: *the United State of America, President Obama, Oxford Road, North Korea,....etc.*
3. Descriptive Proper Names (DPN)---these are converted common nouns that have all the distinguishing features of PNs, e.g: *the Bridge Tower, the Economist, the Great Wall, the Red Cross,....etc.* What distinguishes this class from the first two is that it contains no elements that are CPNs (Sarkka).

For the classification of PNs according to their referents, I shall adopt Quirk and Greenbaum's (76-80) whereby PNs are categorized into the following:

- Personal names (with or without titles)
- Calendar items: (a) Festivals (b) Months and days of the week
- Geographical names: (a) Continents (b) Countries, counties, states, etc
- Name + common noun

1.2 Scope of the Study:

This study concerns itself with the translation of English PNs into Arabic---personal PNs, place names, and names of institutions and man-made products. What is excluded are personal names of foreign

origin that have been incorporated into English through borrowing, titles of books, novels, plays, magazines, films, symphonies, and the like, and acronyms.

2. Discussion:

One of the basic principles of the translation theory is that, "what is translated are texts, not words"(Sarkka). Yet, there are cases and situations where 'words' need to be converted from their source language (SL) form into a target language (TL) equivalent. A case in hand is when a PN happens to occur in a SL text that is to be translated into a TL. But, before we go deep into the heart of the matter, we had better consider the term 'translation' in relation to PNs. Are PNs translatable in the same way as common nouns are? No positive or assertive answer can so readily be given. For it is generally held that PNs are principally and intrinsically devoid of sense or meaning (Lyons 219). It is, therefore, more apt and accurate to talk of 'handling PNs in translated texts' rather than translating them (Sarkka). Now, if we scrutinize what is being practiced in terms of how PNs are being handled in translation (in the Arabic context), we can so easily spot that they are handled in more than one method or by more than one technique:

1. Some PNs are transported wholesale from their SL into the TL---in which case they are transliterated/transcribed, as in: *John* (جون), *New York* (نيو يورك), *Alice* (أليس), *Marble Arch* (ماربل أرج) ...etc.
2. Some are arabicized, i.e. subjected to the Arabic phonological/orthographic rules, e.g: *Mary* (ماري), *Spain* (أسبانيا), *the Parliament* (البرلمان), *Switzerland* (سويسرا).
3. Others are partially transported and partially translated. This technique is adopted and applied when the PN is of the EPN type, viz, it comprises a CPN plus a descriptor(s), in which case the CPN is transported unchanged, and the descriptor(s) is translated, as in: *Queen Elizabeth* (الملكة أليزابيث), *Buckingham Palace* (قصر بكنكهام), *North Korea* (كوريا الشمالية).

4. Another group of PNs are replaced all together with native language equivalents that have already been existent and conventionally used in the TL. The translation equivalent bears no resemblance whatsoever to the English form, e.g.: *Greece* (اليونان), *Venus* (الزهرة), *the Bible* (الانجيل), *February* (شباط).

5. Finally, some English PNs are translated word-for-word from the SL into the TL in exactly the same way as is applicable to common nouns, e.g: *Ivory Coast* (ساحل العاج), *Central African Republic* (جمهورية أفريقيا الوسطى), *the Middle East* (الشرق الأوسط).

With all these five processes at work, it is no surprise, then, that so much inconsistency and variation should arise and prevail in the practice of transferring English PNs into Arabic. But the paradox here is that these nouns (i.e. the English PNs) can by no means be approached in one and the same process or method; they are inherently divergent and so heterogeneous that no one particular method (of the five mentioned above) would suit them all or be applicable to them all. And this constitutes the first and most serious problem facing the Arab translator in dealing with these nouns. The other major problem is that even within each particular category of the PNS, there is lots of variation, inconsistency and instability which can be ascribed to a number of instigating factors, as will be pointed out in the discussion to follow.

To begin with, here are some samples of the manifestations (across the different categories of PNs) of the variation and inconsistency that would most likely ensue as a corollary of adopting more than one technique or method in converting English PNs into Arabic:

1. Personal PNs:

It is generally held that personal PNs are left untranslated (Sarkka), but this is only partially true. It only holds true for names of the CPN type; with personal names of the type EPN, another, different rule may be postulated and put to use: the CPN component of the name goes untranslated, while its descriptor(s) is translated, as in: *Queen*

Elizabeth (الملكة أليزابيث), *President Obama* (الرئيس أوباما), *Saint John the Baptist* (القديس يوحنا المعمدان), *Richard the Lion Heart* (ريتشارد قلب الأسد).

It is most unfortunate that this simple, straightforward rule should not pass without any complication in its application; the complication lies in the translation of the descriptor(s) part of the name. This is most noticeable in the case of titles that are associated with the name. To illustrate and shed more light on this point, let's consider the following example:

The English personal PN *Alexander the Great* has the following Arabic equivalents: (الأسكندر المقدوني / الأسكندر الكبير / الاسكندر الأكبر) (Al-Ba'labakki 6). What this example reveals is that much (if not all) of the complication and difficulty in the translation of such names springs from the accompanying titles/epithets, rather than from the name *per se*. It is worthwhile noting here that the titles which combine with PNs cannot be subjected to one and the same method or technique of translation: three possible categories can be distinguished in this connection:

1. Some titles, such as Dr (دكتور), Lord (الورد), Sir (السير), Senator (السيناتور), General (الجنرال), and the like, are merely transported into Arabic unchanged (and are transliterated/ transcribed).
2. Another group can have two translation equivalents: either it is transported wholesale into Arabic, or translated, as in: *Prof Crystal* (البروفسور كريستل), *Prof Dr Mitchell* (الاستاذ الدكتور متشل), *Captain Cook* (الميجر / الربان / القبطان / الكابتن كوك), *Major Bradley* (الرائد برادلي / برادلي).
3. The last category incorporates titles that can only be translated word-for word into Arabic, e.g: *Queen Victoria* (الملكة فكتوريا), *King Juan Carlos* (الملك خوان كارلوس), *Judge Emmerson* (القاضي), *Inspector Jackson* (المفتش جاكسون).

Following is another instance of the variation and inconsistency that show up when English personal PNs are transferred into Arabic. It has to do with the personal PNs of prophets, apostles, saints, and popes. Luckily, Arabic has already had conventional equivalents for such names (as most of them appear in the Holy Quran). So, when a

reference is made of *Jesus, Moses, Abraham, David, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Paul, Peter, Matthew,...*etc., the Arabic equivalent is already there to be used. Here are the Arabic counterparts for these names respectively: (يعقوب), (إسحق), (داوود), (إبراهيم), (موسى), (عيسى), (بولص), (يوسف), (متى), (بطرس). But when these same PNs are given to (or borne by) individuals other than those spiritual figures, they are handled quite differently in translation: they are now transliterated/transcribed into Arabic, as in: *David Hume* (ديفيد هيوم), *Abraham Lincoln* (أبراهام لنكن), *Joseph Conrad* (جوزيف كونراد), ...etc. What makes things even worse is that this 'deviation' from the norm is not all through or systematically adhered to by Arab translators: some personal PNs such as *Isaac Newton* and *Noah Webster*, for instance, should, on the analogy of the afore-mentioned co-members, be rendered as: (أيزك نيوتن), and (نواه وبستر). But in reality, they retain the prophet name token and assume the following forms: (أسحق نيوتن) and (نوح وبستر) respectively (see Al-Ba'labakki 64 & 88).

A less significant, but more striking, case of inconsistency in the translation of PNs is noted in the context of ship christening. An English PN such as *Queen Mary*, for instance, is converted into Arabic as (الملكة ماري), but when a ship is named after the Queen and is given this same PN at her christening ceremony, the ship's name is arabicized as (الباخرة كوين ماري).

2. Geographical Names:

Despite the claim that 'names of countries seldom pose a problem to the translator' (Sarkka), the translation of these names is also inflicted by the same phenomenal factors of variation and inconsistency. They are seen at work here as well, spreading their impact over all the subcategories of geographical names. The amount and gravity of their impact seem, however, to be in proportion to the following factors: a) the internal syntactic structure of the name: with PNs of the type CPN, for instance, no much difficulty is expected to be encountered in their translation. It is highly unlikely that such names should cause any trouble for the

translator: all they need is to be carried over unchanged from their SL into Arabic, e.g: *Wales* (ويلز), *London* (لندن), *Laos* (لاوس), *France* (فرنسا),...etc. By contrast, those of the type EPN are much more vulnerable to variation and inconsistency. Here is an illustrative example to substantiate this claim:

Though both of the following types of PNs belong to the same category (i.e. they are geographical names), with PNs of countries, such as *North Korea* (كوريا الشمالية), *South Korea* (كوريا الجنوبية), *East Timor* (تيمور الشرقية), and the like, the descriptor(s) component is translated, and the CPN element is transliterated/transcribed. But, with states names (having the same syntactic structure) , e.g: *North Carolina*, *South Carolina*, *North Dakota*, *South Dakota*, the general tendency is to transliterate/transcribe the whole name: (نورث كارولينا), (ساوث كارولينا), (نورث داكوتا), (ساوث داكوتا) respectively. To add more to the complication of the situation, some Arab translators assign two translation equivalents to these names: (كارولينا الشمالية/نورث كارولينا), (داكوتا الجنوبية/ساوث داكوتا), ...etc.

b) Another factor is 'familiarity': the more familiar the name of country, state, county, city,..etc to the translator, the less it is problematic or likely to conduce to inconsistency or variation. Thus, it is most unlikely, if not impossible, to come across cases of variation or inconsistency in the translation of quite familiar PNs such as *England*, *New York*, *China*, *London*, *France*, and the like. But with less familiar ones, such as *Central African Republic*, *Solomon Islands*, *the West Indies*, to cite just a few, at least two different translation equivalents are in use for each: (جمهورية أفريقيا / جمهورية أفريقيا الوسطى) جزر /الوست أنديز), (سولومون آيلندز / جزر السلومون/جزر سليمان), (المركزية الأنديز الغربية/الهند الغربية) respectively. With quite unknown (or unfamiliar) geographical names, such as *Papua New Guinea*, for example, a variety of dissimilar translation equivalents are proposed and employed: (غينيا / بابوا نيو غينيا / غينيا بابوا الجديدة/بابوا غينيا الجديدة) الجديدة

c) The third factor is 'availability of conventional translation equivalents in the TL': if the PN of a geographical entity to be converted into Arabic happens to have a conventional equivalent in use in the TL, there would be no complication or problematicness in its translation (see Lyons 222). Nor would there be any need on the part of the Arab translator to look for, or work out, a suitable equivalent for it.

d) The fourth, and last, factor is what can be termed as 'the cultural factor'. It incorporates all cultural and educational knowledge that a translator should possess, plus knowledge of the world with which he/she has to be acquainted. This kind of knowledge would prove of great necessity and vital value to the translator, who is supposed to be well-informed, competent, authentic, and aware of the seriousness of his/her profession and the responsibility laid upon his/her shoulders. Lacking such kind of knowledge and information will be negatively reflected on the translator's output and general performance.

Here are a few instances (within the category of geographical names) of the phenomenon of inconsistency that almost all categories of PNs seem to have been afflicted with:

A handful of country names that happen to end in "-land", such as : *England, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, Poland...*etc, all share the feature of having an ending letter "أ" in their Arabic orthographic representations: (إنكلترا), (إسكتلندا), (آيرلندا), (هولندا), (بولندا), except for the name *Thailand*, which also ends in "-land", but is deprived of sharing this feature with its cognates---it is always arabicized as (تايلند), not (تايلندا), which makes it look an alien intruder within the set.

Another manifestation of the inconsistency and instability that is so widely marked in the translation of geographical PNs is revealed by the following situation: as was earlier mentioned in the translation of the country name of *Papua New Guinea*, the epithet 'New' is translated into (الجديدة). However, in another country name, i.e. *New*

Zealand, this same descriptor is transliterated, rather than translated; the Arabic equivalent for *New Zealand* is (نيوزيلندا), not (زيلندا الجديدة). To end up the discussion of the translation of geographical names, let's consider the following case: within the category of geographical names, some PNs (of the EPN type) of American states and British towns, such as *North Carolina*, *South Dakota*, *East Anglia*, and the like, comprise a directional component in their structure; this component is generally transliterated / transcribed: (نورث كارولينا), (ساوث داكوتا), (أبيست أنكليا), respectively. But with other geographical names of the same syntactic structure, such as *South Korea*, *North America*, *East Timor*,...etc, the directional component is translated, rather than transliterated: (تيمور الشرقية), (أمريكا الشمالية), (كوريا الجنوبية), respectively.

3. Name + common noun /Common Nouns Converted into PNs:

Nowhere are variation and inconsistency at their utmost as in the translation of this division of PNs. Here, we may come across between two to five different translation equivalents assigned to one and the same PN. Here are some illustrative examples to substantiate this claim:

- *Hyde Park* (ساحة هايدي/حديقة هايدي/متنزه هايدي/هايدي بارك)
- *Camp David* (إسطنبول داوود/مخيم ديفيد/معسكر ديفيد/كامب ديفيد)
- *Fifth Avenu* (الخامس الطريق/ففت أفينيو/الشارع الخامس/الجادة الخامسة)
- *Crystal Palace* (كريستال قصر/القصر البلوري/البلاط البلوري/كريستال بالاس)
- *US Today* (أمريكا اليوم/يو أس اليوم/يو أس تودي/الولايات المتحدة اليوم)
- *Fox News* (أخبار فوكس/فوكس نيوز/قناة فوكس الاخبارية/فوكس للأخبار)
- *St Paul's Cathedral* (كاتدرائية القديس بول /كاتدرائية سنت بول (بطرس)
- *The Pacific Ocean* (المحيط الباسفيكي/المحيط الهادي)
- *The Empire State Building* (مبنى بيرج الأمباير الحكومي/مبنى الأمباير ستيت (الحكومة الأميركية)

To begin with, what these translations all suffer from is that in each set of them there has been more than one translation technique or process applied--- wholesale transportation from the SL into Arabic, word-for-word translation and partial transportation and partial translation.

Now, if we are to account for this situation, or seek an explanation for it, we can so confidently and assuredly ascribe it to a number of varying causes, which may have either independently or collectively contributed to its aggravation. First of all, there seems to be no official, superintendent body or institution which takes the responsibility of monitoring, editing, and unifying the translation equivalents for the English PNs. The absence of such an organization leaves the door open for individual translators to work out what they would think the most suitable, possible translation equivalents for the PNs---hence the wide divergence and incompatibility in the translations thus far produced.

Secondly, a good number of these names are newly-born or created; they have not been in existence in their SL for long and have not consequently been widely known worldwide.

Thirdly, there has never been congruity among the Arab translators of the eastern Arab countries and those of the western Arab countries. Here is a glaring example of the divergence and incongruity in the translations of the two parts of the Arab world: whereas in Iraq, and other eastern Arab countries, English PNs such as *Camp David* and *New York Times*, for instance, are transliterated into: (كامب ديفيد) and (نيو يورك تايمز), respectively, in Libya, and other western Arab countries, they are word-for-word translated into: (أسطبل/معسكر داوود) and (أزمة يورك الجديدة).

Fourthly, another factor that seems to add to the aggravation of this problem is the fact that lots of the in-service translators are not well-informed, educated, and diligent enough to take the trouble of looking for the best possible translation equivalent before venturing to employ it. The result is the emergence of so many inconsistent and inaccurate translations.

3.1 Recommendations:

1. Given the inevitable 'impossibility' of employing one standard and unified method or technique that would prove effective enough as to handle the translation of all English PNs into Arabic, one cannot aspire more than to try to alleviate the 'damage' and reduce it to the

minimum by adopting and applying one technique to be used systematically wherever and whenever it is possible. Thus, the wholesale transportation of the name from its SL into the TL (Arabic) can, for example, be systematically applied in the case of PNs with the construction of CPN---regardless of whether the name is affiliated to the personal or geographical categories. Whereas with PNs of the structure EPN, another standard technique can be systematically and permanently employed: the CPN component of the name is transliterated/transcribed, while its descriptor(s) part is translated. The only real problematic and challenging area of the English PNs is the third category, i.e. nouns that have been converted into proper names. These are so heterogeneous and syntactically varied that no one single process or technique should be expected to apply evenly and effectively to them all.

2. A translator should not only be concerned with the technical aspect of the translational process, he/she should also be much concerned with making all possible effort to look for the most accurate, well-established and conventionally used translation equivalent, before having to resort to his/her own resources.

3. Whenever there is a conventional, established translation equivalent available, it must be opted (unless it has become archaic, obsolete or abusive). Thus, it would not be so sensible or appropriate to use the Arabic noun (الفرس) to refer to the Iranians, or (الصلبيين) to refer to the Europeans!

4. There has to be some sort of collaboration and mutual exchange of information among the in-service translators---especially those who are affiliated to professional organizations, unions, societies, and the like.

5. Translators should always seek assistance and request consultation from experts at the departments of Translation, Arabic, and English in as far as the coinage, selection and adoption of "would be" or "newly-born" candidates of translation equivalents are concerned.

6. With the wide spread of information technology facilities and the multiplication of the mass media channels, it has become imperative that a translator should keep abreast of the tremendous incoming flow of information---especially that which is of relevance to his/her profession. Besides, he/she has to be electronically literate--now a prerequisite for any successful career. This would ultimately be reflected on the quality and accuracy of his/her product (see in this connection Gerding-Salas).

Conclusions:

What I have tried to do in this paper is to pinpoint and highlight some of the problems that are encountered in the translation of English PNs into Arabic. The first and the most serious of these is the problem of having to adopt more than one technique or translation process in handling these names. The irony here is that no one particular process or technique would prove to be all inclusive and effective for this purpose. As a corollary of this situation, considerable amount of variation and inconsistency have ensued and prevailed in the translations of PNs. The other problem, which is not quite irrelevant to the first, is that even within each separate category of PNs, lots of inconsistency and instability show up due to the adoption and application of more than one translation method or technique. Such a state of affairs might be justifiable in the context of cross-category application of more than one translation technique, but its occurrence 'inter-categorically' is intolerable, let alone unjustifiable.

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"بعض مشاكل ترجمة الاسماء العلم الأنكليزية الى اللغة العربية"

ملخص البحث

قد تبدو الأسماء العلم لاول وهلة الأسهل والأقل إشكالية للمترجم --- من حيث قابلية ترجمتها من لغة الى لغة أخرى ---- من بين أبواب اللغة الأخرى. ولكننا حين نتعمق بدراسة عملية ترجمتها ونحوض في تفاصيل طرائق وآليات هذه الترجمة، نجد بأنها عكس هذا التصور تماما. فهذه الأسماء تشكل حقا شائكا و متشعبا ليس من السهل تخطي ما يفرزه من صعوبات، أو تناول عملية ترجمة أنواعه المختلفة ببسر وسلاسة.

تهدف الدراسة الى تشخيص بعض ما تعانيه عملية ترجمة الأسماء العلم الأنكليزية الى اللغة العربية من مشاكل وإشكالات و تلقي عليها مزيدا من الضوء والإهتمام، إذ تكشف الدراسة عن وجود مشكلتين رئيسيتين تتناولهما بالبحث والدراسة والتحليل، وتورد أمثلة عديدة ومتنوعة لما يدعم ويسند ما تذهب إليه.