

Transmitting English Terminology in Arabic Scholarly Composition on the Internet

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Abstract

This paper aims in the first place to examine some 'scholarly' compositions in Arabic on the internet so as to, empirically speaking, find out and describe the problematic phenomenon of the newly transmitted foreign terminology in these digitally presented communications-- terminologies that have invaded the Arabic language and culture in the digital era of today. The paper seeks to scan the selected digital compositions in order to know how their generators (to avoid the term writers), or perhaps equally rightly, communicators, have come to deal with the alien terminology. From the perspective of this paper, digital authors practice translation intentionally or unintentionally: simply because they choose their words for the new concepts they come to know. To what extent Arabic language and research are coping with the problem of alien terminologies in a digital world that does, as fast as it is, wait for none to prepare themselves for the new challenges and encounters? What translational possibilities are available for Arabic 'digital communicators?' This is what the paper attempts to probe and describe with reference to some select specimens from the internet. The paper ends with some recap and suggestions for further research suitable for extensive specialised papers or even focused MA dissertations.

Keywords: Digital Composition, Digital Translation, Transliteration, Digital Arabic Fiction, Translation Possibilities.

Introduction

Foreign terminology, its challenging nature and its rapid transmissions and translations in the digital age of today seem to pose a real problem in Arabic language and research today¹. Discussions and debates, arguments and counter-arguments have already started and they will not come to an end as long as 'digitalisation'² has started constructing its matchless 'kingdom' throughout the time. It has started to eat up, metaphorically speaking, and as the Arabs say, the verdant and the arid. This technological revolution has dominated the world

of today. The changes it brought do not give residents of the globe enough time to think what they can do to meet them or to think of time-consuming solutions, let alone appropriate solutions in times that are politically, economically and culturally globalised. If we go down to the point where we can envision the log that records the changes of terminologies, we will get astonished at the bulk of terminology that has been transmitted among cultures. Cultures that have the power of technology do have the lion's share in exporting their terminology to other less powerful nations and cultures. All languages of the world, as a result, are under the pressure of technology exporters. Technology importers do not just buy the items, tools, instruments, machines and apparatuses but long catalogues, manuals and brochures along with them; sometimes translated, and at other times not. Moreover, the digital transmission of alien terminology make the problem grow bigger and bigger. Here lies the real challenge. What are the possibilities available for the Arabs to face such a problem? Moreover, if this problem has become of a digital nature, how can it be faced? This paper will limit itself to discussing the issue of foreign terminologies in certain digital Arabic compositions. Discussing such an extensive and seemingly non-stop terminological log cannot be finalised by a paper like this of a limited scope and illustration; yet a necessary initiative is to be taken to draw the attention to this new phenomenon and encourage further thought and research on it; particularly if we come to know that only little research is available in this area of study.

Setting the Theme

In the light of the introduction above, the English terminologies that have recently entered Arabic or more correctly invaded Arabic are as the same as those encountered by other cultures and languages that have unshuttered their windows for the new, for the (post)modern and for the digital. Such terminologies have been dealt with differently and with different 'quick' strategies by Arabic speakers, writers and digital interactants and communicators. The majority of Arabic speakers have always found it easier to say 'mobile' 'computer', 'internet', 'USB', 'Net setter,' 'missed call,' 'recharge,' and the like while communicating by the spoken word. This class, due to its irresponsible attitudes, is excluded and does not find its place in this paper. But when such words existed in Arabic various digital/non-digital discourses, many language participants and critics have appreciated their new existence in the language. They have been seen as enriching, developing, and expressive of a changing world:

The twentieth century Arabic vocabulary has been enriching itself by modernising Arabic words to denote fresh ideas, and concepts, by accommodating new words to mean accessories and amenities of modern life and by adopting foreign words into its body. Thus the language has expanded and developed considerably with the changing world (Aboo Backer, 2007: 11).

On the other hand, many language participants and translators still doubt the validity of such adopted vocabulary. They have nostalgia for the original and the indigenous. They consider the failure to cope with the new technologies and innovations, and their terminologies as betrayal of their linguistic national identity. Others like Dr Husam Al-Khatib, a distinguished Arab critic, finds that the real obstacle facing digital translation is not the machine at all, but the limitations imposed on it by linguistic studies which fail to offer the solution. The dialectics surrounding such ways of seeing such linguistic phenomena are really intricate and practically overlapping or contradicting. But the Arab translator, let alone the digital author, has to make his reader understand his writing not through the arabicised words he uses but through the dissemination of the Arabic terminology: the original, the generated, or those that are sculpted from pure Arabic root words at the expense of the loan words. This is the plight and dilemma of Arab translators, but they should find way at last (Najib, 2005: 25). The same holds true of the digital authors or communicators. They should feel responsible for their diction and what they choose to write originally on the internet.

However, in their digitally transmitted communications, communicators have different possibilities and strategies in what they adopt. Some of them prefer to arabicise (transliterate or at least transshape), others do have the time to translate, others find it acceptable to transplant³ (transpose in a foreign script) and very few others can have an opportunity to create. The reality but not the theory of such possibilities, namely the digital ones, is what determines the scope of this paper. To remind, the sense of the term 'digital,' though still of unstable definition, is limited here to describe those kinds of communications generated or aided by the internet and have no *prior* paper existence.

The Nature of the Possibilities

While browsing and scanning some 'scholarly' articles on the internet, it has been found that their writers (!), more rightly may be 'digital authors, or communicators,'⁴ are very much aware of the digital age in which they are interacting and the digital technology through which they are or translating their ideas and research. In their digital

communication, to stick to the issue of foreign, namely English, terminology, they happen to realize that they have four possibilities to face the rapid transmission of English terminology in their digital writings (!) or rather ‘digital communications and interactions.’ Let’s have a discussion of the nature of these possibilities in three select specimens⁵ here: the three of which belong to Arabic ‘digital communicators.’

The First Specimen: Terminology Related to Digital Education

In his digitally transmitted article titled, ‘الثقافة الرقمية مفهوم وفهم’ [Digital Education: A Concept and Perception], Husayn Hasan Rashid uses different ‘digital’ terms while he is talking of digital education. The following list shows some of them:

1. الثقافة الرقمية Al-thaqafah Al-raqamiyyah [digital education]
2. تكنولوجيا المعلومات Tiknulugia al-ma’lumat [information technology]
3. العالم الإلكتروني Al-aalam al-iliktruni [electronic world]
4. العمل الإلكتروني Al-amal Al-iliktruni [electronic work]
5. الجهل الإلكتروني Al-jahl Al-iliktruni [electronic illiteracy]
6. الحساب الرقمي Al-hisab Al-raqami [digital mathematics]
7. (المعلومات) (داتا) Al-m’lumat (data) [DATA]
8. (الرقمي) (الديجتال) Al-raqami (al-dijital) [DIGITAL]
9. المجتمع الرقمي الجديد Al-mujtam’ Al-raqami Al-jadid [the new digital community]
10. التقنية الرقمية Al-tiqaniyyah Al-raqamiyyah [digital technology]
11. مجتمع المعلومات Mujtam’ Al-m’lumat [information community]
12. شبكة الانترنت Shabakat Al-internet [internet]
13. التعلم عن بعد Al-t’allum ‘an bu’d [distance education]
14. التطبيقات الرقمية Al-tatbiqat Al-raqamiyyah [digital applications]
15. الثورة التكنولوجية Al-thawrah Al-tiknulujiyyah [technological revolution]
16. زر ضغطة Zir [key press]
17. (شبكة الاتصالات الدولية) (الانترنت) Shabakat Al-ittisalat Al-diwaliyyah (al-intarnit) [world wide web]
18. الشبكة العنكبوتية Al-shabakah Al-‘ankabutiyyah [the web]
19. علوم الحاسوب Ulum Al-hasub [computer sciences]
20. ثقافة إلكترونية Thaqafah Iliktruniyyah [electronic education]

The bold-font phrases above reflect one possibility which occurs clearly in the aforementioned article. These are just arabicised or trans-

literated, i.e., written in Arabic letters, and represented in Arabic in a way that reads like this: tiknulugia in item no. 2 above; al-iliktruni in item no. 3, 4, and 5; data in item no. 7; al-dijital in no. 8; al-intarnit in no. 12 and 17, al-tiknulugiah no.20. The second possibility of translating is obvious in items 1, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 18, and 19. Readers of this paper who do not know Arabic can through the transliterations above next to each item realise to what extent the translation sounds different from the transliteration. This is because the translation of the latter items uses pure Arabic words. The author of the article is thus using two types of translation in his original digital composition.

Incidentally, the terms listed and translated above have recently occurred in Arabic in order to meet the foreign terminology - most of which have come through the internet. Prior to the digital revolution such terms were absent in spoken and written Arabic discourses and in the discourses of Arabic research as well. The appearance of such exemplary terminology reflects the potentiality of producing equivalent counterparts. In other words, it means that Arabic can have different possibilities to meet the invading aliens. The whole thing turns to be a game of strategy in which languages have to find ways to play with one another on a single digital arena, which has no univocal time, place and setting. The players can either win or lose. To elaborate and illustrate, the translated terminologies listed above manifest different possibilities of transmitting the foreign terminology in original Arabic writings on the web. Some of which turn to be pure translations, others are nothing but mere transliterations. As a matter of fact, the above terminologies have shown nothing of a creation, that is, pure Arabic terminology which is born out of an Arabic technological soil to express an original object, term, or an event. All the terminology seems to have been created in a language other than Arabic. Arabic now plays the role of a receptor. This is contrary to what Arabic used to be during the Middle Ages particularly in the 13th century. This is the period in which the Arabs were in contact with the West through wars that dominated the period in the Arab East. In those times hundreds of Arabic words related to various spheres of knowledge have invaded many foreign languages of the West (Najib, 2005: 6-25). Arabic was an exporter of terminologies, and many languages of the world had to deal with those terminologies each according to its linguistic capacity. What is happening today is just the contrary. But the problem is more serious than any time before. This is because of the rapidness of technological transmission and the non-stop growth of human learning and

knowledge. The technological inability of most of the Arabs today has reflected itself clearly in the language they speak or write. Therefore, the third possibility, that of creating terminology that can pose a real challenge to its alien counterpart, is almost absent and there is no way to talk about it in the present of our times. The following is another specimen from a scholarly article by one who is claimed to be the pioneer of the digital realistic novel in the world. There is no aim to discuss his points of view on the digital world of authorship, which can be spared for a separate literary paper, but to describe the terminology he uses in his digital article.

The Second Specimen: Terminology Related to the Digital Novel

In the third chapter of his ‘digital’ book titled, ‘اللغة في رواية’، اللغة في الرواية الرقمية [Language of the Digital Realistic Novel], the Jordanian Muhammad Sanajlah speaks of the possibilities of the appearance of a new language for the new digital literary genre. Being himself a pioneer of such a genre as is believed by many (digital) Arab critics today, his terminology used to express this new Arabic art is found to be having the four possibilities mentioned earlier. Here is a list of some of the digital terms he uses:

1. رواية الواقعية الرقمية Riwayat Al-waqi’yyah Al-raqamiyyah [the digital realistic novel]
2. العصر الرقمي Al-‘asr Al-raqami [the digital age]
3. لغة البرمجة Lughat Albarmajah [programming software]
4. HTML لغة الـ HTML Lughat Al-HTML [HTML language]
5. الاخراج السينمائي Al-ikhraj Al-sinama’i [cinematographical production]
6. فن كتابة السيناريو Fan Kitabat Al-sinaryu [the art of scenario editing]
7. ANIMATION فن الـ ANIMATION Fan Al-ANIMATION [the art of ANIMATION]

The seven terms listed above manifest four types of possibilities of the digital transmission of foreign terminology: translated terminology as in items 1 and 2; Arabicised or transliterated terminology as in 3, 5 and 6; the transplanted terminology as in items 4 and 7; and finally the created terminology as in item 1 above. The last type expresses a possibility of Arabic coinage. Simply because the Arab author is believed to be the pioneer of this new digital art called “Riwayat al-Waqi’iyyah al-Raqamiyyah” (the Digital Realistic Novel). Unfortunately, this last type is the least prominent as the specimen above shows. It is only the first term of the list above that is a real challenge, though not as

a term as such but as a concept by itself. However, new concepts can breed new terminologies. If this new genre of a novel is really not an imitation of an existing foreign type, then it is expected that many pure Arabic digital terminology will come into existence: a new epistemological occurrence which the rest of the world has to face and admit, and gets into the trouble of its translation. However, the article from which the specimen above is taken is quite disappointing. The essayist practices in this digital ‘scholarly’ article what could arouse doubt, at least for his critics, about his ability or his interest to create or coin more Arabic digital terminology related to the very requirements of the new art (the digital novel) he is talking about. The phrases “HTML” and “ANIMATION” in items 4 and 7 respectively remain without translation above. They are just copied into the Arabic text of the digital article with their exact Roman letters. They interrupt the Arabic script and look odd. Transplanting is provocative, simply because it gives an impression that such an international language like Arabic is insufficient and cannot find its equivalent terminology. He could at least do his job of transliterating and thus avoid interrupting the script with another that does not fit in. This possibility has become prominent in digital communication in Arabic today. Do Arabic digital communicators or bloggers not have capacity to translate or do not have time to cope with the rapid digital technology which waits for none to think over what he is receiving, translating, or even transmitting?!

The Third Specimen: A Digital Very Short Story

In his ‘digital’ very short story titled *بصمة خيال* [An Impression of An Imagination,] Husayn bin Qarin, uses the following two sentences that are sure to capture the attention of a translational critic:

1. *القى نظرة الى هاتفه المحمول* [alqa nadratan ila hatifihi al-mahmul] (had a glance at his mobile)
2. *يداعب كيبورده-لوحة مفاتيحه* [yuda’ibu kibawrdahu – lawhat mafatihi-] ((pampering his keyboard (- his keyboard-))

In these two sentences, there are two technological devices mentioned. One is ‘hatifihi al-mahmul’ [his mobile] and the other is ‘kiibawrd’ [keyboard]. These two words are images of two technological devices: the first one means ‘portable telephone’ which is exactly ‘the mobile handset’; the other one is ‘keyboard.’ The digital short story communicator translates the first, and chooses to transliterate the second though a more common and more acceptable term for keyboard (lawhat mafatihi) already exists in Arabic. It is not only common but

more literary by its very nature. Yet, it seems that the blogger's awareness of the digital age in which he is communicating his story and his awareness of the technology he is communicating through has impressed him to an extent that he cannot resist the temptation to arabicise the English word 'keyboard.' This arabicisation is highly provocative. It does not only breach the Arabic sound system but its morphology as well. The parenthetical translation juxtaposed to it betrays this fact.⁶ Once these two forms of keyboard of the sentence quoted above are translated back into English only one English term will be the equivalent of the two. Moreover, it is felt that the addition of the Arabic 'possessive pronoun' 'هـ' to the Arabicised word makes this possibility quite strange and doubtful as a word that can fit in any Arabic literary composition. However, this uncertainty seems to disappear once readers of digital compositions come to know that such communicators are in search of new language for their digital literature, as it were. Coming across upon such possibilities in such digital genres opens up new horizons for linguists, literary writers, critics and translators of- to shy from other terms already designating paper literature and literary publications- digital literary communications and interactions. Such new usages are revolutionary as far as new Arabic scholarly composition, designated as digital, can make its existence ever felt, and its challenges ever met.

Conclusion

Recapitulation

The whole paper, focusing on the possibilities of transmitting foreign terminology in Arabic as far as digital communication is concerned, has shown the existence of four possibilities on the level of the digital word: the translated, the Arabicised or the transliterated, the transplanted or the copied, and the created. These are the possibilities that appear clearly on the internet. The paper's aim, to remember, was not to take an *ultimate and decisive* ethical stand regarding these possibilities, for there should be a more extensive research scope for questioning their validity first and substantiating reasons why some of them should be rejected.

If all of those possibilities are - and this cannot be the case- vindicated and validated, Arabic then will have no problem at all to express them digitally. Roughly speaking, at this stage and without any reservation however, transplanting as was defined by this paper is found to be inappropriate for Arabic- a language with a right-to-left or-

thographical system and a completely different script. The other three possibilities can work together or enter into the debate and be assessed. Arabic favours creation, encourages translation, and tends to tolerate necessary Arabicisation, but seems to permanently find it impossible to accept transplantations. However, digital communications today and their proponents pose a different type of not only possibilities of transmitting foreign terminology but also a new language that seeks to meet the requirements of digital awareness and globalised forms of contact, and above all different standards of assessment and evaluation and on-line participation.

Established translators]and probably for this case digital communicators or authors[arguably have a professional responsibility to take advantage of the continuing development opportunities offered by their professional bodies in order to help them keep abreast of technological advances in the translation sector, and in order to help them continue to achieve their goals of quality and productivity. Such opportunities might include attendance at relevant seminars and workshops, as well as participation in online discussion groups or networks, where ideas and user experiences can be informally exchanged. Participation in these sorts of activities should help to improve levels of awareness of technological developments in the sector (Heather Fulford and Joaquin Granell-Zafra, 2005: 13).

Recommendations

Every paper cannot go beyond its limited scope. The ideas of this paper, though subject to the limitations of scope and time imposed by a journal paper, can be further promoted by more critiques on the following themes:

- The validity of the possibilities of foreign terminology transmission discussed in this paper.
- The rise and history of new digital concepts in Arabic like the novel literary concept of the digital realistic novel mentioned in this paper and/or the problems of its translatability.
- Analysing one of the digital novels by Muhammad Sanajlah, whose article about such a new genre was taken as a specimen in this paper. This pioneer has to his credit several digital realistic novels so far. Its digital linguistic features can be an excellent source of empirical data for a clearer and more detailed analysis of the problems of translation accompanying digital literature creation or even its translation in Arabic.

Notes

1. Paper research on such digital issues seems to be completely absent. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to fill this gap. Its list of references reflect not only the digital load of the topic discussed but also the absence of paper research that can be made use of.
2. From the perspective of this paper a way of creating and transmitting ideas, thoughts and modes of expression, of whatever type and manner, by and through the internet only.
3. (Its meaning here is determined by the need to express a new phenomenon of translation occurring on internet communications, where the alien remains alien in its shape and orthographic form. In this case it opposes Arabicisation)
4. This is to suggest the problem of labelisation or epitheticalisation in the field of 'digitalisation' as versus the popular and recognized forms of communication like manuscripts and printed publications)
5. The specimens are also selected for their content value that is related to the new idea of 'digital' expression. Interested scholars in such a new trend can refer to the URLs provided later to read more on this issue.)
6. My parenthetical translation in the quote above shows the unnecessary use of the Arabicised form when its translation is already there. Since this is the case in such a digital work of art that has not yet gained enough recognition, it suffices to consider it, though seems as provocative as it may be, a fresh linguistic treatment in creative Arabic compositions on the Net.

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