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Panorama of Self-Translation in The Arabic Literary Landscape

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Abstract*: The current research paper aims at shedding light on self-translation within the Arabic contemporary context, hence delving into a valuable research on the subject which is still not often tackled. This paper provides insight into the self-translation practice of Arab authors who have resorted to such atypical activity. The Algerian context will be given particular importance in order to define the circumstances and reasons that motivated some contemporary Algerian authors to translate their own writings and to embark on this highly challenging endeavor. Thus, our study will put the spotlight on the definition of the concept of self-translation, a brief overview of Arabic literature devoted to it, plus a typology of self-translation and the motives that invigorated this practice. We will then try - through the examination of some Arab self-translation experiences - to identify the characteristics of this practice within the Arab context, and thereby understand the points of divergence that distinguish the Algerian experience from that of other Arab authors, as well as the points of convergence on which these different practices come together.*
Keywords*: Translation studies, literary self-translation, author-translator, contemporary Algerian literature, postcolonialism, Arab writers.*
Résumé : *Le présent article vise à mettre en lumière l'auto-traduction dans le contexte arabe contemporain, apportant ainsi une pierre à l'édifice sur le sujet, qui reste encore peu étudié. Il cherche à dresser un état des lieux de la pratique auto-traduisante des auteurs arabes ayant eu recours à cette pratique insolite. Une importance particulière sera donnée au contexte algérien afin d'essayer de définir les circonstances et les raisons qui ont motivé les auteurs-traducteurs algériens contemporains à se lancer dans cette entreprise oh combien exigeante. Ainsi, notre étude s'articulera autour de la définition du concept d'auto-traduction, elle donnera un aperçu de la littérature qui lui fut consacrée en langue arabe, la typologie de l'auto-traduction et les raisons qui l'ont motivé. Par la suite nous chercherons- à travers quelques expériences d'auteurs-traducteurs arabes et algériens- à mieux cerner les caractéristiques de cette pratique dans le contexte arabe, et de là, comprendre les points de divergence qui distinguent l'expérience algérienne de celle des auteurs arabes, ainsi que les points de convergences sur lesquels ces différentes pratiques se rejoignent.*
Mots clés : *auto-traducteur arabe, auto-traduction littéraire, écriture bilingue, littérature algérienne contemporaine, traductologie***.**

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1. Introduction

The need for self-translation has emerged in several scientific, political and religious contexts - and many literatures testify its existence for more than ten centuries HOKENSON, et al., 2007. Thanks to bilingualism or even multilingualism prevalent in many countries, even though not always officially recognized, self-translation was made possible and gained a real interest among scholars of translation studies.

One of the reasons why the meaning of a literary text can be "lost in translation" is the translator's inability to understand the author's proper intentions. However, the case of the self-translator is different because he or she will never be mistaken about the true intentions of the author of the original text. Therefore, self-translations can be regarded as more prestigious than standard translations. This is simply because self-translation seems to represent a guarantee for compliance with the "requirements" of translation, namely to say everything that the original says, to say nothing that the original does not say. GARCÍA YEBRA, 1989.

2. Self-translation as a new branch in studies -translation

Self-translation has been brought to the surface as an interesting field of study since 1970s onwards, after being characterized for a long time by the sporadic nature of its interventions and its general monographic character. In this vein, Popovič -who is considered as one of the forerunners of self-translation definition - identifies the concept of self-translation as "the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself", stated in Grutman,1998, p. 17.

He also argues in the same context that self-translation "cannot be regarded as a variant of the original text but as a true translation" Indeed, self-translation has managed to make its way into the field of translation studies, thanks to the first article devoted to it in "the Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies", written by Rainier Grutman, 1998.

There is research that defines writing in second languages as "mental self-translation" Cordingley, 2013. As far as we are concerned, this article ignores this one and focuses solely on the definition originally proposed as it remains the most common.

Self-translation denotes the practice of translating one's own work across languages, and the result of that practice would be a self-translation or a self-translated text. according to Grutman: «The terms auto-translation and self-translation refer to the act of translating one's own writings or the result of such an undertaking» GRUTMAN, 1998 .

> As stated in the abovementioned discussion, there are two terms in English which are interchangeably used to refer to the concept of self-translation, videlicet, "self-translation" and "auto-translation". Antony Cordingley has made a distinction between them as follows: "Notions of the 'self' are difficult to extract from thinking about 'self-translation'… In English, the connotations and echoes generated by this term […] are entirely different from those of the self in self-translation. In English, the 'auto' of auto-translation may even suggest the very opposite process- the negation of the self as if the text was on autopilot, performing automatic or machine

> translation, transporting itself into another language code. Using the term "self-translation" concentrates attention on the presence of the translator […] on the various morphing of the self which occurs not only in the act of translation but during the composition of its original". CORDINGLEY, 2013, pp. 1-2.

On the other hand, Arabic has only one polysemic word that refers to two concepts which have the meaning of the "self" in common. The term that denotes "self-translation" in Arabic is the same that designates "autobiography". As the present research focuses on Arab authors who have engaged in self-translation, it has been necessary to carry out this research project in Arabic. This has engendered some difficulty because of the term's polysemy that leads to confusion.

In fact, in Arabic language, the term self-translation is said [tarǧama ḏātīa] [1], it also means "autobiography" which is said otherwise [sīra ḏātīa] in Arabic. Besides, the term includes "self-made translation" as well. This terminological confusion is an obstacle to bibliographical research, in addition to the issues of the novelty of the concept in the field of Translation Studies, plus the scarcity of research works that deal with this phenomenon in Arabic language.

In short, it is a practice that is not always apparent, but may be hidden for one reason or another under a variety of practices that go by different names such as bilingual writing, etc.

3. Statut of self-translation and self-translator

3.1. Statut of self-translation

The early study of literary self-translation has exclusively focused on a few prominent migrant self-translators (e.g. Samuel Beckett and Vladimir Nabokov). It has been generally discussed in the context of comparative literary studies as a bilingual writing strategy. Currently, self-translation is mainly investigated in the area of Translation Studies and, primarily, as a translation phenomenon.

In contemporary research on the phenomenon of self-translation, there is unanimity among researchers in granting agency to self-translators (and regularly denying it to translators in the "standard" sense). In addition to being allowed to act on behalf of the original authors..., self-translators are often considered to have more leeway in the translation decision-making process. Instead of the mere room granted to most modern translators, Grutman thinks that "self-translation can lead to a reversal, or at least a downplaying, of the hierarchy that normally favors the original over the translation, with neither version taking precedence". GRUTMAN, et al., 2014.

Thus, the process of creating a new text in the target language is practically cancelled out in self-translation. The text translated by its own author is new insofar as it occupies a place in the target culture, but not for the translator-author, since the process

[1] Translitteration made online at : https://www.lexilogos.com/clavier/arabe_conversion.htm

of decoding the source text does not exist for the self-translator who begins his or her translation work directly with the encoding of the text in the target language.

3.2. Statut of self-translators

María RECUENCO PEÑALVER assigns two statuses to the self-translator: that of the translator and that of the author: they arise naturally from self-translator's dual function.

The self-translator is a translator because despite his freedom as an author and the privileges that his double quality of author/translator entails in translating, he/she uses, to a large extent, strategies that are specific to each translator". Hence, the creative process of creating a new text in the target language practically disappears in the case of self-translation. TANQUEIRO (1999) cited in M. RECUENCO PEÑALVER, 2011.

> Tanqueiro considers the self-translator, on the one hand, as an ordinary reader –in the same way like Justa Holz-Mäntärri- and she calls him/her "a reader sui generis", and, on the other hand, as "a privileged translator". She shares the same view of García Yebra who has stated that the self-translator does not belong to the group of natural receivers of an original text, he rather must be an "extraordinary reader" who tries to come as close as possible to a full understanding of the text, even though he/she knows he/she will never reach it, stated by TANQUEIRO, 2009.

4. Self-translation from different perspectives

There are several studies which have tried to categorize the phenomenon of self-translation according to the criteria taken into consideration by researchers. Oustinoff was one of the first academicians who have established the first typology of self-translation strategies comprised of: (1) naturalizing self-translation, (2) decentered self-translation and (re)creative self-translation. His doctoral dissertation- published as a monograph- in which he examines self-translation from a linguistic perspective is among the first devoted to self-translation. M. Oustinoff, 2001.

Jan Walsh Hokenson and Marcella Munson have studied self-translation from a historical perspective. They have achieved the first monographic study to situate self-translation as both a practice and a theoretical object. This study demonstrates - despite popular belief - that the practice has a long and rich history, pre-dating the Middle Ages, involving many writers around the world. Indeed, the book chronologically relates the detailed history of bilingual writing and self-translation in the West from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, with the recognition of French as the privileged language of culture. Helena Tanqueiro, for instance, regards the two languages being used, whether they are (central /peripheral - culturally close/distant – equal prestige / competing). TANQUEIRO, 2007.

Others categorize it depending on the extent of the author's adaptations or changings operated on the text, it is the case of Michael Oustinoff (literal/free) Oustinoff, ibid, and so did Antoine Berman before him (Domestication/foreignization) as indicated by Oustinoff.

Xosé Manuel Dasilva considers transparency and opacity as interesting indicators that can inform us about the self-translator's attitude towards self-translation. He examines the paratext in order to find information indicating clearly whether it is a translation made by the author, or otherwise, this latter is presenting it as an original. Yet, others refer to various criteria ranging between elements of time and space on the one hand (simultaneous / successive - geographic stability of the self-translator/ immigration / exile), and the ratio of novels translated by the writer compared to his total production (total translation/partial translation) on the other hand, these letter are generally the points considered by GRUTMAN, 2013.

5. Self-translation in Arabic literary scene

A conspicuous example of the few Arabic-language studies on self-translation was a chapter devoted by Muhammed Asfour, to Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, entitled "The Author as Translator: Jabra Translates Jabra". It is one of the rare sources that we reached in Arabic on this subject. We did not find any other chapters or scientific articles about self-translation, let alone a book. (عصفور، 2009) But, there is a significant literature in other languages on Arab authors who have translated their works, or parts of works, by themselves.

The scarcity of research on self-translation in Arabic is understandable. If we take into account the fact that most bilingual or polyglot authors prefer to write directly in major/central language, it becomes obvious that self-translation is a less important object of study compared to other predominant themes, and therefore more interesting to study.

Another reason for this lack of interest lies in the fact that self-translation is a modern branch in translation studies, and with its recentness we find a good amount of neologism that needs to be translated into Arabic. Furthermore, self-translation studies are still in the process of growth and movement even in their original country.

The choice of language by the author who uses more than one language obeys the law of the strongest. Therefore, he or she goes for the dominant language in the literary field, i.e. the central language, or the one closest to the center according to Pascale Casanova, 1999. But apart from mastering a dominant language, what else would motivate a bilingual author to translate his or her writing?

6. What would motivate an author to self-translate?

The factor of linguistic mastery does not always lead to self-translation since the postcolonial context of some Arab countries on the one side, and the movement of Arab authors to European or other foreign countries, whether for reasons of immigration, political asylum, or study purposes on the other side, is a motivating factor on the other hand. Being in a state of total linguistic and cultural immersion facilitated their foreign languages acquisition such as French and English which are currently at the top of the language pyramid or at the center of the World Republic of Letters, as Casanova would have said, CASANOVA, ibid.

Bilingualism, or even multilingualism, involves not only mastery of a foreign language, but also a "deep" knowledge of the civilization and culture of the foreign language in question, as well as knowledge and awareness of its various characteristics.

Moreover, bilingualism has encouraged many Arab and non-Arab writers to write directly in a foreign language in order to shorten the path, and avoid translation, especially if because it takes too much time and effort.

Maria Alice ANTUNES has more or less put together the reasons for self-translation in one paper, stating intrinsic and extraneous reasons that led to it, all of those reasons have been presented by researchers and self-traslators, according to her (Antunes, 2013). So, intrinsic reasons reside in the following:

- "The desire to "say" the novel in a different language,
- The urge to reach a wider audience,
- The desire to gain access to literary visibility and existence, the fear of being misrepresented,
- The desire to achieve literary freedom by retaining control over the form of their writings, and thus to claim an absolute autonomy,
- The challenge of renouncing native fluency,
- Migration,
- The wish to make a political or ideological statement,
- The fact that self-translation becomes an almost essential step in the creative process,
- The dislike of existing translations, (as for Nabokov)
- Some writers like Raymond Federman feels the book in unfinished if it does not exist in another language.

Besides internal reasons, ANTUNES compilates extraneous motives in the following:

- Censorship,
- The fact that self-translation becomes a trademark,
- Commercial interest,
- The fact that there may be very few professional translators who are able to translate from a specific language, Maria Alice ANTUNES, 2013, p. 47.

In general, self-translation comes as a consequence of combination of these two levels of motives. For instance, an author writing in a minority language may resort to self-translation in order to gain a place among writers of dominant languages, precisely by using the same language as they do. In this case, the internal motivation combines with the external motivation to push and pull the author to self-translate.

7. Some Arabic self-translation experiences

As mentioned above, Arabic literature dealing with self-translation is rare. However, we think that self-translation is more widely practiced by Arab authors than

stated in books and research papers. This opinion is perfectly in line with the one expressed by Santoyo since 2005 about the abundance of self-translation, contrary to the prevailing preconceptions about it SANTOYO, ibid. So, let us see some of the existing cases.

In fact, history of self-translation shows that the first time Arabic language was involved in self-translation (as a source language) was at the time of Abraham Bar Hiyya (1065- 1145), a Jewish mathematician and astronomer living in Barcelona, seems to have summarized in Arabic and then translated into Hebrew, at the request of the Jews of southern France, his Foundations of Intelligence and his Tower of Faith. His example was imitated years later by the Toledo Jew Yehuda Ben Solomon Cohen, author in Arabic and Hebrew of the encyclopedic treatise entitled "Inquisitio sapientiæ" in Latin. SANTOYO, ibid

Except these two cases, we found nothing about other self-translators in relation to Arabic language except those of the modern era. We can arguably think that Arabic writers and researchers did not have recourse to foreign language during ancient times when their language had the same status like English and French nowadays: this follows the same principle outlined in the world republic of letters; or maybe such practice had effectively taken place but was not documented.

The last argument can be true because some famous linguists who published voluminous works about Arabic grammar and poetry were considered as Arabs, where they were not.

Hocine Khemri quotes the two cases of Al-Farabi and Abd al-Qaher al-Jurjani. Al-Farabi is of Turkish origin yet he wrote in Arabic and was therefore considered an Arab writer, and the Imam philosopher Abd al-Qaher al-Jurjani is Persian, but he too was considered an Arab philosopher because of his language of writing 2009،خمري. Both of them had such a good mastery of Arabic language to the extent that his writings in Arabic surpassed those of genuine Arabs in prestige and celebrity.

On the contrary of that era, modern Arabic literature is more open to foreign languages. The bilingualism or even multilingualism that characterizes Arabic countries, due to many reasons -sociological, political, cultural, colonial, etc.) paved the way to the emergence of bilingual writers who master two or more languages; consequently, allowing the appearance of self-translation, since bilingualism, at least, is a sine qua non condition for its practice. Therefore, there is an important number of authors writing in foreign languages- mainly French and English- in the Arab world, such as Amin Maalouf, Kateb Yacine, Yasmina Khadra, Assia Djebbar, Abdelkébir Khatibi, Taher Ben Jelloun, Abdelwahab Meddeb

All of them belong to the Francophone literary sphere. But there are other writers who are perfectly bilingual, i.e.to the extent of being able to write in both languages. They were almost equally proficient in both languages, so they wrote in both, and at other times they translated their writings to make them available in the language of their country of origin, in the language of the other (often that other was the colonizer), so they became self-translators.

So, contemporary Arabic literature counts an important number of authors who have translated themselves, such as the Jordanian-Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra-

abovementioned-, the Syrians Samar Al-Attar and Omar Abu Risha, the Egyptian storyteller Muhammad Tawfiq, the Mauritanian Moussa Ould Ebnou, Tunisians Jalila Baccar and Salah Guermadi.

Jabra's self-translation experience was limited to one novel he originally wrote in English "Screaming in a Long Night"[ṣurāḫ fī laīْl ṭawīl], but he only published the Arabic translation. He also translated a chapter from a second novel whose title is "Hunters in a narrow street". Jabra passed away before having the English origin published. "Hunters in a narrow street" was published in London in 1960 (first edition), and remained unknown to Arab readers until 1974, when Muhammad Asfour made a translation of it (the published translation was made by Asfour, ibid.

It is surprising that Jabra translated the thirteenth chapter of this novel and published it in the Beirut Journal of Arts in 1953 as a short story. So, when Asfour published his own translation of the novel, he did not translate that chapter of it, but rather relied on the translation of the author himself because he estimated that it was the most accurate expression of what he wanted to say.

In his translation, Jabra preserved words from local Iraqi Arabic (noting that Jabra had settled in Iraq since his was young) by using dialect words such as "istikan" which he put in English "istikan" although he could put "cup" (of tea) so as not to draw the English reader's attention to this foreign element. This indicates his preference for foreignization in translation. His choice may be understood as a form of resistance and as a strong will to keep and show his identity. Asfour, ibid.

Perhaps the fact of maintaining linguistic fragments that he takes with him on his travels is a consolation to him in his aloofness, reminding him of his identity and origin in a foreign land.

Unlike Jabra, the Tunisian writer and linguist Salah Guermadi tends to "localize" his self-translations, and to remove all the marks of strangeness that may exist in the original text. Self-translation was reflected in Guermadi's simultaneous publication of some of his works in Arabic and French. This was somewhat of a rewriting, given the disparity between the two versions in terms of language levels, shared beliefs and stereotypes, as noted by Salah Mejri, 2000.

Guermadi himself translated one of his two collections of poetry from Arabic to French, the one entitled in Arabic [al-laḥْmatu al-ḥaīa][2] whose title became "Avec ou sans" in its French version, in Tunisia in 1970, published by Geres. Mejri, ibid.

Guermadi used Tunisian dialectal Arabic with all its borrowings from the French language. He used it with a high degree of deliberate and humorous linguistic overlapping. He also used very different cultural references between Arabic and French, using his own references for each language without trying to cross-reference them. The French versions of his works were devoid of the influence of Tunisian Arabic.

In Algeria, a generation of writers has emerged who are known for their harmonious bilingualism, combining the use of Arabic with another dominant foreign language, be it English, French or other (Italian for "Amara Lakhous").

[2] "اللحمة الحية" means « live meat ».

Now, let us address the sociolinguistic reality of Algeria in order to better understand the context that led authors to self-translate. In fact, diglossia exists in Algeria since centuries, due to successive occupations and colonization. The linguistic situation in Algeria is characterized by the presence of school Arabic, varieties of Tamazight, alongside with French which is the language of the elite. Furthermore, the post-independence Algerian state imposed on a plurilingual society a monolingual linguistic policy based on school Arabic Abderrezak DOURARI, 2012.

Hence, Algeria also has its own set of self-translators: the novelists Rachid Boudjedra and Malek Bennabi, the playwright Slimane Benaissa, and the immigrant writer Amara Lakhous.

Considering collaborative translation as a category of self-translation -since it carries a high degree of subjectivity, although its practice is not limited to the author alone- we can add the translator and literary critic Mohamed Sari, and Waciny Laredj to the list.

Rachid Boudjedra is better known for his auto-translation practice than others, perhaps because he belongs to an older generation, has produced more auto-translations than others, and has acquired an undeniable international fame.

Mohamed Sari has self-translated two of his novels: "Pluie d'or" from French into Arabic, the other from Arabic into French.

The latter constitutes his first experience with self-translation. The novel was written in Arabic under the title "الورم" [al-waram] and was published in 2002 by El Ikhtilef Editions, knowing that he started writing it in 1995. The novel was translated into French under the title "Le labyrinthe" and published in 2000 by Marsa Editions. In other words, the French translation was published two years before the original Arabic version. The French version was clearly marked on its cover as "Translated from Arabic by Mohamed Sari, with the collaboration of Marie Virolle", i.e. it is a "transparent" collaborative translation in the sense of Dasilva (2016). It should be noted that Sari is a very prolific literary translator, and as such his relationship with languages is very fluid and flexible.

The writer told us when we met him on parallel of a conference that after writing some chapters he felt that "such a subject would not be accepted by an Algerian publisher in Algeria, not even in Arabic countries", so he changed the language of writing and completed it in French and sent it for publication in 2000. Then he went back to the Arabic text and finished the writing based on the French version. He kept the paragraphs and chapters he thought were good and changed the rest by deleting, adding and rewriting. Then, he made a collaborative transparent re-creative self-translation.

Then he presented the novel to Arab publishing houses, some of which did not respond to him; others asked him to rewrite in classical Arabic the passages that were written in Algerian dialectal Arabic, that the oriental reader would not understand, a condition that the writer rejected, and so we can understand his incentives for self-translation.

Waciny Laredj has had limited experience with self-translation. It is reduced to two collaborative self-translations. indeed, he translated his novel initially written in Arabic

"سيدة المقام", (saïidaïu al-maqām) into French under the title "The wings of the queen" published in 2009", by Sindbad editions. he also translated a limited part of the novel "حارسة الظلال" [ḥārisaïu al-ẓilāl] published by Marsa editions (Algeria) in 1997 and later in a second edition by Ward publishing (Damascus) in 2006, under the title "La gardienne des ombres: Don Quichotte à Alger" (The guardian of the shadows: Don Quixote in Algiers), translated by Zineb Laouedj and Marie Virolle. Katia Ghosn, 2010. Waciny Laredj made a collaborative self-translation with the same French translator Marie Virolle. He confessed that the task was not easy. Waciny Laredj, 2017).

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, we realize that self-translation does exist in the Arab world, and in Algeria in particular, given the linguistic situation that simultaneously encourages rootedness but still opens large linguistic perpectives and choices. We recognize then - among the factors that motivated the authors whose experiences we examined - to self-translate that immigration is a key factor for Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, for whom self-translation is a consolation, a means of resistance against forgetting the native land. For Jalila Baccar, it was a precious means that allowed her to achieve fame by performing on French theater stages, although her text lost the initial linguistic cachet of the Tunisian dialect, which was full of borrowings from the French language. For Mohamed Sari, self-translation was a means of escaping censorship, and of making his voice heard beyond the Arab world, which initially refused to publish it. For Waciny Laredj, it was a difficult experience to complete, despite his perfect bilingualism; however, he overcame it bravely thanks to the collaboration with other translators, in order to complete it. Moreover, it turns out that Maghrebi writers practice self-translation without resistance, hence the transparency of it, through their statements and press interviews, which testifies to an openness to others and the fact that they reconcile local culture with world cultures without any concern.

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