

The Translatability of Prosody: A case study of English/Arabic Poetry

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the translatability of prosody by showing the difficulty of translating the prosodic features from English into Arabic, illustrated with English/ Arabic examples. The current study is intended to show that prosody presents a challenge for translators in translating the poetic text from English into Arabic due to the great differences between the two linguistic systems. The dictionary definition of rhythm is the regular occurrence of sounds, that is the *sonic pattern* created by successive variously intonated units of speech, mainly by using syllables usually stressed and unstressed in a certain order, in European languages, such as English, French and German. In Arabic we have units of consonants and vowels, rather than syllables, with less consideration for intonation. So, while we have in English a line consisting of a number of successive syllables creating units of one unstressed followed a stressed syllable, in Arabic we have units consisting of one, two, or more consonants followed by a vowel. This paper concludes that failure to preserve prosodic features such as rhythm, meter, and rhyme

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is due to the employed strategy that the translator used either to translate the poetic text into verse or prose style.

Keywords: prosody – NrhythmN – consonantsN - vowels – syllables – stressed - unstressed

1. Introduction:

The English unit for which the symbol of (u –) is used [the 'u' means unstressed], is called a 'foot'. In Arabic the unit consisting of two consonants followed by a vowel and one consonant followed by a vowel, for which the symbol is (– – o – o) [the dash is a consonants and the 'o' is a vowel], is called (تفعيلة) and may be regarded as the equivalent of a foot in English. Shorter Arabic 'feet' are available, the commonest one may consist of three consonants followed by a vowel (– – – o) or alternating consonants and vowels (– o – o).

In Arabic, however, the vowel is either a long 'Alef', 'Waw' or 'Yaa' (أ – و – ي) or a stopped consonant, that is a consonant not followed by any vowels, short or long. Take for example a sentence in Arabic like (مَنْ تَكُنْ لِي) which is transcribed in English as (man takon lee) is regarded, for the purpose of phonetic enunciation needed for the recognition of the rhythm as (– o / – – o / – o) where the initial (ميم) (m) [حرف ساكن عليه فتحة أي حركة قصيرة] (م) followed by a short vowel, thus (– + a). The (نون) (n) marked by a stop (o) [سكون] is regarded as a vowel, that is a stop consonant, and is therefore a vowel. The same applies to the following word where (ta) [ت] is a consonant followed by a short vowel, and the (k) (ك) is a consonant followed by a short

vowel (o) – (ta ko n). The last word consists of an (L) (ل) [لام] followed by a long vowel. Hence the rhythm (– o / – o / – o).

2. Arabic Prosody:

Consequently, a word like (أَقْبَلُ) *Aqbel* is said to consist of a *hamzat*, followed by a short vowel (ε+ a) the Q is a stopped consonant and is therefore a vowel, the (b) (ب) is a consonant followed by a short vowel, and is therefore a consonant, then the (L) (لام) is a stop consonant and is therefore a vowel. The phonetic transcription of the word would be (– o – o) with each letter is represented by a single dash or 'o'. The unit is a whole is regarded as a foot, and may be repeated – as a sonic pattern called metre (البحر الشعري). This foot has different forms but equally regular, such as (– – – o) as in the word *kutuba* (where *ku* and *tu* and *b* are consonants, followed by the long vowel (a) (كُتِبَا). It is to be noted that what counts in Arabic verse is the phonetic not the written form of the word. So, if the word was (كُتِبَا) it is transcribed phonetically as *kutuban*, without any change in the rhythm. So, a monostich (شطر) that is, a hemistich (نصف بيت) like:

أَقْبَلُ تُرْزَقُ رِزْقًا حَسَنًا

(*Aqbel turzaq rizqan hasana*)

Would be symbolized by (→ – o – o / – o – o / – o – o / – – – o /) where the last word consists of three consonants followed by the vowel – either (a) or (an).

3. Arabic / English Prosody:

A famous example of the regular metre in English is a 'pastoral' (رعوية) poem by Christopher Marlowe. Here is the opening line:

Come live with me and be my love

When you read it normally, you find that the second word is always stressed, the first always unstressed. Each word is an independent syllable, and each combination of two such syllables makes a foot, whose rhythm is (v –) which we call iambic. When you read the stressed syllables, you can get some sort of meaning, which is the opposite of the combination of the unstressed syllables:

Live / me / be / love /

Come / with / and / my /

The stressed syllables are operative words, a verb, an object, an infinitive and a noun. The unstressed syllables are mostly inoperative. So, the pattern takes the following form: [v – / v – / v – / v – /]. As there are four feet in the line, we call it tetrameter (رباعي). This is how we make it.

v – v – v – v –

Come live with me and be my love

or

x – x – x – x –

If we reproduce the line in Arabic, we may do it in prose, saying for instance:

أقبل ولنعش معًا ولتصبح حبيبي

As prose the line has no pattern of any bind: transcribed phonetically it may look like:

(from right to left)
o/o////o//o//o//o/o/o/

In other words, no recognizable units are repeated. If we translated it into verse, we may have:

أَقْبِلْ شَارِكُنِي عَيْشِي يَا حُبِّي

Which would be thus phonetically transcribed:

ء ق ب ل ش ا ر ك ن ي ع ي ش ي ا ح ب ب ي
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| |

(from right to left) o / o / o / o / o / o / o / o / o / o /

Note that (حبي) is transcribed phonetically as (حُبْ بِ ي). This should be enough to indicate the meaning of rhythm in both English and Arabic. Now for actual examples firm the English lyrics.

4. Translating Metre:

A famous ditty by Robert Burns reads:

O my luve is like a red red rose

That's newly sprung in June

O my luve is like a melody

That's sweetly played in tune.

The initial 'o' in lines 1 and 3 is an extra syllable that does not count in the scansion, so that the line consists of four feet, each consisting of one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one (u –) thus

v — v — v — v —

my luvè is like a red red rose

v — v — v —

That's newly sprung in June

v — v — v — v —

my luvè is like a melody

v — v — v —

That's sweetly played in tune.

This means that the first line is tetrameter (four feet) followed by a line of three feet only (trimester). The remaining lines follow the same pattern. The rhythm is called iambic and is described as a rising beat (إيقاع صاعد). As modern stylisticians affirm, the meaning of the poem includes the rhythm as well as the imagery conveyed by the words. So, if you translate the words only, you will have conveyed only *part of* the meaning. According to Enani 2020, we will take this example:

حبيبي تشبه وردة حمراء قانية
تفتحت حديثاً في شهر يونيو
حبيبي تشبه لحناً
معزوقاً بحلاوة وفق النغمة

This prose version looks like a paraphrase but fails to give us the full meaning of the poem. If we, however, do it in verse, the meaning is more likely to be complete:

حبيبي شبيهة بوردة حمراء قد زهت بلونها
تفتحت في الصيف هذا اليوم فوق غصنها
حبيبي أنشودة جمالها في لحنها
توافقت أنغامها وذا رنين حسنها

The metre here will be different from the previous one (called *khabab*) but will be another Arabic metre called *Rajaz* (الرَّجَز). The *rajaz* foot could consist of two short syllables, followed by a long one, *or* two long syllables. The syllable in Arabic is necessarily different from an English one: it may be called a segment, as it consists of a single vowel, as in *min* (من) where the vowel is represented by the stop consonant, or an ordinary vowel, like *maa* (ما) each is referred to as "stop" (سكون), and the segment in this case is regarded as *short*. It is the kind of segment that is repeated 10 times in the line (أقبل) (شاركني عيشي يا حبي) given above. The long segment consists of a consonant followed by a short vowel (ma) (مَ) then by another followed by a "stop" – such as *takun* (تَكُنْ). Put together, the three segments would be something like *maa lam takun* (مالم تكن) the symbol of which is (from right to

left): [o// o/ o/]. The three segments are together called a foot of the *rajaz* metre. It is repeated in the hemistich (الشطر) three times, normally, thus

مَا لَمْ تَكُنْ عِنْدِي أَنَا لَا تَنْسِنِي
o// o/ o/
o// o/ o/ o// o/ o/

Now, there are acceptable modulations (زحافات) in both Arabic and English prosody (العروض). In English we may have a modulation of the iambic foot (v –) into the reverse beat (– o) called trochee, and the adjective is trochaic. In Arabic, we may have two long segments in a foot instead of two short ones followed by a long one, thus (حَبِيْبِي بَتِي) from right to left [o// o//]. So, the rhythm of the versified translation of Burns' ditty would be:

حَبِيْبِي / شَبِيْهَةٌ / بُوْرْدَةٍ / حَمْرَاءَ قَدْ / زَهَتْ بِلُوْنِهَا
o// o// o// o//o// o// o// o// o// o// o//
تَفَقَّحَتْ / فِي الصَّيْفِ هَذَا الْيَوْمَ فَوْقَ غُصْنِهَا
o// o// o//o// o// o//o// o//
حَبِيْبِي / أَنْشُوْدَةٌ / جَمَالُهَا / فِي لَحْنِهَا
o//o//o// o//o// o// o//o// o//o//
تَوَافَقَتْ / أَنْعَامُهَا / وَذَا رَنِيْدٍ / حُسْنِهَا
o// o// o//o// o// o//

An advocate of 'formalism' may demand that the four Arabic lines be of equal length as is the tradition normally observed in Arabic verse, but this rule is no longer applied in modern poetry. If applied, the first line should read:

حبيبتى شبيهة بوردة حمراء قانية
o// o//o/o/ o//o// o//o//
o//o//

Or even in less words:

حبيبتى / كالوردة / الحمراء زاهٍ / لوئها
o//o/o/ o//o/o/
o//o/o/ o//o//

But as the (n) (النون) is followed here by a short 'o', the whole rhyme scheme has to be changed. If not, it may be regarded as 'flawed', and the flaw is called (إقواء). If the first alternative is chosen, the second line should have a different rhyme:

تفتحت / لتوها / في شهر يونيـ/و زاهية
o//o/o/ o//o/o/
o//o// o//o//

The point is that rhyme and rhythm have come, according to modern stylistics, part of the meaning of the text. This is the prevalent view now, as discussed in detail by Stockwell (2009) and (2012-2014), confirmed by Sotirova (2016), and corroborated by Browse (2018). Rhyme and rhythm have to be changed as the phonology of the target language is necessarily different: So, while the metre changes from tetrameter to trimeter, from the odd-numbered lines to the even-numbered ones, the Arabic translated text consists of equal 4-foot lines, i.e. tetrameters. Sometimes the translator follows the source text if the alternation of meters appears significant to him or her. An example is the so-called "sublime epitaph" by Wordsworth:

A slumber did my spirit seal
I had no human fears
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years
No motion has she now no force
She neither hears nor sees
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees.

The alternation of tetrameters and trimeters, thus

v — v — v — v —

A slumber did my spirit seal

v — v — v —

I had no human fears

Is reflected in the Arabic version:

خَتَمَ النُّعَاسُ عَلَى رُوجِي وَعَيَّبَهَا
وَمَحَا مَخَافَ البِنْتِ
فَبَدَّتْ لِعَيْنِي فَتَاهَ لَيْسَ تَلْمَسُهَا
يَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْقَدَرِ

The odd-numbered lines belong to a complex metre called *al-Baseet* (البيسط) while the even-numbered belong to the *rajz*, but this only occasional, or even accidental, as the rest of the poem shows.

فَالآنَ قَدْ سَكَنْتُ وَالْقُوَّةُ اُنْدَنْتَتْ
وَمَضَى زَمَانُ السَّمْعِ وَالْبَصَرِ
وَعَدَتْ تَدُورُ بِبَطْنِ الْأَرْضِ دَوْرَتَهَا
كَالصَّخْرِ وَالْأَحْجَارِ وَالشَّجَرِ

Here we have variations of al-Baseet and the *rajaz* (or *al-kaamil*). The first line is a straightforward Baseet, the second a modulated *kaamil*, the third *Baseet* and the fourth the same as the second. Vital to this rendering is the unity of the main rhyme (البشر / القدر / البصر / الشجر) which establishes the sonic leitmotif, further bolstered by the (ha) (ها) rhyme in lines 1, 3 and 7. So, as the rhythm and rhyme help to bind the lines together in the English text, they do so in the Arabic text producing the textual cohesion, which is conducive to coherence, with variation in the metre and the rhyme scheme. Note that the caesura in line 5 (the internal rhyme dividing the line into two equal parts) supports the deictic change from the 'I' of the speaker to the dead girl. Part of the unity of the poem is therefore due to the behaviour of the language, both as rhyme and rhythm. Without these two factors, the meaning of the poem would be incomplete.

Sometimes the poet builds a poem in the form of a series of quasi-conditionals, followed by what looks like a conclusion. The main feature here is parallelism: each distich (بيت شعري من سطرين) consists of a premise (مقدمة) and a result (نتيجة). The structure *in toto* looks like a sustained figure of speech. An example is Shelley's famous poem "Music ..."

Music when soft voices die

Vibrates in the memory
Odours when sweet violets sicken
Live in the sense they quicken
Rose leaves when the rose is dead
Are heaped for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts when thou art gone
Love itself shall slumber on.

The rhythm of the lines sounds regular enough, though we have variation in the number of syllables used in the eight lines, 7,7, 8,8, 7,8 and 7,8. This is said by Stockwell to constitute "subtle variations" which serve to "prevent the repetitions becoming monotonous" (2012, p.71). Monotony (الرتابة) was once regarded as extreme regularity required in every Arabic poem of the classical type; it is today avoided in most modern Arabic poetry. Instead of prosodical regularity, Arabic poetry relies on internal regularity, as Shelley's poem clearly shows. Each distich consists of a noun phrase (NP), a conjunction (conj), another noun phrase consisting of a pre-modifier and a noun (pre-mod+N), a verb phrase (VP), plus another VP, a preposition (prep), then a noun phrase (NP). The following is Stockwell's analysis:

There is syntactic repetition here, in the form of a brief initial noun phrase > followed by a relative clause with a conjunction 'when', a pre-modified noun phrase and a verb phrase > followed by a main verb phrase > and ending with a prepositional

phrase consisting of a preposition and a noun phrase. There is also some parallelism across the semantic relationships of these lines. For example, the initial NP emerges from the NP in the relative clause (music comes from voices, odours come from violets, rose leaves come from the rose). There is, of course, some variation within these basic repetitions: the lexical realization of the initial NP ('music') is not repeated; though the conjunction 'when' is repeated, the later preposition is varied ('in, within, for'); though the final NP always begins with a determiner, the rest of the NP is variable. An intense reading can examine the significances of the variation. For example, the semantic progression across the initial NPs goes across the senses from sound ('music') to smell ('odours') to a combined sight and touch ('rose leaves'), and this progression scales from most intangible to most material. Furthermore, at an iconic level, the single senses are referenced with a single lexical item here while the doubled sense is referenced with two words. A particularly intensive reader might even notice that the synaesthetic blending of sight and touch is iconically matched by the potential multivalence of the nouns 'rose' and 'leaves' as active verbs, where there is no such potential in the single-item occurrences 'music' or 'odours'. (2012, p. 69)

The fact that there is variation in the linguistic structure of the poem is reflected in the prosodical pattern, phonologically approached. This means that the translator should aim at conveying the *regularity* of the metre and the *modulations* which account for the *variations*. A prose rendering of the lines cannot reproduce the variations because it cannot reproduce the regularity in the first place. A professional translator may render the lines in prose as follows:

عندما تموت الأصوات العذبة
تتردد ألحانها في الذاكرة
وعندما تمرض البنفسجيات الحلوة
يحيا شذاها في الحس الذي تحييه.
وعندما تموت الوردة
تجمع أوراقها فراشاً للمحبوب
وهكذا فعندما تغيبين
تغدو أفكارك فراشاً ينام فيه الحب

Grammatically and consequently structurally, the Arabic text is logical and idiomatic enough. We have parallel distichs, consisting of all the elements mentioned by Stockwell. No one may quarrel with the correspondence of the Arabic text with the source text *communicatively*, according to Newmark's distinction between communicative and *semantic* translation. A semantic translation, according to such a distinction, should reflect the internal pattern rhythmically and, therefore, phonologically. This may be achieved in a

verse translation in which the *foregrounding* of the initial noun phrases is maintained, and an adequate *interpretation* of the concluding distich is provided. Critics are not agreed on the meaning of the word 'gone' in the penultimate line: some claim that it means 'dead', but most commentators assume that the poem was addressed to his wife Mary, who gave it the title "To —", when it was published in 1822 (only after the poet's death, though it was written in 1821), and that 'gone' simply means "when you are away." The interpretation of "thy thoughts" in the verse rendering gives meaning to the whole poem. Here is the verse rendering by M. Enani:

المُوسِيقَى حِينَ تَمُوتُ الْأَصْوَاتُ الْعَذْبَةُ
تَغْدُو دَبْدَبَةً فِي الذَّاكِرَةِ الطَّرْبَةُ
وَأَرِيحُ زُهُورَ بِنَفْسَجٍ رَائِعَةٍ إِنْ يَعْتَلَّ بِهَاهَا
يَبْقَى حَيًّا فِي الْإِحْسَاسِ النَّابِضِ بِشَدَاهَا
أوراقُ الوُرْدَةِ حِينَ تَمُوتُ الوُرْدَةُ
تَجْتَمِعُ لِقَرَشٍ حَبِيبٍ أَخْلَصَ وَدَّةً
وَكَذَا إِنْ غَبَّتِ خَطَرَتْ بِبَالِي
كفَرَاشٍ يَرْقُدُ فِيهِ الحُبُّ جِبَالِي

In our analysis, it has been noted that prosodic features are crucial in determining meaning in languages, and when it comes to translation, rendering these features should be given precedence over other cultural and linguistic features. The analysis shows that rendering prosody seems to be difficult as it is language-specific, a point with which Perego (2003)

agrees. Since intercultural communication is said to be the ultimate goal of translation, it is true that some elements in a language may not be translated because meaning dwells more on what is implied rather than what is actually said — pragmatic import.

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ترجمة الأوزان الشعرية في اللغة الإنجليزية والعربية

آية عوض شحاته مبروك

مستخلص:

علم العروض هو العلم المعني ببحور و أوزان الشعر العربي، وأول من وضع علم العروض هو الخليل بن أحمد الفراهيدي . وأهم ما يميز علم العروض هو الاعتماد الكلي على كيفية نطق الكلمة و ليس على كتابتها . و تعتمد بحور الشعر العربي على الميزان الصرفي للكلمة العربية (تفعيلتها) مرتكزة على الأساس (فعل) . و تتشكل بحور الشعر العربي من كون الكلمات في اللغة العربية تتألف من قسمين : متحركات و ساكنات و تعتمد على نطقنا للكلمة بحيث أن كل حرف لا ينطق - رغم كتابته - لا يحسب ضمن الوزن الشعري . وبذلك أسس الفراهيدي بحورا للشعر وأوجد تفعيلات معينة ثابتة مثل: فاعلن، مفاعيلن، مفاعلتن، متفاعلن، مفعولات، فاعلاتن، مستفعلن، فاعلاتن، مستفعلن و بحور الشعر العربي المشهورة هي : بحر الطويل ، بحر البسيط ، بحر المديد ، بحر الوافر ، بحر الكامل ، بحر الرمل ، بحر الرجز ، بحر الهزج ، بحر السريع ، بحر الخفيف ، بحر المنسرح ، بحر المجتث ، بحر المقتضب ، بحر المضارع ، بحر المتقارب ، بحر المتدارك.

وكون الفرق شاسع بين تاريخ اللغة العربية و تاريخ اللغة الانجليزية اذ أن الأولى موعلة بالقدم قياسا بالثانية وبذلك فإن اللغة الانجليزية تفقد ذلك التدوين المقدس الذي حظيت به لغات معينة كالعربية و العبرية و اللاتينية. كما يقاس الوزن الشعري (rhythm / meter) في اللغة الإنجليزية و معظم اللغات

الغربية بمجاميع صغيرة من المقاطع تسمى الوحدات . (feet) و الكلمات تقاس وفقا للمقاطع المشددة (stressed syllables) و غير المشددة (unstressed syllables) بها و هو المعيار في الشعر الانجليزي تحديدا. وهذه الدراسة تلخص التالي:

- تعتمد التفعيلة في علم العروض العربي على الميزان الصرفي الأساس و هو (فعل) بالاعتماد على الحروف الساكنة و المتحركة تم احصاء تفعيلات أساسية لبحور الشعر العربي مثل (مستعلن) و غيرها . بينما ، التفعيلة في علم العروض الانجليزي تركز على المقاطع المشددة و غير المشددة و ليس على الحروف الساكنة و المتحركة .

- لكل بحر من بحور الشعر العربي تفعيلاته الثابتة ، و ثباتها هو ثبات لتركيبها و عددها أيضا . بينما لبحور الشعر الانجليزي تفعيلات ثابتة من حيث التركيب و لكنها ليست ثابتة من حيث العدد.

- عند ذكر البحر الشعري العربي فلا حاجة لذكر عدد تفعيلاته لكونها مشهورة و ثابتة بينما حرية عدد التفعيلات بالشعر الانجليزي تلزم ذكر عددها، و يذكر العدد باللغة اللاتينية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العروض - الإيقاع - الأصوات الساكنة - الأصوات المتحركة - المقاطع الصوتية المنبورة - المقاطع الصوتية غير المنبورة.