



Maintaining Coherence and Conveying Implicatures: A Comparative Analysis of Naguib Mahfouz's *Thartharah Fawq Al-Nil* with the English Translation

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ABSTRACT

Coherence and implicature are two very important notions in the field of pragmatics, especially with regard to cross-cultural translation. Despite this, only a few practical pieces of research have been done in exploring these areas in Arabic to English translation. This paper studies the translation of the novel *Thartharah Fawq Al-Nil* by Naguib Mahfouz examining whether and how the coherence and implicatures are being dealt with by the translator in rendering the English translation. As a framework for my analysis, I have used the guidelines provided by the translation theorist Mona Baker in her book *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. While expounding on the dynamics of translation, using the examples from the chosen text, I have looked at the strategies adopted by the translator in making the translation coherent and in conveying the intended implicatures. In cases of some miscalculations or clear errors from the translator, I have provided alternative translations for them. With this research, I aim to highlight some of the complexities involved in maintaining coherence and the relevance of conveying intended implicatures specifically in the translation from Arabic to English. Keywords: Coherence, Implicature, Pragmatics, Mona Baker, Arabic to English Translation

Introduction and Literature Review

Pragmatics is “the study of how both literal and nonliteral aspects of communicated linguistic meaning are determined by principles that refer to the physical or social context (broadly construed) in which language is used.”(Pragmatics)Mona Baker defines it as “the study of language in use” which explores the meaning “conveyed and manipulated by participants in a communicative situation.”(236) In the chapter on pragmatic equivalence, she has primarily focussed on the study of coherence and implicature and has mentioned several strategies regarding both in cross-cultural translations. (236) Linked to the topic of pragmatics especially coherence and implicature the following major studies have been done in the last decade.

Farghal and Manna in 2014, conducted a pragmatic analysis in which they have briefly included implicatures and coherence along with other aspects like speech acts, presuppositions etc. in the transfer from Arabic to English. In 2011, detailed research was performed by Maisaa Tanjour on understanding aspects of

cultural differences and problems related to coherence in the translation from English to Arabic. Also, linking coherence and cohesion, Mohammad Farghal in 2017, conducted a study exploring the textual aspects of Arabic/English translation. In the same year, the issue of implicature in English/Arabic translation was dealt with by Muna Ahmad, however, the study was undetailed and the researcher linked the topic to the skopos theory.

This research is specific and detailed as it works within two topics in pragmatics primarily linked to each other i.e., coherence and implicature within the framework provided by the translation theorist Mona Baker while also making a few associations to Grice's Co-operative Principle. With several examples and comparative analysis, the goal here is not just to show the translation problems but to also provide a detailed account of the translation process and elucidate the steps taken by the translator in maintaining coherence and transferring implicatures with necessary alternatives and corrections in Arabic/ English translation.

Coherence and Implicature

"Coherence of a text is a result of the interaction between knowledge presented in the text and the reader's own knowledge and experience of the world the latter being influenced by a variety of factors such as age, sex, race, nationality, education, occupation, and political and religious affiliations." (Baker 237) Thus the reader's "cultural and intellectual background" play a direct role in his/her finding the text coherent or not. (239) An emphasis on the context and the reader's background knowledge doesn't mean that linguistic information is of no use in the discussion rather it's the building block from which all further meanings and connotations originate. (222) Coherence is a very complex and problematic aspect and to maintain it in translations, the translator has to meticulously consider the background knowledge of the target readers, their expectations, and what they deem as appropriate or inappropriate at both "linguistic and non-linguistic" levels. (237, 267)

In her discussion on coherence, Baker talks about Charolle's categorization of two types of coherence namely supplemental and explanatory. (240) Supplemental coherence establishes a "continuity of senses" without justifying the underlying relation while the explanatory coherence along with establishing this continuity also provides a justification for it. (240) It is in the discussion of explanatory coherence that the concept of implicature emerges which deals with the question of how in a specific situation "we come to understand more than what is actually said." (240) A language has specific tools within it like idioms using which it can relate more than the literal meaning of the utterance but implicature is not related to non-literal meaning in this regard rather it deals with finding the hidden in a conversation from a contextual perspective. (240) The following conversation exchange between the imaginary participants A and B, provided by Baker will help to explicate the matter:

"A: Shall we go for a walk?

B: It's raining." (240)

Depending on the context, the statement of the participant B can be interpreted differently concerning what has been uttered previously by A. We can argue that B said the statement as a case for not going out for a walk or for taking an umbrella or for some other reason valid in the contextual sphere of both participants. (240, 241) The job of the translator here is to find the exact hidden reason and based on that, render the response which maintains the coherence of the discourse. (Al-Shawi and Tengku Mahadi 66)

However, this problem becomes more complex when an utterance can give rise to multiple implicatures. (Baker 244). In this case, an extra amount of caution is needed from the translator to filter "the" intended implicature out of the unintended ones.

Paul Grice's theory can be of help in determining the correct implicatures in a context, in which he argues that a speaker can suggest "an implied meaning conventionally or non-conventionally." (241) Conventionally it is done using cohesive devices and grammatical structure of the utterance and non-conventionally it can be done with the help of the Co-operative Principle. (241) This Co-operative Principle has certain maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner which the participants in a conversation generally observe as they try to be "informative, truthful, relevant and clear." (Nordquist) These maxims, however, were provided by Grice for

English conversations and may or may not be applied to Arabic conversations in certain cases. (Baker 250)
General guidelines and Translation Strategies

Apart from listing certain primary issues that the translator needs to pay attention to, in dealing with coherence and implicature in a cross-cultural translation, Baker has pointed out several strategies that can be used to resolve them. They are:

- 1) The translator needs to “identify references” which can be of anything like a name, type of food, product, or anything that is founded in the source text culture and language and translate it effectively with the limitations of the target culture and language. (247) To deal with culture-specific references the translator can find a word or expression of the target text language which can have a similar impact on target text readers or can paraphrase it or provide its explanation with a footnote. (30) The preference of one technique over the other is done keeping in mind the context and the stylistic aspect of the text. (40) If none of these techniques is valid for a context then the use of omission can be done for that reference if it deals with information that is not that relevant. (43)
- 2) The translator can use Grice’s Co-operative Principle for finding the intended implicatures and eliminating the unintended ones in a conversation. (242)
- 3) Keeping in mind the context and the “linguistic conventions” of the target text “community in general” can help the translator to deal with the issue of the reader’s expectations. (254) However, this adherence to the reader’s expectations is not something absolute and can be compromised especially if the context motivates the translator to transfer “a feature of the source text itself.” (265)
The Analysis

(1) ورق أمير المؤمنين حتي صار أصفي من الهواء (محفوظ 33)

Translation: The Caliph, the Commander of the Faithful, became finer and finer until he was more transparent than the wind. (Mahfouz 33)

The title “Caliph” doesn’t appear along with the phrase “the Commander of the Faithful” in the literal translation of the Arabic text which wouldn’t create a problem of recognition or association for the average Arab readers as they have been associating the two terms almost since the beginning of Islam. The second Caliph named Umar was the first one to be given this title in this context. (Sallabi 228) However, an average English reader wouldn’t be aware of this usage and connection which are deeply rooted in the Islamic faith and culture. The translator comprehending this gap has added the word “Caliph” in association with the phrase in the translation. Even though this addition reduces some ambiguity from the translation, the translation still keeps the phrase “the Commander of the Faithful” which is not relevant here and can create a few ambiguities by triggering certain unintended implicatures. While adhering to Grice’s maxim of relevance and quantity a more effective translation here could be produced by omitting the whole phrase from the sentence.

(2) قال أنيس لنفسه كل شيء يستقر في جوف الجوزة ثم يتبخردخانا كالملوخية التي طبخها عم عبده. (محموظ 55)

Translation: And Anis said to himself: All these things lie in the bowl of the pipe, to go up in smoke, like the **vegetable dish, mulukhiya**, which Amm Abduh cooked for lunch that day. (Mahfouz 59)

The literal translation, in this case, would only contain the name ‘mulukhiya’ without further specifications and descriptions of any kind. Thus, a lot of obscurity in the example can exist primarily because of the unknown reference mulukhiya and secondarily because of its relevance with what is said before it in the sentence. With regards to references, Baker tells us that identifying them is merely one aspect of it and for a coherent text, after the success in identification the translator needs to produce equivalent implicatures emerging from them. (232) The dish mulukhiya is “the national dish of Egypt, a soup made by cooking a large amount of finely chopped jute, which is a green leaf vegetable with a distinctively bitter flavor.” (Mulukhiyah) The ambiguity regarding the identity of the reference has been removed by the translator with the addition of “vegetable dish” before the term mulukhiya. A more specific way of doing this could be by the usage of “vegetable soup” before the noun “mulukhiya” which would also limit the nature of the dish.

However, the question that remains unanswered in the translation is: Why did the author mention *mulukhiya* in this context? If this issue is not resolved, the right intended implicatures can't be triggered in the mind of the reader and the coherence can't be maintained. The answer to the question is drawn from the way this famous dish is cooked wherein the dried and chopped *mulukhiya* leaves are boiled in broth with large chunks of some kind of meat and the cooking process releases smoke from the mixed ingredients of the bowl, the same way as it rises from the substances put in a smoking pipe. (*Mulukhiyah*). An alternative translation that can convey this intended implicature while also adhering to the maxim of the relevance of Grice is: "And Anis said to himself, all these things lie in the bowl of the pipe, and they rise like smoke just as it rises in cooking the vegetable soup, *mulukhiya*, that Amm Abduh made for lunch."

(3) سكت كل شيء إلا القرفة. (محفوظ 55)

Translation: Everything was silent, save **the bubbling of the pipe**. (Mahfouz 58)

This example deals with how the background information presented in the text before can be useful in providing the intended implicatures and maintaining the coherence. A reader finds coherence in a text "by relating it to what s/he already know or to a familiar world whether this world is real or fictional." (Baker 238) The Arabic word *قرفة* with the article *ال* can be literally translated to "the bubbling." The noun *قرفة* in the novel has already been collocated with the noun *الجوزة* before its usage here and thus the ambiguity is less when only *قرفة* is mentioned in the Arabic version. In the translation, however, the word "bubbling" has not been collocated with "a pipe" before this usage, thus the literal translation if maintained can give rise to other unintended implicatures. One of the unintended implicatures that can emerge, is from the setting of the conversation, which is a houseboat on the river Nile, the water of which can also "bubble" in the English language. Thus, the addition of the prepositional phrase "of the pipe" in the end by the translator removes the scope of this implicature making the text clearer and coherent.

(4) فأجاب عنه مستفي راشد: لقد طعن في السن لدرجة تجعله فوق القانون ! (محفوظ 116)

Translation: Mustafa replied for him. "He's so **long in the tooth**," he said, "that he is above the law." (Mahfouz 126)

A decontextualized translation of the Arabic expression *طعن في السن* is 'very old' which, if used here, would capture the meaning of the utterance but would fail to acknowledge the emotions and tone behind the usage in the specific context. (Wehr 560) The tone used in the source text is humorous which arises from the context, where a newly added girl in the group of friends asks surprisingly about the old manservant of theirs who works as a pimp and a drug supplier for them and is fearless and indifferent to being caught by the police while engaging in these illegal activities. (Mahfouz 126) The literal usage misses the humour and the unkindness in the tone of the reply along with marking it with some degree of formalness. Avoiding it, the translator has used the idiom "long in the tooth" to translate it which conveys the intended implicatures associated with the tone and mood in the context along with providing the meaning of "very old" in it. (Long)

(5) فقال مصطفى راشد محركا تفاحة آدم : (محفوظ 19)

Translation: Mustafa Rashid **cleared his throat**. And what's more," he said, ... all." (Mahfouz 18)

The Arabic phrase *محركا تفاحة آدم* would literally be translated as "moving Adam's apple" which is against the target reader's language expectations and if used can obscure the meaning giving rise to multiple unintended implicatures. The translator has accordingly used the intended meaning of "clearing the throat" and has maintained the coherence of the text by swaying away from the literal usage.

(6) لنحمد الله علي أنه في أزدل العمر (محفوظ 20)

Translation: "We should thank God that he's **past his prime**," added Mustafa Rashid. (Mahfouz 19)

The context behind the Arabic text here is that a group of drugged young people are having a friendly banter in which they are talking about their servant who is extremely old but has a huge built and a muscular form to him. (19) They are aiming to convey that if this mighty muscular man would have been younger, the girls would have preferred him instead of them because of his impressive build. The literal translation of the phrase

أرذل العمر in the English language can be “most decrepit old age” which, if used, would provide the meaning in a restricted sense and would leave some space of ambiguity regarding the intended implicature which is linked to the tone and context of the communication affecting the overall coherence of the text. (Al-Mehri 221) The translator has appropriately understood the context and tone of the discourse and has used “past his prime” instead of the literal usage which transfers the tone with the due consideration of the overall message, with the language fitting into the register of friendly banter between the participants.

(7 فتأوه أنيس: الله! (محفوظ 28)

Translation: **Marvelous**, cried Anis. (Mahfouz 28)

Both English and Arabic have unique ways of expressing different speech acts in a discourse. (Farghal 94) The usage of the word الله in the source text is done to depict the amazement and adoration that the speaker feels towards the reply of the addressed individual, as in the Arabic language and culture this word can, in several contexts be used to depict just that. The literal translation of the word الله is “God” and its usage here could have created a lot of vagueness in the meaning by producing multiple unintended implicatures in the minds of target readers. In the English language also, the usages like “my God” and “oh my God” exist which can be used for expressing emotions of amazement and surprise. (Oh My God)

However, these usages can be used for expressing other emotions too, like anger and disbelief where the tone of the speaker helps to convey the exact meaning. In rendering the translation, the translator has, for this reason, avoided this equivalent and has used the word “marvelous” which maintains the coherence in the message by conveying the appropriate intended implicature for the context.

(8 أتسخر مني يا أستاذ رجب؟! معاذ الله... (محفوظ 49)

Translation: Are you making fun of me, Ragab? “**Oh, I wouldn't dream of it!**...” (Mahfouz 51)

The context here presents some friends having a light conversation while smoking a pipe. (51) The Arabic expression معاذ الله can be literally translated as “God forbid” and is used in the text to demonstrate an emphatic reaction against the utterance spoken by the first speaker. (Wehr 656) However, the literal translation would contradict the reader's expectations at multiple levels as they would find the religious language in this case as something strange when they relate it to the context, setting and the participants of the discourse. The translator has accordingly conveyed the intended implicature with the sentence “I wouldn't dream of it” which conveys the intended implicature and makes the text coherent. This translation agreeing with Grice's maxim of manner fulfils the target reader's expectations by considering the setting and tone used in the discourse.

(9 بالله ردها إلي فلا وقت للكلام. (محفوظ 100)

Translation: “**I beg you**, give it back to me-this is no time for talking!”(Mahfouz 110)

The conversation in the novel is between two young people in which a young girl is imploring the man Anis to return back her personal diary while he is refusing to do the same. (110) The Arabic phrase بالله is an oath that is literally translated as “by God” while in this context, it adds to the utterance a tone of pleading with urgency. The usage “by God” coming in the literal translation would somewhat contradict the target reader's expectations with regards to the context, the participants involved in it and also regarding the language as the term has become old-fashioned in English. (By God)

Taking all of this into account the translator has transferred the intended implicature with the sentence “I beg you” which along with being contextually right, has in it the tone of pleading with urgency. An alternative translation that conveys the intended implicature along with transferring the religious tone of the Arabic can be done by using the English expression “for God's sake” instead. (Farghal and Almann 98)

(10 ويوما قال لي شيخ: "إنك تحب الإعتداء والله لا يحب المعتدين" (محفوظ 72)

Translation: One day the Sheikh said to me: “You love aggression, and God does not love the transgressors.”(76) The Arabic sentence here contains an allusion to a verse of the Quran which is:

"وقاتلوا في سبيل الله الذين يقاتلونكم ولا تعتدوا إن الله لا يحب المعتدين." (2:190)

Translation: "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors." (The Holy Quran 133)

The general Arab reader can be safely assumed to be aware of this verse and this allusion. This background knowledge adds to the implied meaning in the context as with it, the message represents not just Sheikh's personal advice instead it shows, him reminding the man of what "God" had said. The translation provided didn't regard this allusion and transfers the sentence without relating it to the Qur'an thereby affecting the coherence of the text. An appropriate translation that would transfer this intended implicature can be: "One day the sheikh said to me: You love aggression and God says in the Quran that He doesn't love the transgressors."

(11) وتذكر كيف أغرتهم بمغازلتها وكيف أبي كيوسف! (محفوظ 75)

Translation: And he told them how she had tempted him with her wiles and how he refused "like **Joseph with Potiphar's wife!**" (Mahfouz 80)

In the literal translation of this sentence, the Arabic name يوسف would be rendered as "Yusuf" and there would be no mention of "Potiphar's wife" along with it.

However, this can obscure the contextual meaning at multiple levels. The first point of obscurity that can arise is with the identity of the name "Yusuf" and the second comes with the relevance of its usage in this context. The Arabic sentence contains an allusion to the story of prophet Yusuf as mentioned in the Quran wherein he rejected the temptations of the wife of al-'Azeez. (Al-Mehri 193) A similar story with the prophet named Joseph is found in Bible where he was tempted by Potiphar's wife and he stood his ground against her. (Chaignot) The translator has properly understood the religious connotations and has used an equivalent cultural reference by changing the Arabic name Yusuf to Joseph and also by the addition of Potiphar's wife. The addition of the phrase "Potiphar's wife" further removes ambiguity by eliminating the scope of other unintended implicatures from the sentence and telling the readers exactly which instance of Joseph's life is being talked about in this usage.

(12) صعد الحاكم بأمر الله إلى قمة الجبل ليمارس أسرار العلوية ولم يعد حتى اليوم لم يعد ... و غير بعيد أن يتجلي للمساطي في ليلة القدر . (محفوظ 129)

Translation: The Caliph al-Hakim went up on the mountain to practice his sublime secrets, and did not return.... He might yet appear to those who smoke the pipe on the **night that marks the Quran's revelation.** (Mahfouz 139)

The literal translation of the phrase ليلة القدر is "the Night of Decree." (Wehr 745)

This night has its origins rooted in the Islamic faith and is mentioned in the following verse of the Quran: "Indeed WE sent it [i.e. the Quran] down during the Night of Decree." (Al-Mehri 631) The target translation here needs to provide the readers with some background knowledge about this night and also the reason behind its usage specifically in the context, for the intended implicatures to be conveyed and the coherence to be maintained.

The translator has swayed from the literal translation and has provided a description of the night of decree by adding the description "that marks the Quran's revelation" after the noun "night" which gives target readers some background information about the night. But what is still missing from the translation is the reason behind the mention of this night in the context. The intended implicature with mentioning the night of decree in the source text is related to the "holiness" of the night as it is commonly acknowledged in the Islamic faith that this night is the holiest and most virtuous night in the whole year for Muslims. (Answer) This implicature can in this case be conveyed to some extent by the usage of the adjective "holy" before the noun "night." Even this addition wouldn't make it completely coherent because this night has wide connotations in Islamic culture but it can steer the target readers away from assuming some unintended implicatures.

(13) و ظهر أم عبده مرة أخرى و هو يقول: و خدوا الله! (محفوظ 149)

Translation: Amm Abduh appeared again. "Well **praise the Lord!**" he said. (Mahfouz 160)

The expression! وخذوا الله is literally translated as: "Believe in One God.!" However, it can be employed differently based on the context, for example, if a preacher is preaching Islam to the masses he can use it with the literal meaning while in case of crises, fights and chaos it is used to calm down the addressees. (Farghal and Almanna 98) The context here is that the servant Amm Abduh enters the room while the addressed people are involved in a bloody fight and he urges them to calm down using this expression. (Mahfouz 160) The translator has misunderstood it completely and has not even translated it with the literal meaning. This translation creates various unintended implicatures for the target reader and makes the text incoherent. An appropriate translation, in this case, could have been: "calm down for God's sake" or "for the love of God, please calm down," which would deliver the intended implicature along with the religious tone contained in the Arabic expression. (Farghal and Almanna 97)

Conclusion

"Coherence is a problematic and elusive notion because of the diversity of factors" involved in maintaining it "and the varying degree of importance which a particular factor can assume in a given context." (Baker 267) It along with implicature serve as foundations to an effective, functional translation from Arabic to English. In the introduction to this paper, I have mentioned the importance of the area of pragmatics in the field of cross-cultural translation specifically considering the aspects of coherence and implicature. When talking about coherence I have mentioned its connection with the notion of implicature. After that, I have presented a summarized account of the main translation guidelines and strategies mentioned by Baker to deal with coherence and implicature problems. With several detailed examples, I have illustrated various issues that can arise because of the difference in background knowledge (textual or outside the text), target reader's expectations, emotions and tones used in a conversation and have shown how the translator had weighed these aspects before coming to a translation we have before us. By presenting a stepwise analysis in several examples, I have also shed light on the choices available for the translators with regards to the two notions and how and why they should prefer one over the other.

This research would present to the reader the internal dynamics of the process of translation. By making the connection of Grice's maxims with the conveying of implicatures in several examples I intend to promote further research for finding a unique list of Co-operative Principle maxims for Arabic discourse, an area of studies already hinted at, by Baker. (251) In connection to this, I also hope that in the future, comparative research is done in dealing with coherence and implicature problems for different genres of Arabic literature simultaneously, which would highlight the differences in priorities, choices and procedures involved.

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