

Pursuit of naturalness in translation: The case of the English translations of two francophone Maghrebian novels

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Abstract

The fact that certain systemic differences exist between languages means that each language possesses a set of natural ways of expression specific to it, and ones that may sound odd in other languages. In other words, what is called ‘the genius’ of a language implies the existence of different ways of seeing and describing the world. Findings from comparative linguistics assert that languages ‘behave’ differently in manners revealing distinct mental pictures of the world events they describe. Naturalness is a central principle relating to proper language use and currency of usage from the perspectives of native users. This paper reviews the systemic differences between French and English and looks into the ways translators ensure naturalness by means of a strategy of equivalence in difference. A sign of success is the degree to which the translator manages to ‘free himself from the interference of the foreign language’. The corpus investigated consists of random samples of parallel excerpts from two francophone Maghrebian novels and their translations into English.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fact that certain systemic differences exist between languages means that each language possesses a set of natural ways of expression specific to it and ones that may sound odd in other languages. In other words, what is called ‘the genius’ of a language implies the existence of different ways of seeing and describing the world. Findings from comparative linguistics assert that languages ‘behave’ differently in manners revealing distinct mental pictures of the world events they describe. Translation therefore presupposes the possibility of fulfilling a sort of ‘equivalence through difference’. This notion which will be frequently invoked in this paper implies that what can be said in one language can be said in any other, though, as part of their genius, languages actually differ in terms of the kind of rhetorical devices they customarily deploy (Di, 2003).

Due to the inherent systemic differences between world languages, naturalness is a relative matter with roots in the processes of acculturation and psychological formation of different peoples, hence the need for many more comparative studies such as the one presented here. The early prominent names associated with linguistic approaches defining

translation in terms of equivalence relationships are Catford (1965) and Vinay and Darbelnet (1950). Their theories fall within the realm of comparative linguistics. Based on their repeated observations, Darbelnet & Vinay ended up with a list of seven *procedures*, or transformative strategies, claimed to occur rather spontaneously as one switches between English and French. The two-section literature review below elaborates on the concept of naturalness in language use across languages and illustrates a set of differences between French at English at 'Langue' level. On the basis of a qualitative analysis of random samples of parallel passages from the original French and target English versions of two Maghrebian novels, this paper focuses on the ways the translators have managed to ensure naturalness and thus overcome systemic differences between French and English. Predominant translation transformative strategies among those described by Vinay and Drbelnet will be elaborated in terms of their illustrative examples.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Naturalness and the systemic differences between languages:

Naturalness is a central principle relating to proper language use and currency of usage from the perspective of native users. It is a quality that is supposed to characterize all the different levels of language in use. In terms of lexis, for example, authors and translators alike are responsible for the careful choice of denotatively and connotatively appropriate diction, including the correct use of collocations and neologisms. As for syntax, care is given to the grammaticality and 'natural flow of the content' of sentences as well as their coherence and cohesiveness (Ash-Sharifi & As-Safi, 1997). The primary features of naturalness include: Well-formedness (grammaticality), acceptability, idiomacticity, authenticity and contemporaneity. Ash-Sharifi & As-Safi (1997) explain these components as follows:

- a- *Well-Formedness (grammaticality)*: It is 'a property of syntax which requires that the target language be consistent with the TL grammar rules and be free from SL syntactic interference' (p. 61).
- b- *Acceptability*: This simply denotes 'compliance with the target linguistic and cultural norms (p. 61)
- c- *Idiomacticity*: It is the tendency to use certain established formulas in the TL culture, namely collocations, idioms and proverbs. Such formulas are part of the literary heritage of a language' (p. 61).
- d- *Authenticity*: Authentic language is characterized by *both* well-formedness and acceptability. [...] Authentic language tends to *effectively* utilize the local rhetoric and aesthetic canons. It therefore should not 'exhibit in its grammatical and stylistic forms any trace of awkwardness or strangeness' (p. 62).
- e- *Contemporaneity*: Since 'literary norms can change across cultures and periods, contemporaneity entails addressing the targeted readership at any given time in intelligible codes' (p. 63).

As far as translation is concerned, the early prominent names associated with linguistic approaches defining translation in terms of equivalence relationships are Catford (1965) and Vinay and Darbelnet (1950). Their oft-cited contribution consisted in the establishment of 'taxonomies' of translation strategies for resolving systemic differences among languages. Though the authors were quite far apart in time and deploying distinct terminology, Munday (2008) analyses the similarities of their ideas about the occurrence of 'shifts' in the translation process. The Saussurian distinction between 'langue' and 'parole' was the basis for their contrastive investigation with regard to the occurrence of interlingual shifts. For a definition,

‘langue’ is a notion denoting ‘the code or system of rules common to all speakers of a language (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 26), as opposed to ‘parole’ which is every particular way of expression chosen from among the varied possibilities offered by the linguistic repertoire of a given language ‘when conveying a certain specific meaning’ (Herrmann, Dalen-Oskam, & Schöch, 2015).

Vinay and Darbelnet worked on French-English pairs of texts and remarked the use of what they called ‘direct translation’ and ‘oblique translation’ strategies. The first is tantamount to literal translation and it is most convenient when the languages involved belong to ‘the same family and culture’. Their best example is these two sentences: ‘I left my spectacles on the table downstairs’ which becomes ‘J’ai laissé mes lunettes sur la table en bas’ (cited in Munday, 2008, p. 57). Vinay and Darbelnet reported that this direct method is abandoned in certain cases where ‘literalness’ (a) gives a different meaning; (b) has no meaning; (c) is impossible for structural reasons; (d) ‘does not have a corresponding expression within the metalinguistic experience of the TL’; or (e) corresponds to something at a different level of language. The alternative is ‘the oblique method’ which consists of a range of procedures (i.e. transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation) which come into play when the *genius* of the target language may be compromised in a literal rendering. In other words, translating literally may result in a ‘grammatically correct’ stretch of text but one that ‘is considered unsuitable, unidiomatic or awkward in the TL’ (p. 57), hence the resort to oblique procedures (*See next section for more details*).

Further major linguistics-based insights on translation come from the landmark work of John Catford (1965). He not only drew attention to observed issues to do with systemic differences between languages, which result in the occurrence of shifts, but also opened an early discussion of ‘the dependence of translation equivalence on communicative features such as function, relevance, situation and culture’ (Munday, 2008, p. 61). These elements are at the heart of his distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence. In the case of formal correspondence, source and target language ‘categories’ or ‘pieces’ (i.e. unit, class, structure, element of structure, etc.) are said to ‘occupy as nearly as possible the same place in the economy of the respective languages’ (Catford, 1965, p. 27). For instance, the French noun *fenêtre* generally occupies a similar place in the French language system as the noun *window* does in English’ (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p.27). A textual equivalent, on the other hand, is defined as ‘any TL text or portion of text which is observed [in a specific pair of texts] to be the equivalent of a given SL text or portion of text’ (Catford, 1965, p. 27). Hatim & Munday (2004) relate this distinction to that of Saussure’s between *langue* and *parole* (p.27). They explain that whereas formal correspondence has to do with the general, non-specific, relationship between elements in two languages, textual equivalence focuses on the relations that exist between elements in a specific ST-TT pair (Saussure’s *parole*)’ (p.28). Departure from a formal correspondence in favour of a textual equivalent is technically referred to as ‘shift’. Again, a distinction is made between obligatory and optional shifts. Obligatory shifts are dictated by differences between linguistic systems. For example, due to a lack of formal correspondence between related lexical items in the source and target languages, a one-word form (e.g. the dual form in Arabic) may be rendered as a multiple-word form in English, a language which does not possess an equivalent category. Optional shifts, on the other hand, are those opted for by the translator for stylistic, ideological or cultural reasons.

2.2 Systemic differences between French and English at ‘Langue’ level

This section illustrates a set of differences between French at English at Langue level. Problems of translation and language learning arise as we start to move beyond the kind of

straightforward equivalent sentences that can be translated literally between the two languages:

- Le livre est sur la table, *The book is on the table*
- J'ai laissé mes lunettes sur la table en bas. *I left my spectacles on the table downstairs.*
- Où êtes-vous? *Where are you?*
- Ce train arrive à la gare à 10 heures. *This train arrives at the station at ten.*

The passage from SL to TL is not always so smooth, as these examples constitute 'l'exception plutôt que la règle; dans la plupart des cas, un minimum de reformulation s'impose' [these are simply exceptions as in most cases reformulations are needed] (Bottineau, 2004, p.110). In most other cases of actual use, the two languages seem to show 'un décalage perceptuel et conceptuel' [different perceptual and conceptual representations of the world] (p.112), represented by certain idiosyncratic propensities such as the preference of English for explicitness and that of French for implicitness. Bottineau (2004) provides the example:

- She stood waiting in the queue.
(*Debout dans la queue, elle attendait)
- Elle faisait la queue.

He concludes that in the English sentence the words 'Stood, waiting and queue' provides an explicit and detailed depiction of what is exactly taking place in the scene, while the French sentence leaves implicit all the details described by the English sentence, so it is up to the recipient to visualize them as underlying components of the act of queuing (p.112).

The corresponding literal translation (*Debout dans la queue, elle attendait), though perfectly correct morphologically, lexically and syntactically, sounds unnatural for its violation of the unannounced laws of the two language systems. Advanced learners and translators should therefore recognize the principle that 'l'énoncé anglais tend à faire explicite par des mots une quantité de données sensorielles percevables que l'énoncé en français tendra à passer sous silence' [The English sentence tends to maximize descriptive explicitness by stating a larger number of perceivable sensory acts which the French sentence lets go unnoticed] (p.111).

Another related issue concerns the 'canonical' syntactic order in sentences describing movements. Comparing the two sentences below, we note that English sentence tends to describe the acts and movements in the exact order in which they happen or as perceived by the observer whereas French puts the resultant act first (p.115).

The common name for this sort of syntactic transformation is the 'chassé-croisé'.

- He swam across the river.
- Il a traversé la rivière à la nage

Again, Bottineau (2004) ascertains that when the canonical order of the verbs of movement is not respected in the ST, a marked and non-canonical structure will obtain in the TT as well (p.115).

Darbelnet & Vinay (1958) is a classic reference offering a most detailed comparative study of the typical 'internal stylistics' of the two languages. The authors are two Canadians in a daily simultaneous contact with the two languages. They were once struck by the nuanced ways street bilingual notices tend to talk about similar situations: Why, for example, the sign 'private' is translated as 'Défence d'entrée', instead of the readily available word 'privé'. The same is true of 'Staff only' (Réservé au personnel), 'we deliver' (Livraison à domicile), 'No parking' (Stationnement interdit), etc. (p.121).

What these simple and commonplace examples show is that everyday usage of a language could only be seen as being more a matter of habit than conformity to recorded rules. Among the language-specific preferences, the two researchers list the following:

- Predominance of the French noun
- As exemplified above, in the description of reality English normally follows a natural order, like the temporal sequence of an action film. French does not necessarily follow the order of our sensations. It goes directly to the goal, i.e. the objective of looking.
 - Il a regardé dans le jardin par la porte ouverte:
 - He gazed out of the open door into the garden. (p. 123).
- Syntactic economy in English, as in the examples:
 - We'll price ourselves out of the market: *Nous ne pourrons plus vendre si nous sommes trop exigeants.*
 - He started out to walk off his emotions: *Il sortit pour calmer son émotion en marchant.*
- English seems to possess a huge set of prepositions and particles that largely contribute to economy of expression. Equally, the frequent use of ellipsis in English sentences contributes as well to their economy. (p. 218).
 - I did it: *C'est moi qui l'ai fait.*

English prepositions, particles, numerals, adjectives, definite and demonstrative pronouns are stronger than their French equivalents and do not require supplementation. In addition, French supplements out of a desire for clarity.

- Easily rubbed off... : ...qu'un léger frottement suffit à enlever.
- Supplementation is the process of strengthening a word which is inadequate on its own and therefore needs to be supported by others. In French there is usually a need to reinforce by means of a noun certain function words which in English can stand on their own (e.g. **To** the station: Entrée de la gare : Direction de la gare (p. 130). Here *To* is supplemented by a noun *Entrée*.
In this example, there are two types of causes of supplementation: (a) structural causes, in the case of prepositions and conjunctions. Because 'à' indicates both position and direction, French signs would be ambiguous if they read 'À la gare', instead of: 'Direction de la gare'. For similar reasons French prepositions cannot be followed by conjunctions. (b) Psychological causes, motivated by the French concern for precision and the need to judge.
- Characterization: A comparison of the two languages shows immediately that English has a greater stock of adjectives and adverbs than French. On the one hand, for structural reasons, English forms derivatives more easily than French and can use nouns as adjectives; on the other hand, working within concrete expression, where concrete detail is important, English makes good use of its resources. It also uses qualifiers in a more flexible way. For example, it uses qualifying nouns as relational adjectives with an ease that French has not yet equalled, even though it seems to want to follow this path. (p. 136).
 - *Une entreprise sans espoir* : *A hopeless undertaking*
 - *Sans condition* : *unconditionally*
 - *D'un air de reproche* : *reproachfully*
 - *D'un œil (air) critique* : *critically*
 - *à plusieurs (maintes) reprises* : *repeatedly*
- Conjugation systems: Seven English forms for the PrésentGrammars, especially that of Veslot&Banchet (1922), have shown that the English

conjugation system is more logical than the French one. The seven English forms which correspond to the French présent are separated by fine nuances which have nothing to do with the forms provided by grammar, [but rather with conception] (p. 155).

1. J'écris. : *I write.*
2. J'écris. : *I am writing.*
3. J'écris. : *I do write.*
4. J'écris depuis: *I have been writing....*
5. Rien ne dure. : *Nothing will last forever.*
6. Je viens vous dire: *I have come to tell you that...*
7. Je viens. : *I am coming.*

- The objective character of the English passive: The frequency of the English passive is part of the nature of the language. English verbs do not have to be transitive to have passive forms; they simply keep their preposition regardless of voice, e.g. *The doctor was sent for.* : *On envoya chercher le docteur.*

Based on their repeated observations, Darbelnet & Vinay ended up with a list of seven *procedures* claimed to occur rather spontaneously as one switches between English and French. Three of these are 'direct' and four 'oblique'. Thanks to 'structural and metalinguistic parallelisms' between these two historically related languages, it is often possible to achieve full 'straightforward correspondence' and overcome potential metalinguistic gaps ('e.g. a new technical process, an unknown concept') simply by means of such direct methods as:

- **Borrowing:** this involves using foreign phrasing in the target language (Waliński, 2015, p. 58) as a better option instead of trying to coin a possibly less satisfactory or awkward equivalent (e.g. 'menu', *chic*, *déjà vu*).

Sometimes the use of borrowed words could be meant to create a certain stylistic effect.

- **Calque:** this is 'a special kind of borrowing whereby a language borrows an expression *form* of another, but then translates literally each of its elements' (Darbelnet & Vinay, 1958, p. 32).

- English Source: Matrimony is *a fifty-fifty* association.
- French calque : *Le mariage est une association à cinquante-cinquante* (instead of the typical French *moitié-moitié*).

- **Literal translation:** as its name suggests, this refers to the word for word translation of a ST segment into 'a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate TL one' (Ibid, p. 34), as in:

- J'ai laissé mes lunettes sur la table en bas.
- I left my spectacles on the table downstairs.

Convenient literal transfer of this kind is said to be most common 'between two languages of the same family', and ones that share the same culture and metalinguistic concepts, in addition to their physical coexistence ('i.e. long periods of bilingualism as is the case of Canada for example) (Ibid, p.34).

Methods of direct transfer are not always desirable as they often tend to undermine the naturalness and idiomacity of the target language, therefore compromising the *genius* of the target language. They are thus abandoned in cases where 'literalness' potentially:

- (a) gives a different meaning;
- (b) has no meaning;
- (c) is impossible for structural reasons;

- (d) ‘does not have a corresponding expression within the metalinguistic experience of the TL’;
- (e) corresponds to something at a different level of language.

A textual restructuring therefore becomes necessary and proficient language users and translators resort to more ‘complex’ and oblique methods to ensure adequate conveyance of meaning in natural manners. These methods are:

- **Transposition:** This is said to occur when a part of speech is substituted for another in the target language without change in meaning:
 - Replacing the adverb “almost” by the verb “failli”: “He almost fell”, → as “Il a failli tomber” (p. 117)
 - Replacing a verb by a noun: as soon as she got up’ → ‘dès son lever’).
- **Modulation**, on the other hand, maximizes the naturalness of expression by changing ‘the semantics and point of view of the SL’ as shown in the example ‘the time *when*’ becoming ‘le moment *où*’ (p. 58).
- The third procedure is termed ‘*equivalence*’. Vinay and Darbelnet use this term in a specific sense to describe a case where a target text leads the target reader to derive the same source text sense but from a different image. This procedure is said to work best for idioms. For example, the closer and more natural English equivalent of ‘comme un chien dans un jeu de quilles’ would rather be (like a bull in a China shop) instead of (like a dog in a game of skittles) (p. 58).
- *Adaptation* is the fourth procedure that compensates for semantic losses due to the non-existence of certain source ‘cultural references’ in the target culture, in which case the translator replaces that reference with an approximant that has a similar ‘cultural connotation’. Munday (2008) cites Vinay and Darbelnet’s example of how a ‘reference to the game of cricket in an English text might be best translated into French by a reference to the Tour de France’ (p. 59).

As a conclusion to this section, a special note should be made about the significance of Vinay et Darbelnet’s work as one usefully produced by bilingual researchers living simultaneously in both linguistic spheres. Their observations as well as their list of procedures are as relevant today as ever before for both language learners and students of translation who, in dealing with the different sorts of systemic differences, find a complete guide in which the two researchers ‘ont énuméré une série de procédés de traduction essentiellement linguistiques, tantôt strictement formels (transposition, chassé-croisé), tantôt sémantiques (modulation), tantôt culturels / pragmatiques (équivalence, adaptation) pour en rendre compte’ [have listed a series of, essentially linguistic, translation procedures to account for these systemic difference; some of the procedures are strictly formal, i.e. transposition and chassé-croisé, others are largely semantic in nature (modulation), while the two others, equivalence and adaptation, are pragmatic:] (Bottineau , p.110).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Investigating naturalness in a translation means measuring the degree to which the translator manages to ‘free himself from the interference of the foreign language’. This paper examines the uses of the seven transformative strategies described by Vinay and Darbelnet to

ensure target language naturalness in the translations of the two novels studied here. The corpus to be analyzed consists of random samples of parallel passages from *Qui se souvient de la mer* by Algerian Mohammed Dib and *La nuit sacrée* by Moroccan Tahar Ben Jelloun. Predominant shifts and transformations will be qualitatively elaborated in terms of their illustrative examples and analyzed in relation to their contribution to fulfilling overall equivalence through the deployment of equivalent forms and rhetorical devices target language users naturally use as part of their genius. Following every example a commentary is provided on the ways the translators have fully or partially managed or failed to overcome the systemic differences between French and English. Since literary writing is by its nature 'appeal-focused', the analysis will focus also on the ways the combination of those sub-strategies not only endows the target text with an equivalent semantic load but a stylistic and artistic flavor as well.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the view point of this paper, the assessment focuses on the ways the different translators achieved naturalness in compliance with the genius of the target language as described by Vinay and Darbelnet's comparative study. Parallel excerpts randomly selected from two francophone Magrebian novels and their English translations are examined.

Excerpt One: *La nuit sacrée* by Moroccan Tahar Ben Jelloun

Award-winning Moroccan author Tahar Ben Jelloun has been noted for a series of novels critiquing various aspects of the Moroccan society. In *La Nuit Sacrée*, for example, he deals with the 'injustices' of Morocco's absolute patriarchy inherited from Islamic tradition through the story of Zahra, a female who has to live as a boy by the name of Ahmed to 'safeguard the honour and fortune of the father and to conform to the dominant patriarchal system in society' (Faiq, 2005, p.67).

As for the translation of this novel into English, transposition, modulation and syntactic re-ordering are strategies that go hand in hand in this translation, often within the same passage, even the same sentence as exemplified below. Their neat combination seems to offer a pleasurable reading experience and a naturally-reading text, and attests to the translator's awareness of what we referred to as systemic behaviors at 'Langue' level. The following parallel passages reflect good decision-making as to what strategies work best for what situations is a quality the translators

Syntactic re-ordering:

En me retrouvant entre quatre murs je réalisai combien ma vie d'homme déguisé ressemblait à une prison

Finding myself behind bars made me realize how much my life as a man had been like a prison.

Transposition (also modulation):

Ma vie s'organisa très vite en prison >> My life in prison soon fell into a routine.

Literal translation:

J'étais privée de liberté dans la mesure où je n'avais droit qu'à

un seul rôle. Hors ces limites c'était la catastrophe. Sur-le-champ je ne me rendais pas compte combien je souffrais. Mon destin avait été détourné, mes instincts brimés, mon corps transfiguré, ma sexualité niée et mes espoirs anéantis

I had been confined to a single role, and in that sense deprived of freedom. Beyond the limits of that role lay catastrophe. At the time I had not been aware of how much I had suffered. My destiny had been twisted, my instincts suppressed, my body transfigured, my sexuality denied, my hopes destroyed.

Simplification by means of transposition:

Je pressens l'infortune. Je suis **mal armée contre** le malheur
I can feel misfortune **coming**, and **I have no way to fight it.**

Original French Text	English Translation
<p>Ma vie s'organisa très vite en prison. Je ne considérais pas l'enfermement comme une punition. En me retrouvant entre quatre murs je réalisai combien ma vie d'homme déguisé ressemblait à une prison. J'étais privée de liberté dans la mesure où je n'avais droit qu'à un seul rôle. Hors ces limites c'était la catastrophe. Sur-le-champ je ne me rendais pas compte combien je souffrais. Mon destin avait été détourné, mes instincts brimés, mon corps transfiguré, ma sexualité niée et mes espoirs anéantis. Avais-je le choix ?</p> <p><i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 143)</p>	<p>My life in prison soon fell into a routine. I did not consider imprisonment a punishment. Finding myself behind bars made me realize how much my life as a man had been like a prison. I had been confined to a single role, and in that sense deprived of freedom. Beyond the limits of that role lay catastrophe.</p> <p>At the time I had not been aware of how much I had suffered. My destiny had been twisted, my instincts suppressed, my body transfigured, my sexuality denied, my hopes destroyed. And I had had no choice.</p> <p><i>The sacred night</i> (p. 135)</p>

Original French Text	English Translation
<p>J'ai peur de le perdre. Aide-moi à ne pas le perdre. Je pressens l'infortune. Je suis mal armée contre le malheur.</p> <p><i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 102)</p>	<p>I'm afraid of losing him. I want you to help me not to lose him. I can feel misfortune coming, and I have no way to fight it.</p> <p><i>The sacred night</i> (p. 96)</p>

Syntactic re-ordering and modulation have the additional role of reconciling author's and translator's visions and styles and ends up creating equally captivating images in the target texts.

- Ils passent leur vie à amasser de l'argent... **Tous les moyens sont bons ; ils ne reculent devant rien**
>>
- They spend their lives piling up money... ***They will stoop to anything and stop at nothing.***
- **J'avançais malgré tout dans l'enterrement des êtres et des choses**

>>

- **I had managed to bury** some people and things
 - **Son comportement**
 - >>
 - **The way he was acting,**
- **Son comportement me faisait mal**
 - >>
 - **I was hurt by** the way he was acting

Original French Text	English Translation
Ils passent leur vie à amasser de l'argent et à le cacher. Tous les moyens sont bons ; ils ne reculent devant rien. <i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 31)	They spend their lives piling up money and stashing it away. <i>They will stoop to anything and stop at nothing.</i> <i>The sacred night</i> (p. 25)
Le travail de l'oubli se faisait tant bien que mal. J'avançais malgré tout dans l'enterrement des êtres et des choses. <i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 89)	My effort to forget was making some progress, for I had managed to bury some people and things. <i>The sacred night</i> (p. 82)
Son comportement me faisait mal. Je le comprenais mais je ne pouvais l'approuver ni discuter avec lui. <i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 52)	<i>I was hurt by the way he was acting. I understood it, but I could not excuse it or talk about it with him.</i> <i>The sacred night</i> (p. 47)

Another effective way modulation is used to create an equivalent effect on the target reader is when the wish of Ahmed/Zahra's mother to be free and metaphorically be able to breathe, worded originally in an affirmative sentence form, is made stronger when turned into an exclamative sentence in the target text:

- **Je voudrais pouvoir respirer** >> **How I would love to be able to breathe**

Original French Text	English Translation
Je voudrais pouvoir respirer quelques jours, quelques semaines en son absence, une absence absolue. <i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 52)	How I would love to be able to breathe for a few days or weeks in his absence. <i>The sacred night</i> (p. 47)

Paraphrasing is also a dominant method the translator used in dealing with some Moroccan proverbs which could otherwise sound meaningless to the English reader if translated literally or by means of a near equivalent in the target language, particularly those whose form is itself calqued from Arabic.

Original French Text	English Translation
Mais comme dit le proverbe: « L'entrée dans le hammam n'est pas comme sa sortie ! » <i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 52)	But as the proverb says: "It's a lot easier to enter the baths than to leave." <i>The sacred night</i> (p. 47)

Contrariwise, in other cases where the overall meaning of the proverb or idiom is rather straightforward, the translator simply went for a suitable literal translation that conveyed in the same way the self-explained meaning of the original idiom:

- **Aucun chat ne fuit une maison où il y a mariage**
- **'No cat flees a house where there's a wedding'**

Original French Text	English Translation
<p>Oui, j'ai été une femme abandonnée ! J'ai été jetée dans la rue, et comme dit le proverbe : « Aucun chat ne fuit une maison où il y a mariage »... S'il est parti c'est qu'il avait de bonnes raisons. « Sais-tu comment on retient un homme ? Avec ça et ça, me dit ma mère posant une main sur le bas ventre, et l'autre sur les fesses.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 71)</p>	<p>"Yes, I was abandoned, thrown into the street, and as the proverb says, 'No cat flees a house where there's a wedding.' If he left, he must have had a reason. 'Do you know how to hold on to a man?' my mother used to say. 'With this and this,' one hand on her belly, and the other on her butt.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The sacred night</i> (p. 65)</p>

The choice of *le mot juste* among varied possibilities is this translation's major sign of quality, proven by frequent examples as in the translation of the father's confessed resentment about the ordeal he subjected himself and his kid to. He describes the effect of that in French as **lourd** and the translator uses the stronger word **burdensome** which more forcefully conveys the feeling of resentment.

Original French Text	English Translation
<p>Toi, je t'ai aimée autant que j'ai haï les autres. Mais cet amour était lourd, impossible.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 28)</p>	<p>But you! I loved you just as much as I hated the others. But it was a burdensome, impossible love.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The sacred night</i> (p. 23)</p>

Literal translation, if appropriately opted for, could also allow the author and translator styles to be mirrored in an interesting fashion. The following two passages attest to this possibility.

Original French Text	English Translation
<p>Il n'y a plus rien à craindre. La Nuit du Destin te nomme Zahra, fleur des fleurs, grâce, enfant de l'éternité, tu es le temps qui se maintient dans le versant du silence... sur le sommet du feu... parmi les arbres... sur le visage du ciel qui descend... Il se penche et me prend...</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>La nuit sacrée</i> (p. 32)</p>	<p>You have nothing to fear now. The Night of Destiny names you Zahra, flower of flowers, grace, child of eternity. You are time standing on the slope of silence, at fire's peak, among the trees, on the face of heaven descending." 26</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The sacred night</i> (p. 18)</p>

Excerpt Two: *Qui se souvient de la mer* by Algerian Mohammed Dib

Qui se souvient de la mer is Mohammed Dib's major surrealist novel about the horrors of Algeria's war of Independence. The plot features 'an apocalyptic nightmare vision of the life of trapped inhabitants caught in war zones (Poole, 1997, p. 89). A well-informed translator of Dib's texts which contain a blending of poetry and prose would be judiciously shifting between formal and dynamic strategies to reproduce Dib's poeticity. It seems that the translator's good grasp of the text as well his good knowledge of the two languages helped

him realize that a *literal* translation of passages such as the ones below would be an adequate strategy to successfully maintain their poeticity and naturalness in the target version. An examination of the passages below shows that it actually is.

Original French Text	English Translation
Où voudriez-vous aller, avec ces murs qui vous épient? Ces murs qui ne changent guère de tactique, tournant autour de vous, se jouant de vous, et rajustant leur masque au bon moment?	Where else can you go, with these walls that watch your every move? These walls that hardly ever change their tactics, surrounding you, playing with you, and readjusting their mask just in time.
<i>Qui se souvient de la mer</i> (p. 163)	<i>Who remembers the sea</i> (p. 88)
Original French Text	English Translation
Mais jusqu'a la veille, nous allions vivre au milieu du même cercle ; aucune route, aisée ou difficile, ouverte devant nous. Un ancien et silencieux cataclysme nous ayant arrachés a nous-mêmes et au monde, seul un nouveau cataclysme pouvait nous y reprojeter.	But until then we were to live within the same circle; no road, easy or difficult, open before us. An ancient and silent cataclysm having torn us from ourselves and the world, only a new cataclysm could restore us.
<i>Qui se souvient de la mer</i> (p. 96)	<i>Who remembers the sea</i> (p. 47)
<p>At a next level relating to the poetic flavor of Dib's prose, Termaine pays a great deal of attention to the assonance of certain clauses and finds a way of maintaining it in the target language. In this example, the assonance realized by the 'er' endings in the first group verbs¹ in French is clearly impossible to maintain in English unless the translator works a reformulation. Tremaine beautifully creates similar, equivalent, assonance by means a series of rhyming question forms.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Où pouvait-on aller? - Où se cacher, - Où manger un morceau, eat? - Où se coucher? 	<p>Where could you go? Where could you hide, Where could you get a bite to Where could you sleep?</p>
Original French Text	English Translation
S'il fallait fuir, où pouvait-on aller ? où se cacher, où manger un morceau, où se coucher ?	If you had to run, where could you go? Where could you hide, where could you get a bite to eat, where could you sleep?
<i>Qui se souvient de la mer</i> (p. 101)	<i>Who remembers the sea</i> (p. 58)

Another noticeable procedure whereby the translator ensures naturalness is *transposition*. In the two examples below, he respectively translated a noun by means of an

¹ Note **aller** is a third group verbing having in common the 'er' ending with first group verbs

adjective and a prepositional phrase by an adverb. In both cases we could imagine the awkwardness of translating those elements otherwise.

Original French Text	English Translation
L'homme se carrait dans l'encadrement de la porte. <i>Qui se souvient de la mer</i> (p. 21)	The man stood framed in the doorway <i>Who remembers the sea</i> (p. 3)
Les gens clopinaient en silence , à pas prudents. <i>Qui se souvient de la mer</i> (p. 136)	People shambled along silently at a seemly pace. <i>Who remembers the sea</i> (p. 71)

5. CONCLUSION

It should be remembered that translation is after all a linguistic activity and the good command of the language into which the text is translated, often the case when it is the translator's native language, helps a great deal in observing the genius of the target language. What is particularly important is the translator's effective selection of the right turn of phrase, among multiple alternatives, that ensures naturalness of expression and best generates an artistic effect similar to that of the original. The two translations studied here seem to have fulfilled this principle to quite a large extent.

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