

Spatial Setting in Translation: A Comparative Evaluation of translations from Pre-Islamic Poetry

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Abstract : This study is concerned with scrutinising translations into English and French of references to locations in the desert of pre-Islamic Arabia. These references are used in the Source Text (ST) within a poetic image. Reference is made to the names of three different mountains in Arabia, namely Qatan, Sitar, and Yadhbul. As these mountains are referred to in the context of the poet's description of the density and expansion of the clouds, it is crucial to know that while Sitar and Yadhbul are close to each other, Qatan is far away from them. This distance was functional for the poet to describe the expansion of the clouds. This reflects the spacious place (desert) he handled, and the fact that it was possible for him to physically see what he described. The purpose of this image is for the poet to communicate the vastness of the space he managed to see as he was in a moment of contemplation. Thus, knowledge of this characteristic about the setting is capital for the receiver to understand the communicative function of the verse. A corpus of eighteen translations is gathered. These vary between verse and prose renderings. The methodology adopted in this research work is comparative. Comparison is conducted at both the synchronic and diachronic levels; every translation shall be compared to the ST and then to previous translations. The comparative work will prove at the end that the translators who target historical facts do not necessarily succeed in preserving the image of the ST. It also proves that the more recent the translation is, the deeper the translator's awareness is the link between imagery, setting, and point of view. Since the late eighteenth century and until nowadays, pre-Islamic poetry has been translated into Western languages. Translators differ as to motives, sources, priorities and intellectual backgrounds. A translator's skopoi undoubtedly affect the way s/he handles aspects of the ST. When it comes to culture-specific aspects and details related to setting, the problem is even more complex. Setting is a very important factor that reveals a great deal of the culture of pre-Islamic Arabia as this is remote in place, historical framework and literary tradition from its translators. History is present in pre-Islamic poetry, which justifies the important literature that has been written to extract information and data from it. These are imbedded not only by signalling given facts, events, and meditations but also by means of references to specific locations and landmarks that used to exist at the time. Spatial setting is an integral part of a literary text as it places it within its historical context. The importance of the translator's awareness of spatial anthropological data before indulging in the process of translation is tested. This is also crucial in measuring the effect of setting loss and setting gain in translation. The findings of this research would ultimately evaluate the extent to which a comparative methodology is reliable in investigating the role of spatial setting awareness in translation.

Keywords : historical context, translation, comparative literature, spatial setting

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