Conflict in Translation: Online News Coverage of the Arab World

With Special Reference to Selected Post 9/11 Events

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents.

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In the name of Allah, most Compassionate, most Merciful.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to Allah for providing me with the blessings to finish this thesis.

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Brill's Simple Arabic Transliteration System by Pim Rietbroek

Arabic Letters	Transliteration Characters and diacritics
ا	a, ā
ب	b
ت	t
ث	ṯ
ج	ǧ
ح	ḥ
خ	ḫ
د	d
ذ	ḏ
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	š
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	ʿ
غ	ġ
ف	f

ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
هـ	h
و	w, ū
ي	y, ī
ء	ʾ
ى	ā
ي	Ī
و	ū
َ	a
ِ	i
ُ	u
ـَيْ	ai
َوْ	au
ـِيْ	Īy
ُوّ	ūw
ة	a, ah, āh, at, āt

Source: "Brill's Simple Arabic Transliteration System", version 1.0, 14 Dec. 2010, by Pim

Rietbroek.

List of Abbreviations

The following table provides a list of key abbreviations used in this thesis

Abbreviation	Stands for
AFP	Agence France Presse
AP	*Associated Press*
BAD	Basic Arabic Dictionary (Ál-mǔ ʿ*jam* Ál-ʿ*araby* Ál-ás*ā*s*y*)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CNN	Cable News Network
CSI	culture-specific item
FAIR	*Fair and Accuracy in Reporting*
Hamas	Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement
MEMRI	Middle East Media Research Institute
NTSB	American National Transportation Safety Board
NY Times	*New York Times*

Abstract

The present study attempts a scrutiny and an evaluation of the online news coverage of the Arab world in Western online news institutions. It aims to identify the strategies which are employed by the translators and their news institutions in rendering the religious and political references while tackling the Arab events. The current descriptive analytical study, also, attempts to explore whether the meanings of the Arabic references are transferred accurately in the English texts or not. It aims to show the effect of Western online news institutions and their political stances on the translated texts. It is divided into three chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, the researcher deals with the methodology of research; in chapters two and three, the practical analysis is introduced and the conclusion sums up the research findings.

For the purpose of the thesis, the researcher selected certain religious and political references in Saddam Hussein's speeches/letters and Arab writers' articles during the Iraq war (Jan. – Dec. 2003) and tackled the way they are translated in some Western online news institutions, namely, the *NY Times* and the *Guardian*, and the think tank *MEMRI*. The selected religious and political references are analyzed in the light of Mona Baker's narrative theory, Lawrence Venuti's notions of domestication and foreignization and Javier Aixelá's strategies. The analysis reveals that the Iraqis and the Iraq war are misrepresented in the selected online news institutions. The selected translators swung between the domesticating and foreignizing methods through using Aixelá's strategies. The selected religious and political references, which stress comparisons made by Hussein and the Arab writers between the Iraqis and the invaders are either deleted or distorted, in many cases. The narratives of difference, of homogeneity and terrorism regarding the Iraqis are formed in the target texts and articles, to justify the Iraq invasion. The selected translators are affected by their news institutions, which in turn, are

influenced by the official stances of their political regimes supporting and/or joining the coalition troops in occupying Iraq. According to the conclusions reached by the research, the narratives presented in the target texts did have negative impacts on the image of Iraq as well as that of the Arabs in the West.

Introduction

0.1 Presentation

The present thesis attempts an analysis and evaluation of the online news coverage of the Arab world as exemplified by the selected examples of the former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's speeches/letters and of the Arab writers' articles translated in the selected Western online news institutions. The extracts are analyzed in the light of Mona Baker's narrative theory, Lawrence Venuti's notions of the domestication and foreignization and Javier Aixelá's strategies. The online news institutions chosen for this study are the *NY Times*, the *Guardian*, and *MEMRI*. The present study envisages using a descriptive analytical approach, for dealing with the Arabic extracts translated into English.

Media and media translation play important roles in motivating and influencing countries and peoples. Some media institutions, media professionals, journalists and translators, fail to deliver the news and its analyses impartially. Many journalists and translators are also influenced by their ideologies and ideologies of the news institutions where they work, and of the policy makers in their countries and in countries of the target readers. All such considerations and others affect the way the texts are presented.

Western countries and their news media have focused for long on some events in the Arab world, especially in the wars and disputes. They adopt different stances towards various events; some of them express their support while others announce their opposition to these events. They reflected mixed views regarding the Iraq war. For example, some Western countries, such as the USA, the United Kingdom, Australia and Israel, and news institutions attempted to justify the war on Iraq by the coalition forces. They claimed that they aimed at

freeing the Iraqi people from dictatorship and injustice imposed by Hussein. Other Western countries, such as France, Germany and Russia, and news institutions announced their opposition to the Iraq invasion. They affirmed that resorting to the war should be the last alternative and "any solution must be inspired by principles of the United Nations Charter" ("Joint Declaration").

0.2 Aim of the Study

This study attempts a scrutiny and an evaluation of the online news coverage of the Arab world in Western online news institutions, with particular reference to the Iraq war (starting in March 2003 and running until 2011 when President Barak Obama decided on withdrawing the American troops). The main focus is the translation of some news items and reports appearing in non-Arabic speaking media. The study analyzes the translated extracts of Hussein's speeches/letters and of Arab writers' articles, during the Iraq war, using Baker's narrative and Venuti's notions of domestication and foreignization and Aixelá's strategies as approaches for this analysis.

0.3 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is the news items (the religious and political references) published online covering the Iraq war during its initial phase (Jan. – Dec. 2003) including different speeches/articles which tackle various events.[1] This is due to the fact that the period before and after the war until the capture of Hussein, in December 2003, was a period when Hussein was a prolific speaker; it is also rich in Arabic articles and commentaries on such speeches as well as on the battlefield.

The specific texts selected for the analysis were subject to some constraints. As the thesis deals with the Arabic texts in translation, the researcher tried to locate the sources of the

translated full texts or extracts in Arabic. The researcher relied on the online sources which initially included the official website of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was functional during the early phase of war. However, with the lapse of time, this website was closed and this led to another attempt at locating the Arabic sources on other online sources. Unfortunately, due to the development of events, the legacy of Hussein's speeches and letters was preserved in rather unofficial sources such as *Dhiqar* (the website of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party), *Hdrmut, Sh3bwah* and *No Intervention* (sic).

On another level, the selection of the translated texts for analysis was guided by a technical constraint, namely the availability of the source texts in Arabic. Also, as the research developed, some of the archived Arabic sources have been removed from the websites. Thus, for the purposes of the documentation and citation, the researcher found it appropriate to analyze only the examples of which both source and target texts are available and accessible only. The selected Arabic articles are written by ʿAbd Al-Bari ʿAtwan, in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* , ʿAbd Al-Rahman Al-Rashed and Nusyr *Al*-Nahr in *Al-Sharq Al*-Awsat.

Other significant constraints are the content of the source texts, the presence of the political and the religious references in the selected examples and the way the news institutions/translators (if their names are stated) interpret these texts. That is to say, these references can show the extent to which the news institutions/translators transferred the references which highlight the narratives of difference between the Iraqis and the invaders in target texts. This in turn expresses institutions'/journalists'/translators' stances towards the Iraq war and the Arab World, in general.

0.4 The Online News Media Chosen for this Study