

**A Sound Strategy toward Effective English –
Arabic – English Translating: A Methodical
Approach.**

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1. Purpose and Limitation of the Study.

1.1 Purpose.

This study is an attempt to bring together some of the principles of ‘speech prosody’ that can be applied toward effective ‘English-Arabic-English’ translation of non-literary texts. It intends to present the Arab translator with some transnational strategies on how to build reasonable interpretation of what he/she really reads in English, toward a full understanding of a particular written text and ‘arrival at’ its ‘intended-writer meaning’ through the aspect of sound, namely: stress, tonal and rhythmical indications. As such, the study is not an outline of a model for teaching Arabic students how to translate, but a proposed sound strategy to heighten the

Arab translators and students' sensitivity to the sound patterns of written English texts, and some practical ways of implementing these strategies in English-Arabic-English translation. This strengthens the justification that since Arab translators do not normally enjoy the same linguistic background and intention of native speakers, they should be presented with some sound strategy on how to relate sounds and meanings when reading an English text for Arabic translation and vice-versa.

The current study is an attempt to bring together some of the principles of speech prosody that can be applied toward effective English – Arabic translation of non-literary texts. It intends to present the specialized Arab translator with some translational strategies on how to build reasonable interpretations of what he really reads in English, toward a full understanding of a particular written text and arrival at its 'intended – writer meaning', through the aspect of sound, namely: stress, tonal and rhythmical indications. This restriction allows the study to focus on a well-defined problem area, for Arab translators, which is rather neglected by most works on English – Arabic – English translating. Also, it allows for a complete and detailed investigation of

two distinguishable kinds of vocal phenomena, one prosodic (i.e. stress), the other paralinguistic (i.e. tonal and rhythmical indications), which can be employed to bring out the potential differences between 'spoken' and 'written' versions of the same 'source language text' (SLT). The purpose of the investigation then is limited that it may be studied in depth and more practical and realistic sound strategies suggested.

1.2 Limitation:

The study addresses itself to the specialized Arab translator and those who are engaged in teaching advanced translation to Arab students. It is not an outline of a model for teaching Arab students how to translate, but a proposed sound strategy to heighten the Arab translators and students' sensitivity to the sound patterns of written English texts, and some practical ways of implementing these strategies in the English- Arab – English translation. As such, the study is mainly confined to the phonological level, except where the rest of the levels (lexical, grammatical and semantical) are incorporated in the analysis of the text in question. This limitation does not mean that these levels are of less

importance in their contribution to the meaning of an utterance, but it does allow for exploration of a part of the meaning of a SLT that is not derived from linguistic features directly relating to the 'lexico-grammatico-phonological core' (LGPhC) of that text. This kind of meaning may be labeled 'intended- writer meaning (IWM) and can be obtained from associated prosodic and paralinguistic (relating to voice quality) features inspired or reflected by the linguistic, or 'non- linguistic', situational context in which the utterance occurs. Besides, the meaning of a SLT derived from features directly relating to the LGPhC has extensively been dealt with in other works of translation (cf.2.2).

Though it may prove to be useful, in several ways, to the translation of 'literary' texts, the investigation is strictly confined to the English- Arabic – English translation of 'non- literary' texts.

2. Explanation of Basic Terms:

2.1. The 'Lexico – Grammatical- Phonological Core' (LGPhC).

The terms LGPhC², the 'Lexico-grammatical core' (LGC), the 'phonological core' (PhC) and the 'Common

Core' (CC) are intensively used in the investigation. It is worth making some distinction between them since they often represent different uses and implications. The terms LGC and PhC are used in their most ' formal' and restricted linguistic sense. That is the LGC refers to any 'linguistic construction', or a string of meaningful and grammatically arranged words, that can be used to communicate meaning; the PhC refers to the channel through which this 'linguistic construction' is communicated from one person to another. In this sense, the PhC is not itself 'speech' but, says Francis (1965: 193), "an intermediate strand of language structure between the lexico-grammatical system and articulate audible speech".

Thus, it may be said, in a broader linguistic sense, that the total meaning of an utterance, spoken or written, can be obtained by combining the meanings of 'words' (lexical) of which it consists and the meanings of the 'construction' (grammatical) in which the words are combined. Since both, lexical and grammatical meanings cannot be separated-unless they are artificially intended to be so- the core that combines them may be labeled 'LG' to illustrate their being interwoven in a way 'normal' to language use. Being so interwoven and interrelated, both the LG and the Ph cores are basic for the

communication of meaning, which is the major purpose of all languages. The term LGphC refers to the 'core' of language as reflected two interrelated cores (LG & Ph) regardless of situational contexts.

2.2. 'The Common Core'

The term 'Common Core' (CC), as used by Crystal and Davy (1979:65), covers most phonological and lexco-grammatical patterns "which are imposed on the language-user as being laws common to the whole speech community in all situations". As such, it means exactly the same thing as LGPhC, the reason why the two terms are used alternatively in the investigation to refer to the core of language vested in its lexical, grammatical and phonological rules, which are subconsciously known to every native speaker.

1.3 Formal and Non-Formal Indications:

By 'formal indications' reference is made to those 'linguistic features', which occur regardless of any situational contexts and are shared in some degree by all utterances in the same speech community. Since these features all relate directly to the CC of language, they may be labeled CCFs. 'Non-formal

indications' are those 'non-linguistic', or paralinguistic, features which do not relate directly to the CC, but are closely connected with the situational contexts that may arise as a result of their occurrence. In this investigation, the term 'formal indications', is used alternatively with 'formal linguistic features' and is restricted to the CCFs which are normally observable by the native speaker as part of his mother tongue linguistic training. Again the term 'non-formal indications relating to voice quality which are not 'linguistic' in the formal sense of the word, but are of potential linguistic significance to meaning particularly IWM.

2.4 Grammatical Meaning and Intended –Writer Meaning:

The distinction between 'grammatical meaning' and IWM can be made by relating the terminology discussed above (cf. 2.3) to the 'phonological core'. Such tactical features as stress, pitch and juncture, for instance, can be employed to govern the coming of phonemes into organised 'phonological construction' which, in fact, reflects what is labelled, by Turner (1979:29), 'formal speech'. These tactical features may be used to control the correct pronunciation of certain 'linguistic

construction' (i.e.LG) without any diversities of meaning. The diversities of meaning, of course, are usually obtained when such linguistic or tactical features as stress and intonation (i.e. prosodic features), plus other non-linguistic features are consciously used by the speaker to guarantee only 'one way' of receiving his message by the hearer. Also, a writer intentionally provide, in writing, for such paralinguistic features to control the reader's intonation and guarantees only 'one way' of reading the text.

It is an interesting fact that, like the rule of grammatical construction, the phonological rules are 'subconsciously' known to every native speaker except where they are unexplicitly and unrigorously stated.

That's except when such phonological features as stress and rhythm are used in a special way by the speaker for 'effective intonation' to guarantee the reception of his intended message (i.e.ISM) by the hearer, or when they are consciously designed by a text writer to direct his reader's intonation toward his special intended meaning (i.e.IWM). In these cases, the phonological features are not used in a way 'normal' to their 'formal' use, i.e. to ensure the correct pronunciation and general understanding of the spoken or written utterance.

Hence, phonological feature formally used will only reflect the LG meaning, or what linguists call 'grammatical' or 'conventional' meaning, which is not exactly, the same as ISM or IWM. An approach to a text, which results in such a meaning, is no doubt a formal one.

3. Methodology.

3.1. Data Collection.

The data for this investigation have been obtained by two major modes, one experimental, the other observational.

The Experiment.

Using the perception and interpretation of certain 'non-forma;' linguist features (at the SLT reading stage), and providing for them (at the TLT writing stage), as a fundamental transnational step toward arrival at the IWM, I experimented with two groups of Arab students (158 in total) between 1996 and 1997. Specifically, the experiment was intended to examine those difficulties the Arab University students face in their attempt to perceive, interpret and provide for the various spoken "discourse feature' establishing the stress, rhythmical and tonal effects of written texts.

Three sections of 82 students, in the Department of English and Translation, Imam Mho's Bin Saud' Islamic University, Riyadh, participated in the experiment over the September-December 1996 Semester and two sections of 76 students, in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Omdurman Islamic University, over the July-September 1997 Semester. Selected passages were assigned, for translation, to the students who were all in their final year completed at least three courses in translation (major) and two courses in Arabic (minor), and whose Mother Tongue is Arabic.

The above experiment, together with the data obtained from other works on translation (see 3.1), my own continuous experimentation, long experience in teaching translation at different Arab institutions and exchange of views with other specialised Arab translators and university teachers of translation is sufficient evidence of the problem.

3.2. Procedure.

The approach I deem most satisfactory in determining the relationship between 'sound' and 'meaning' in the translation of a given SLT, involves the realisation of certain types of sound contrasts within the same text and how this

effects its meaning, particularly IWM. The analysis of any stretch of speech or a piece of writing can be conducted in terms of four major levels, distinguished, by Crystal and Davy (1979:15), as 'phonological, lexical, grammatical and semantical'. The major concern of this methodology is on how the phonological level can affect the rest of the levels and how this knowledge can be used to account for meaning in English-Arabic-English translation. Though it is most unlikely that we consciously separate sound from grammar and meaning, for procedural and pedagogical reasons, the phonological level is studied as independently as possible from the 'lexico-grammatical' so as to arrive at the IWM in translation, the SLT should be studied in details which includes sorting out 'sound' from 'Lexico-grammatical meaning. Nevertheless, since the interpretation of certain phonological features is dependent on information obtained at the lexico-grammatical level, certain aspects of this level are incorporated in the process.

However, since sound involves "a relatively finite and stable set of contrasts" compared with the complexities of vocabulary, grammar and semantics (Crystal and Davy, 1979: 16), it is hoped that this approach, by working from sound to meanings, would present the Arab translator with some

practical sound strategies for a SLT analysis and the implementation of this in writing the TLT. Like any other investigation this approach looks into the total experience of language as reflected by the 'formal' linguistic features, but at the same time allows the translators to see more vividly other non-linguistic, or paralinguistic, feature relating to sound than they usually do. Despite focusing on the possibilities of 'variation' found in such 'non-formal' features as these, the 'formal' linguistic features are considered whenever they prove to help the analysis. In analysing sound, for instance, focus will not be on such phonological matters as the physical characteristics of sounds, phonemic distinctions, or on stress and intonation when illustrative of 'formal speech'. In other words, interest is not on those variant pronunciation characteristics of 'special types' of speech that are well known to native speakers of no special linguistic training. But special interest and concentration will be on those 'linguistic' and paralinguistic features of sound, which are not 'common' or 'formal' in the sense described, and are intentionally supplied by the SLT right to control the reading of the text.

Thus, the investigation of the 'formal' linguistic, or prosodic, features such as 'stress' and 'intonation' will provide

for the correct reading of the SLT and make its general understanding by the translator possible, but 'non-formal' linguistic, or paralinguistic, features relating to 'voice quality' (e.g tonal and rhythmical indications) will guarantee only 'one way' of reading the text and, consequently, 'arrival at' its IWM.

The methodology adopted in this study intends to enable the Arab translator make use of certain aspects of sound to approach the meaning of a SLT at a 'non-formal' level. This can be conducted along the following lines.

1. Examination of significant linguistic differences between speech and writing.
2. examination of certain items of emphasises, in written texts, highlighted by stress markers of speech.
3. examination of special sound effects, such as tonal and rhythmical indications, signalling the particularities of a SLT.
4. The analysis and interpretation of certain ambiguous utterances to provide some insight into how to relate sounds and meanings.

5. the distinction between sentence meaning and utterance meaning.
6. The distinction between prosodic features (directly relating to the CC of the text) and paralinguistic features relating to the writer's voice quality (i.e. solemn voice).

4. The Sound Strategy.

4.1. Exporting Prosodic and Paralinguistic Features of the SLT.

In accordance with the explanations made in a previous section (cf. 2.4), we may approach the meaning of a SLT through the interpretation of two important sets of features relating to sound. First, those 'formal' tactical, or prosodic, features (e.g. stress and intonation) which are normally observed by the native speaker as part of his mother tongue linguistic training. These are of course part of what the general linguist would call 'language proper' and may relate to de Saussure's concept of 'language'. Second, those features, which are not linguistic in the formal sense of language, but may have linguistic implications of essential significance to meaning particularly IWM. In this sense,

such features do not form an integral part of 'language', but may relate to the de Saussurean sense of 'parole'. However, the first set of features has been extensively dealt with in relation to meaning (Crystal 1969, O'Connor and Arnold 1973, Lyons 1984: 83). In this study both sets of features, prosodic and paralinguistic, are incorporated in the analysis of 'non-literary' texts.

Incorporating the aspects of sound in the process of English-Arabic-English translation of 'non-literary' texts is probably the least understood by university students. It is evident, from long teaching experience to Arab university students and the various Arab and non-Arab scholarly works on translation (e.g. Emery 1989, Sa'adeddin 1987, Kharma 1985, Taha 1984), that, in their analysis of a SLT, almost all Arab translators depend totally on 'formal' and 'scientifically' observable indications relating to the LGPhC of that text. Generally speaking, Arab translators are often confused about how to approach the meaning of a SLT, and may still see it, as being only obtained from the linguistic features relating to the CC of the text in question. Again, the present investigation reveals that, in their approach to the meaning of a text, the students concentrate on those

'formal' connotations of language leaving out 'non-formal' connotations relating to the real situation, or context, of the actual language in use. By so doing, such translators are, in fact, looking for aspects of 'conventional' meaning which they assume is conveyed by the collective meanings of words and sentences signalled by formal linguistic features with yes, or no, attention to those meanings which may be reflected by context and are highlighted by non-formal linguistic features relating to sound. Relating to knowledge of the linguistic forms and structures alone, such translations may only reflect the 'grammatical meaning' of sentences and, at best, give a general 'understanding' of the SLT in question, but they do not necessarily ensure 'arrival at' its IWM. The fact that there is a great difference between 'understanding' a text and 'arrival at its IWM, makes such translations incomplete. Though it is the ultimate purpose of communication, says Turner (1979:145), 'understanding is occasionally less than arrival at a meaning'.

To isolate a pattern of sounds essential to the particularities of a text which reflect its IWM, and proceed to a methodical interpretation of linguistic features based on the LGPhC of that text, the description of the simple

sentence 'I saw you', for example, boils down to the grammatical sequence S + V+O with the phonological sequence (as:ju). That's, five phonetic elements together with their 'normal intonation' (as · against 'effective intonation') unite such a grammatical sequence into a meaningful stretch of speech. Abiding by the same rule, the translation of the sentence will keep to the same sequence: ^{أنا} رأيتك. In practice this kind of translation ignores situation and motive as no particular situation or special motive came readily to mind. It ignores such important distinctions as whether the sentence was said loudly or whispered, angrily or calmly, in a child's voice or in an adult's. If the sentence is intended by the SLT writer to be "whispered", for instance, the translator should think of some kind of a motive or interest which he should reflect to the reader in the 'target language text' (TLT). If it is spoken, the hearer will be able to get the exact message from the variations in the speaker's 'voice quality' and facial expressions. He will understand, for example, if the speaker intends to tell him 'I know what you are doing' or "I have now known the secret you were trying to hide", in which case the translation will be something like ^{أنا} لقد كشفت الاعمى or ^{أنا} عرفت حقيقتك. Such 'non-formal'

connotations reflective of the 'speaker-intended meaning', are obtained from the paralinguistic features characterising the speaker's voice quality rather than the linguistic features relating directly to the LGPhC of what he said. This point is very essential for translation, because it has a number of consequences, some of which may not be immediately obvious or scientifically observable, particularly for the translation of commercials, political, legal and religious texts, as well as literary texts, where the sound effects play a very important role in the reflection of such implicit meanings. Though essentially 'non-linguistic', in the sense of 'language proper' (i.e. not directly relating to the LGPhC), the features that further qualify their particular meaning and make 'arrival at' the IWM or ISM possible, are linguistically significant and derive more from the real situation (speech), or context (writing), of the actual language in use. •

3.2. The Translator as a "Keen-Silent Reader".

It is clear from the previous discussion that in speech, the speaker does not depend on words alone to express the special meaning (ISM) he intends to convey to the hearer.

The tone and rhythm of his voice can influence the meaning of words he speaks. He can yell or whisper (effective intonation enforced by paralinguistic features such as tone, tempo, or loudness); he can pause or halt, lower or raise his voice at the end of a statement or a question (normal intonation enforced by such linguistic features as stress or pitch). Again, certain facial and bodily expressions (also paralinguistic features but not relating to sound) can add much to the words of the speaker. Similarly, a writer cannot make the reader understand his words and sentences and arrive at his special intended meaning (IWM) by lexicogrammatical constructions alone. He has to find a way of representing, in writing, all the stresses, tones, rhythms, halts and pauses that occur in speech. Language communication, therefore, is achieved by speakers-hearers cooperation in particular situations or writers-readers in particular contexts.

Accordingly, since speech situations and writing contexts do affect language forms in several ways and influence the ISM and IWM, employing certain sound strategies in the translation of written texts is then justifiable.

Like a “keen reader”, the translator, by employing certain linguistic or prosodic (e.g. stress) and paralinguistic (e.g. tonal and rhythmical effects) features relating to a particular SLT, can bring out the ‘sound’ of that text which will help him fully understand it and thus make arrival at IWM possible. Theoretically, since the more linguistic differences between speech and writing are found in these features directly relating to the LGPhC of language, special ‘writing qualities’, representing other ‘non linguistic’, or paralinguistic, features relating to ‘voice quality’ may bridge the gap between the two media and bring about a ‘context’ to writing similar to that which is normally reflected by a speech situation. This, should not be understood as a process of convergence, in the sense that ‘shapes’ on paper (or writing) represent or repeat ‘sounds’ in the air (speech) or vice versa. In fact, some aspects of speech are going to be lost in writing.

However, since writing never fully represents or repeats speech, a written text is mere shapes on paper until it is ‘sounded ‘ by the reader. It depends, says Knowles (1987:21), ‘on the ‘silent’ reader’s own performance that

any sound it may be said to possess is supplied by the readers”.

Hence, it may be said that it is possible for readers, by depending on ‘formal’ phonological features alone, to produce some kind of reading which may be accepted by common consent as representative of the same written text in relation to its meaning. But it may also be said that though this kind of reading is possible and may enable them to ‘understand’ the text, it is not necessary that it represents exactly the same intonation designed by the text writer to guarantee ‘arrival at’ a special intended meaning. Readers of the same text, therefore, are expected to disagree, at least to some extent, in the degrees of ‘normality’ or ‘effectiveness’ of the intonation with which they would read the text. This is apparent where readers of the same linguistic background disagree in their interpretation of the same text as they may interpret, for example, certain punctuation marks differently, disagree on whether certain parts of a sentence should be accepted or not, and so forth. Practically, readers (even native speakers) are expected to produce more than one ‘spoken version’ of the same written text, none of which is, perhaps, exactly the same as the one

intended by the original text writer. Non-formal' differences as these have a number of consequences for translation, especially the translation of texts (e.g. political, religious and literary) where sound is intended by the writer to be 'fixed' to control the intonation of the reader and guarantee only 'one way' of reading the text.

Since there is no 'one-to-one' relationship between sound and meaning and that native speakers of English did practice relating sounds and meanings since the early stages of their language learning (Fromkin, 1987: 169), it is imperative that Arab translators, who do not enjoy the same linguistic background and training, should be presented with some kind of sound strategy on how to relate sounds and meanings when reading an English text for Arabic translation and vice versa. The strategy adopted in this study starts working from sound to meaning and derives from a two -fold fact that if a writer were to preserve the particularities of a certain text and ensure his readers' involvement and 'arrival at' his special intended meanings, he should make his writing reflect both 'linguistic' (relating directly to the LGPhC) and paralinguistic (relating to voice

quality and special graphitic techniques) features. In other words he should:

1. Provide for the orderliness, tidiness and correctness, of the text by means of features relating directly to the LGPhC of that text, including such prosodic features as stress and intonation used in the most 'normal' way to ensure a general 'understanding' of the text, but not necessarily its IWM.
2. Construct his writing with special sound effects including tonal and rhythmical indications and other paralinguistic features relating to 'voice quality' to control and direct his readers' intonation toward his intended meaning.

However, the strategy treats the translator as a 'keen silent reader' who should, during the SLT reading stage and before the actual writing of the TLT, bring the SLT 'to life' by inferring the original writer's intonation. The fact that there is no sound pattern dormant in the SLT makes this task more difficult. As part of his SLT analysis, the translator should first search the resources of the spoken

language for an appropriate way of 'speaking' it, which entails substituting for the whole unmarked 'speech prosody' (i.e. stress, intonation, tone, rhythm, et.).

Being part of their linguistic training, the perception and interpretation of the linguistic features cited in (1) should present no difficulties for the native speaker of no special linguistic training. Again, the paralinguistic features cited in (2) are expected to pose no difficulties for the linguistically trained native speakers. Conversely, Arabic native speakers who can read 'normal English text if the misinterpret any of the 'normally' used prosodic features (stress and intonation). Again, since they lack the intuition and training of the English native speakers, the linguistically trained Arab translators may face difficulties in detecting and interpreting such paralinguistic features, as tonal and rhythmical indications.

To sum up, the strategy of sound makes it clear that for a full 'understanding' and 'arrival at' the IWM of a text, and the consistent representation of this in the TLT, both 'formal' linguistic (prosodic) and 'non-formal' (paralinguistic) features should be incorporated in the analysis and interpretation of the text in question.

Notes:

1. The term 'specialised Arab Translators', or just 'Arab translators', refers to all those translators who have participated in the experiment speaking Arabic as mother tongue, majored English in their B. A., received their education at Arab government institutions, and who are now working as professional translators.
2. the term 'lexico-grammatico- phonological core' (LGPhC) is compounded by the author to refer to the basic patterns of an utterance, spoken or written, found in lexicon, grammar and phonology without any other essential variables relating to context and which are normally dictated by prosodic and paralinguistic features.
3. All kinds of transnational errors relating to misinterpretation of phonological features (especially stress, tonal and rhythmical indications) were collected (between 1996 and 1997) from papers translated by specialised Arab translators and Arab university students, classified

and thoroughly examined to account for the translation difficulties encountered, by these translators, at the phonological level.

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