

**The Birth of Meaning:  
Exploring the Collaborative work Between Translation and  
Critical Reading in Todd's *Tripoli the Mysterious***

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**Abstract**

This study concentrates on the collaborative process between the translator and the critical reader, examining it through a case study deliberately drawn from Libyan travel literature to illuminate how meaning is co-created. The case study concerns Todd's *Tripoli the Mysterious*, originally published in London in 1912 by Grant Richards and later translated and published by Dar Al-Fergiani in 1968 under the new title (*Asrar Tarabulus*) *The Secrets of Tripoli*, a framing that narrows the scope of the investigation.

The importance of this study lies in highlighting serious issues that Libyan researchers may encounter when referring to translations from the canon of travel literature. It aims to identify the communication gap between the author and the translator, trace the potential for critical reading, and observe its contribution to the birth of meaning.

The study hypothesizes that critical reading, as a form of literary criticism grounded in exploring the English–Arabic language pair, can be a helpful factor in the birth of meaning, the faithful effort of every translational act. This will be examined in light of reception theory, employing critical analytical strategies such as textual analysis that explores the historical context and illustrates reader response.

The results of the study confirm the substantial impact of collaboration between translation and critical reading in precisely generating meaning and, consequently, provide recommendations for publishers of such translations, which are extensively used by researchers in their analytical conclusions.

Key words: Translation – criticism - meaning reception - reading

### المستخلص:

تركّز هذه الدراسة على العمل التعاوني بين المترجم والقارئ الناقد في تشكيل المعنى، وهو ما تم استكشافه في كتاب اختيار بعناية من المصادر الليبية لأدب الرحلات. هذا الكتاب، «طرابلس الغامضة» لتود، نُشر في لندن عام 1912 على يد غرانت ريتشاردز، ثم تُرجم ونُشر عن دار الفرجاني عام 1968 تحت عنوان جديد هو أسرار طرابلس. (The Secrets of Tripoli)

تكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في تسليط الضوء على بعض المسائل الحرجة التي يتعرض لها الباحثون الليبيون عند الإحالة إلى مثل هذه الترجمات المنتمة إلى مدونة أدب الرحلات. ومن ثمّ، تهدف الدراسة إلى ردم فجوة التواصل بين المؤلف والمترجم واقتفاء اثر فعالية القراءة النقدية ومساهمتها في تيسير ولادة المعنى.

تفترض الدراسة أن القراءة النقدية بوصفها مستوىً من مستويات النقد الأدبي — القائمة على استكشاف النص في لغتيه (الإنجليزية-العربية) يمكن أن تكون عاملاً مساعداً في ولادة المعنى، وهو الجهد الأمين الذي تتوخّاه كل عملية ترجمة. ويتم التحقق من هذه الفرضية ودراستها في ضوء نظرية التلقي، بالاعتماد على استراتيجيات التحليل النقدي عبر التحليل النصي الذي يستكشف السياق التاريخي ضمن امثلة من استراتيجيات استجابة القارئ.

تؤكد نتائج الدراسة الأثر البالغ للعمل التعاوني بين الترجمة والقراءة النقدية في توليد المعنى على نحو أدق، وما يترتب على ذلك من تقديم جملة من المقترحات والتوصيات للجهات التي تعمل على نشر مثل هذه الترجمات التاريخية، التي يعتمد عليها الباحثون اعتماداً كلياً في استنتاجاتهم التحليلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة، النقد، المعنى، التلقي، القراءة.

## Introduction

Translation is important, not only for its unique role in making cultural productions accessible to avid readers across the world, but also for its generating nature in posing questions, forging arguments and paving the way for the critical minds to unleash their creativity in establishing the meaning. The concept of meaning is broad and varied, and since it is the main target of translation, it is prone to misinterpretation owing to its intrinsic breadth and variation.

Nida, (1964, cited in Munday, 2010: 56) indicates "the move away from the old idea that an orthographic word has a fixed meaning and towards a functional definition of meaning in which a word 'acquires' meaning through its context and can produce varying responses according to culture." However, translation is confined to the process of rendering the meaning of a message from one language into another, keeping as much as possible its style and communicative intent; it is both a linguistic and cultural act, and it requires a level of sensitivity to semantic accuracy as well as to the social, historical, and literary contexts of the language pair.

Therefore, translation plays a striking role in bridging communication gaps between different linguistic communities. Its necessity can be spotted in several areas: local and global communication, education and knowledge, trade and business, diplomacy and politics, media and entertainment. (Bellos, 2011:34) asserts " translation is part and parcel of modern business."

These areas represent a wide variety of cultural backgrounds that require translators who spend without stint time and effort and some passion in studying and researching this variety to be able to make their own responsible decisions, whether to domesticate (i.e. construct the translation to meet the norms and expectations of TL readers) or 'foreignize' (i.e. maintain as far as possible a literal translation of the original SL) when dealing with whatever sensitive issues they might encounter.

This introduction attempts to highlight the concept of translation, where meaning is central to translation act and readability is fundamental for



effective communication. Translation as an activity is a responsible factor of mediation, bridging not only words but also worldviews, enabling texts to travel across cultural and temporal boundaries. Translators of literary works, such as Fatima Naoot, emphasize the pursuit of equivalence as a condition to evoke a response in the TL audience comparable to that intended in the SL audience. (Naoot, 2010: 17) demonstrates, "In some cases, obtaining the precise Arabic translation was absolutely arduous."

Translation requires a deep engagement in a critical reading at every stage of the process of translation. At the early stages of the process, the translator might encounter the question of choosing the work and its purpose, which forces him to take the conscious initiative of a responsive reading. (Khuri 1988: 123) asserts, "Choosing the book to translate is the most important step, 'the cornerstone', for it is where the money is spent, the effort is dedicated, and the intellectual food is served to the reader."

In the early stages of the translation movement in Libya, the decision of choosing the book for translation was often confined to the urgent need for references that provide the researchers in fields such as political and social history with sources of evidence. Most of these works were written by travelers based on their tours in the country between the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

This study concentrates on a translation of a book that belongs to travel literature, attempting to pave the way for the role of critical reading in creating the meaning. That is because such translations pay more concern to the purpose (a historical reference) than to the means (a responsible act of translation).

It attempts to prove that the integrated work of translation and critical reading produces more intellectual analysis, prevents misinterpretations, and fosters intercultural discourse. These objectives of such collaboration are seemingly sufficient to be taken as the framework of the study.

Within the framework, selecting an appropriate theory and methodology is essential to maintain the study's objectives. The study also relies on strategies that are systematic features of reader-response criticism and related

analytical approaches. The evolution of methodology within the study indicates its degree of sophistication. Since the focus of the study shifts between the source text and the target text and their readership, methodological strategies should be diverse and adaptable within the theoretical analysis to accommodate these varying focal points.

Since the study highlights the reader's role in creating meaning, it starts from this premise and employs textual comparative analysis as the initial step to investigate how different readers respond, aiming to reveal the translator's stance on the issue. (Meyer, 2007: 662) notes, "there is no single definitive reading; readers create meanings rather than simply discover them."

## **Framework and Methodology of the Study**

The central focus of this study is the collaborative work between translation and critical reading in establishing meaning for the case study Todd's *Tripoli the Mysterious*. Given this objective, Reception Theory is a suitable framework because it connects its core principles with feasible critical-analytic strategies that help the study to maintain its objective. The aim is to deepen understanding of the study's topic, to raise awareness of its significance, and to assess the feasibility of achieving its objectives.

The following steps demonstrate the application of the theory and strategies with full awareness and careful adherence.

### **▪ The Paratextual Study**

The necessity of such a study becomes evident when the title of the Source Text (ST) is rendered differently in the Target Text (TT). Consequently, paratextual analysis expands to consider other liminal devices that may bridge the gap between the reader and the TT's content—such as the title, the author's background, the preface and introduction, the footnotes, and the accompanying photographs with captions. Paratextual study performs a crucial function, because it scrutinizes seemingly marginal elements attached to the text in order to help the reader engage more deeply with it. As the translator of Gerard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Lewin, 2001:1) notes, "with clarity, precision, and an extraordinary range of



reference, paratexts constitute an encyclopedic survey of the costumes and institutions of the republic of letters as they are revealed in the borderland of the text."

### ▪ **The Comparative Textual Analysis**

Comparative textual analysis functions as a methodological tool for identifying divergences in meaning, nuance, or tone from the source text (ST), evaluating whether such shifts are justified by stylistic or cultural considerations, and elucidating the translator's strategies for negotiating lexical gaps, cultural references, and stylistic features.

It further exposes how translator choices may mask, soften, or shift the author's ideologies, values, or political stances, enabling critical reflection on power dynamics in translation. By identifying additions, omissions, or alterations, the analysis evaluates their potential impact on interpretation, style, and cultural prominence.

Therefore, comparative textual analysis is an essential means of demonstrating translation quality and the translator's choices, which are among the main factors in establishing the perspective of responsive readers. This analysis leads the study to substantial discoveries that, firstly, evaluate the impact of using or not using certain mediations and, secondly, provide the study's hypothesis with compelling evidence that helps to confirm the final conclusion.

### ▪ **The Analysis of the Historical Context**

The source text is based on the author's memoirs and her impressions of Tripoli in 1900 and 1905, and this historical entry suffices the study to engage deeply with the text, using its genre (travel literature) and its phase (the interval between two international powers) as a framework for depth. Thanks to this historical analysis, the author's intention to convert these memories into a book (1912), which precedes the Italian invasion announcement in 1911, becomes a key factor in reinforcing the role of critical reading in establishing meaning by tracing the shift from literary to ideological implications.

Moreover, this historical entry introduces another factor: it frames the social and national background of the author and her interests within a broader context that encompasses the literary text, the historical setting, and the publisher's decisions as well as the translator's choices. These factors are expected to delineate a framework for tracing how personal memories are mobilized to address contemporary interests, not merely past events

### ▪ **Reception Theory Analysis**

Reception Theory focuses on how readers, viewers, or users interpret a text rather than just what the text claims to mean. It emphasizes the active role of audiences in making meaning, influenced by social, cultural, and personal contexts. Messages are produced with intended meanings by their senders, yet recipients interpret them in varied ways: they may accept the message as intended, partly negotiate its meaning, or reject it altogether.

The main reason behind using reception analysis is to reveal how different readings might shape meaning or rather how possibly they contribute in reaching gaps that are caused by translation quality and translator's choices.

*Mabel Todd's Tripoli the Mysterious* is received by two readings: the first one is achieved within the purpose of travel literature where the reader focuses on the TT only and introduces the author of the ST relying on her stylistic character in the TT. The second reading is achieved within a review of the two texts, and focuses on the reason behind authoring the text and the reason behind publishing it, and this focus shifts the categorizing of the ST from travel literature to historical sources. This reading leads the review to expand broadly and to explore the author's ideology in depth.

## **Mabel Todd's Book Within Travel Literature**

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a flourishing of travel literature in North Africa, including Libya. This era coincided with remarkable European interest in Africa, driven by exploration, colonial ambitions, scientific inquiry, and a fascination with what were regarded as 'unusual' cultures. Consequently, North Africa became a prominent destination for travelers, merchants, missionaries, diplomats, and explorers, whose writings played a pivotal role in shaping Western perceptions of the region.



Libya, in particular, attracted attention because of its strategic location, its central role in trans-Saharan trade routes, and its administration under the Ottoman authority. While some European travelers such as Friedrich Hornemann, Joseph Ritchie, and Heinrich Barth undertook expeditions across Libya and into the Sahara, documenting their routes, recording the customs of local tribes, and describing the perils of desert travel, others such as H. S. Cowper, Ethel Braun, and Mabel Todd confined their travels to Tripoli and its surrounding regions, using the opportunity to describe the city, its inhabitants, and their traditions in greater depth. The accounts of these travelers were published in books for their detailed narratives, blending elements of adventure with ethnographic observation.

Mabel Todd's *Tripoli the Mysterious* is based on her memoirs about her residence in Tripoli during the early twentieth century, when she accompanied her husband on two expeditions in 1900 and 1905 to observe solar eclipses, which are narrated in three chapters of the book.

This book was selected for three main reasons:

It extends far beyond its original scientific purpose to include the author's biases and ideology.

It offers a comprehensive depiction of life in Tripoli at the dawn of the twentieth century, merging close observation with detailed commentary on the cultural, social, and political realities of the region.

It is widely used by researchers and highly regarded by critical readers.

## **Remarks on the Book and the Author**

The first important note is that the transformation of Mrs. Todd's memoirs into a published volume took nearly seven years, with the book appearing in 1912, issued by Grant Richards Ltd in London and by Small, Maynard and Company in the United States. This delay may be explained by Todd's own remark in the preface (Todd, 1994:5): "The skirmishes in Tripoli, alluded to casually by newspapers in late September 1911, soon developed into a full-fledged war of international significance." It seems that the outbreak of the Italo-Ottoman War, which drew global attention to Italy's colonial ambitions in Libya, prompted Todd to revisit her notes and shape them into a book of enduring relevance.

The new version of the book used in this research was published in Cairo in 1994 by Dar Al-Fergani. It is divided into thirty chapters, including an introduction and a

preface, and is enriched by a remarkable collection of photographs taken and captioned by the author herself, which add significant documentary value. Amazingly enough, the book also includes illustrations of musical notes for sounds heard by the author in the surrounding environments—such as the call to prayer (the muezzin), funeral cries, the 'peculiar' sound indicating joy (zaghrotta), and other melodies. The author's interest in music and musicians is expressed in an entire chapter.

If books such as *Tripoli the Mysterious* mirror the creators' spirit, Mabel Loomis Todd emerges as an amateur naturalist, poet, musician, and a remarkably vivacious and talented woman. A brief biographical note from *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2012) reveals aspects of her personality that help explain the creative genius behind *Tripoli the Mysterious*.

Mabel Loomis Todd (born on November 10, 1856, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and died on October 14, 1932, in Hog Island, Maine) was an American writer and editor best known for preparing the first posthumously published editions of Emily Dickinson's poetry. After graduating from Georgetown Seminary in Washington, D.C., she pursued studies at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. In 1879, she married David P. Todd, an astronomer who later joined the faculty of Amherst College. In addition to her editorial achievements, Todd established herself as a writer. Her works include: *Footprints* (1883); *Total Eclipse of the Sun: A Novel* (1894); *Corona and Coronet: Her Memoirs in Japan* during one of many expeditions with her husband to observe solar eclipses (1898); *A Cycle of Sunsets* (1910); *Tripoli the Mysterious* (1912)

## The Translation and the Translator

The Arabic translation of the book was published in 1968 by Ferjani House. This edition preserved the original structure, with chapters, illustrations, and captions, and also included a detailed index of notable people and places, though the translator's name was not recorded on the cover.

Despite remaining anonymous, the translator demonstrated considerable skill in rendering Todd's refined prose, which is characterized by an elegant and highly expressive use of English, at times evoking the sensuous diction and vivid imagery of poetry. (Meyer, 2007:102) states, "It is important to understand that a translation is by its nature different from the original, and that despite that difference, a fine translation can be an important part of the journey and become part of the literary landscape itself."



The process of translation is not directly observable, but the translation work can be seen as a mirror that reflects this process. For the translator, it was enough to know the reason behind the need to translate Todd's work, and this reason (providing the researcher with a reference) compelled them to pursue the meaning of every single word, idiomatic phrase, and metaphorical sentence in order to render in Arabic diction the life of a living city from almost a century ago.

So, a word-for-word transfer does not adequately render the source text into the target text; rather, identifying the meaning of a word can lead to capturing the context.

### **Why Does Meaning Matter?**

It matters because meaning is the primary target of every translational act. When the translator decides how to render remarkable expressions, such as metaphors, idioms, or stylistic features, they primarily focus on conveying the meaning to maintain coherence, authenticity, and relevance, ultimately bridging linguistic and cultural divides. The focus on meaning ensures that the translated text remains a faithful representation of the author's communicative intent, enabling readers in the target culture to grasp the original's significance and impact. Without capturing meaning effectively, a translation risks becoming a hollow or misleading text, stripped of its essence. Regardless of method or type, the central goal of translation is to carry meaning from a source language (SL) into a target language (TL). The approach may vary, but this 'bridge' function never changes, and this bridge is built on transferring meaning. Translators and interpreters agree that their main task is to reproduce the meaning of content expressed in a foreign language. (Bellos, 2011:40) states, "In fact, this identifies the sort of service that all of us have to provide. But it doesn't provide a proper understanding of what translation is, because the meaning of an utterance is not a single thing." This statement depicts language as an ocean of words where, with a good dictionary, every single word can be captured and juxtaposed beside its meaning.

But this is not the case almost with any word in English; for instance, neck, head, table. In fact, when a language user faces one of these words or any others, he may search for its meaning and examine its context, which will be necessary to obtain a sense of natural understanding and a degree of satisfaction. The following examples clarify the relation between the word and the context in determining the meaning:

The table is homemade.

The table has three columns.

He bought a greener bridge table for his newly decorated hall.

She waits for him at the table.

The conflicting parties agree to come to the peace table.

The focus on meaning seems to be the permanent mental operation of the translator, which not only challenges their skills but also might hinder their progress in the process of transferring, however great their skills, tools, and knowledge in the background or however modest. Translators prioritize meaning because the fundamental purpose of translation is to convey the original message accurately from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Meaning encompasses not only the literal words but also the underlying ideas, emotions, intentions, and cultural nuances embedded in the source text.

Semanticists conclude that the answer to the question "what is meaning?" comes in kinds, and this diversity makes the journey toward seeking and grasping them always risky because of two types of mistakes:

The first type is avoidable.

The second type is inevitable.

The first type requires meticulous preparation, rich knowledge, deep understanding, a good dictionary, and an available network of faithful and intellectually minded assistants belonging to (SL) and (TL). The second type requires nothing because it has nothing to do with the translator's ability or inability but with the sense of meaning within the text and the context. That means this type of mistake deals with something invisible but a potential actor on the platform of meaning. Meaning cannot be pushed up to rise due to the complicated nature that might accompany its birth on the white page or space.

This might happen, for instance, when an attempt is made to translate words whose meanings partially depend on the meaningfulness of sound (intonation) or an omitted structure. Such examples have been found in pre-Islamic poetry and in the holy scripture of the Glorious Quran Kareem. The translator (Pickthall, 1981:1) states, "That inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy." Perhaps for this reason, it is truly said, "The Quran cannot be translated."

Does meaning matter? It depends. It does not matter when considering the abstract beauty of language, the natural complexity of understanding, or the absence



of concern for meaning on the readers' side, when they consciously or unconsciously restrain it in a distant corner reserved for times of need.

This is clearly noted in literary and religious texts when the authors themselves leave it to the readers' vision. (Bellos, 2011:31) suggests, "Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence, and therefore a translation cannot be judged according to mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one-to-one correspondence." (Sugar, 2014:340) asserts, "A translator requires a unique blend of abilities to focus on the translation of critical texts..." Hence, it is imperative for a translator to be conversant with the critical thought of not only one language from which he wishes to translate but also the other traditions that influenced it.

Although the topic of Tripoli the Mysterious is tessellated, fathomless, and profound, and the language is vivid, intense, and gripping, and the writer is a poet, musician, and photographer, the translator demonstrates great effort in tackling the topic, grasping the language, and paralleling the writer with a high level of linguistic skill, particularly in the attention to detail and in rendering the text into fluent, seamless Arabic. Nevertheless, despite these merits, the translation overlooks two elements that might help the reader observe the process of dealing with such a topic, such a language, and such a writer: the omission of a preface and the need for effective illustrative footnotes.

## **The Omitting of Preface**

A preface to a translated text (TT) is one of the translator's mediations that is not added or omitted owing to the translator's ability or disability, but rather due to the overt or covert implications charged or burdened within the source text, with tiny but devastating suggestions that can be sensed in tone and diction. Translators should anticipate the knowledge and cultural frames of their target readers and their expectations to produce a translation that is both accessible and meaningful. This involves decisions about whether a preface for the translation is indispensable or optional, how much cultural context should be covered in the preface, and how many footnotes should be added to the margin to place their readers in a context similar to that of the source text's readers.

Mabel's book sufficiently indicates the necessity of setting a preface to deal with many misunderstandings, biases, and prejudices; starting with the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, the holy Qur'an, the Tuareg, the traditions, and the customs and habits of the people living in the city. Moreover, she insists, along the

course of the book, on contrasting every aspect of life in 19th-century Tripoli, which is still yawning in the face of the coming century, with its counterparts in the advanced cities of Europe or the United States.

It is worth noting that the book appeared seven years later to coincide with a new phase in the city's history. The writer purposefully depicts the city as a place still living in the darkness of past centuries, because only under such a state of underdevelopment could the Italian occupation be not merely justified but also regarded as inevitable. This perspective is most evident in the book's final chapter, *B' Salama, Farewell* (PP. 202–203), where she writes: "Can one properly call this heterogeneous mass of humanity a people? Are their rude leather cushions, straw dish covers, rugs, imperfect carving and metalworking, weaving and pottery art at all? And was it the iron hand of Mohammedanism, the deadening power of Turkish rule, or the inertia of the desert which was to blame for this sleeping province?"

Importantly enough, the writer stylistically embeds what she starkly expresses in a spectacular way. This is what she has added to her purposeful intentions: "Whatever it may have been, Tripoli was a city of enchantment, white as dreams of paradise, fringed by palms and olives, and steeped in memories of the centuries."

Moreover, there is a sense of sarcasm half-hidden by her fascinating language. And then again, the suggested preface would expose and might confront such a sardonic style.

### **Here are some Examples:**

"No more at twilight are Arabs sitting in the sand against mosque walls like a line of ghosts in the still evening waiting for the call to prayer." P.10

"A bundle of rags appeared to have been thrown, carelessly; to one's Surprise these bundled masses once in a while sat up, peacefully adjusted themselves and stalked away dignified fully dressed Arabs." P.20

"In front of their open shops devout Arabs read the Koran in apparent absorption never so far removed from this world 's affairs, however, as to forget the additional price for their wares reserved for Christian." P.21

This Sulphur- tinted edible is more decorative than hygienic. But it must be distinctly convenient to use the street as a sort of supplementary bake-shop" P. 21

"Taste in furniture was execrable and worse almost in proportion to the amount money spent." P.88



"Was it indeed our own world at all -or not, rather, some sudden plunge into the life of a new planet." P.118

## The Need for Effective Footnotes

The translation is 226 pages long, and there are nearly 20 footnotes; among them, only one discerns a truth about Islam, while most are needless. Therefore, a margin with more clarifying footnotes to confront the writer's follies, which are numerous, and some other issues might be necessary.

Here is a selection of these issues:

- The change of the term '*Mohammedanism*' to '*Islam*' in the translation does not affect the meaning, but it is, in fact, a serious change that manipulates the writer's ideology. Readers should be made aware of this key issue. *Mohammedanism* implies that there is no religion called Islam, but rather a man who (Todd, 1994:160) "saw the advantage of having a sacred book and sought to make an alliance with them (the Jews), but was not willing to take their book as the basis of a new religion, yet borrowing continually from them for the Koran, especially from the midrash of the Talmud." This change should be indicated in a footnote if the translator prefers to alter the term.
- The change of the book's title from *Tripoli the Mysterious* to *The Secrets of Tripoli* should be noted in the margin of the first chapter, which originally bears the book's title.
  - One of the photos was captioned with additional information not stated in the original photo in the book (P. 91 in the book and P. 112 in the translation).  
There are many indications and allusions that need to be clarified in the footnotes.

## Here are some Examples:

Gil Gursh fort P:9

The Djurjura P:205

Her head in the fire of heaven P:5

The bleached bones of the world P:74

Pianora market P:129

## The Avoidable Mistakes

Some of these mistakes are misspelling of proper names possibly due to that the translator not being Libyan. And one of these names, Balaid, ((بلعيد)) is simply left out. Examples of names which are misspelled by the translator are shown in this table:

The author's spelling	The translator's spelling	The correct spelling
Boumiliana P.60	بوميلياتا	بومليانة
Misda P.135	مسدة	مزدة
Gharian mountains P.135	جبال الغاريان	جبال غريان
Tirsa P,136	ترسة	ترزة

He translated Barbary fig literally into التين البربري, but more commonly التين الشوكي

He translated Zoroastrianism into الزرودشتية, but more apparently الزرادشتية

(Sager, 2014: 340) concludes, "It is imperative on the part of a translator to be conversant with the critical thought of not only one language from which he wishes to translate but also the other traditions which influenced it."

## Readability and Critical Reading

Translation as an epistemological activity aims to enable the target-text reader not only to receive and understand the translated text, but also to develop their ability to pose questions, evaluate the output, and analyze the factors that either lead or do not lead to accessibility in reading and the ability to read critically.

Having agreed that translation is not merely a transfer of meaning, a balancing act between fidelity and accessibility is required. This dual focus, rooted first in comprehension and then in reader experience, shapes the translator's decisions, ensuring that the work remains both faithful to the original and fully alive in its new linguistic environment.

In translation, the cause of readability and the effect of critical reading together play a key role in preserving the intent, tone, and cultural nuances of the source text while adapting them to the linguistic and cognitive expectations of the target audience. By enhancing comprehension, maintaining reader engagement, and fostering trust, readability and critical



reading serve as an essential bridge between the writer's or translator's purpose and the reader's understanding. It is the result of the translator's effort during the process of translation that saves the reader's effort during the process of reading.

Readability in this context is simply the ability to read; the easier a text is to read, the more readable it is. This quality is the responsibility of both the writer and the translator. If the translator encounters difficulty in reading what is to be translated, they will transfer this difficulty to the reader. Therefore, readability is a fundamental characteristic of effective communication, as it determines the extent to which a reader can comprehend and engage critically with a text. A highly readable text conveys meaning with clarity, precision, and fluency, enabling the intended message to be received without unnecessary effort or misunderstanding.

The importance of readability lies in its ability to fill the gaps that might appear during the process of transferring meaning across languages. (Bellos, 2011: 20) indicates, "Like speech and communication, words and things don't fill the same space. But there's worse to come. Not all words have a meaningful relationship to things at all." In this case, bridges will not be needed because these spaces will be hidden in a language that sounds natural.

A readable text communicates ideas clearly, allowing readers to grasp the intended meaning without confusion. In translation, this ensures that the target audience receives the same message as the original audience. When the text flows smoothly and readers are able to follow it easily, they undoubtedly become more interested. On the other hand, when the text is difficult or awkward, it may cause readers to lose focus or even stop reading. Clear, concise writing by the author or effective rewriting by the translator allows readers to absorb the content easily and rapidly without rereading. Readability is always pivotal, whether reading time is limited or not, whether the context is professional or academic, and whether the reader is experienced or not.

## **The Researcher is the Reader**

Given that the purpose behind translating *Tripoli the Mysterious* is to provide Libyan researchers with a historical source, the notion of the

researcher as the reader whose interpretation completes the communicative act can be clearly deduced. This is because the translator mediates between the source author's intent and the target reader's perception, ensuring that the text resonates within the reader's linguistic ability and cultural horizon.

Reader-response theory in literary criticism underscores that meaning is co-created by readers, making their role essential. In translation, this means that the translator's choices often aim to guide, shape, or even challenge the reader's engagement with the text. Ultimately, the success of a translation depends on how effectively it communicates with its intended audience, highlighting the reader's pivotal role in the translation's life cycle. (Venuti, 2004: 1) states, "A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent."

Among these creative readers is Dr. Khalifa Telesi, who read the translation and used it effectively in his book *Hikayat Medina: Tripoli in the Narratives of the Arab and Foreign Travelers*.

Before quoting from the translated book, he introduced the source author, Mabel Todd, to Arab readers, seeking to reveal her influential perspective and poetic sensibility. He then continued to engage them through carefully selected quotations, if not the book itself. (Telesi, 1997: 207) notes, "She (Mabel) presented one of the most poetic and aesthetic pictures of life in the city, and she is the second woman who presented us with a description of the city of Tripoli with such precision in note-taking, poetic spirit, and innocent opinions on the beauty of the city and its fascinating attractions."

He sensed the importance of Mabel Todd's book and her admiration for the city; therefore, it was incumbent upon him to illustrate the significance of both the writer and the work itself. (Telesi, 1997: 207) adds, "It has been noticeable from Mabel Todd's book that she adored the city of Tripoli, felt comfortable with its people, and loved her residence in the city. She wandered through many places with eyes eager to take photographs and a memory capable of retaining events that helped her present this poetic painting, full of warm and jazzy colors. She was able to delve into many habits and traditions,



particularly regarding wedding ceremonies in Tripoli, which were displayed in a historical picture identical to known historical reality."

Before concluding his carefully chosen collection of quotations, Dr. Khalifa Telesi once again returns to praise Mabel's creative talent. (Telesi, 1997: 213) writes, "Mabel Todd was a woman, a poetess, who stood before every angle and corner of the city and viewed them poetically. Never before had anyone written with such admiration and passion in an attempt to discover the unique and remarkable in everything around her; even the silent walls were captured by her eyes."

It is generally agreed that the reader plays a crucial and dynamic role in the process and reception of translation, provided that the translator undertakes their role and confirms their visibility through a vivid presence in the translated text as it undergoes a new birth. (Venuti, 2004: 312) concludes, "A change in contemporary thinking about translation finally requires a change in the practice of reading, reviewing, and teaching translations, because translation is a double writing, a rewriting of the foreign text according to domestic cultural values ..."

## **The Critic is the Reader**

Who is the critic? It might be a mistaken idea that the critic's job starts when the translator finishes theirs. Every work related to literature, whether literary translation or literary criticism, cannot expand its influence except through a channel called critical reading. In this sense, the translator may begin the process of translation with the eyes of a critic who acts as an interpreter and gatekeeper of literary value, whose analyses contribute to the ongoing dialogue between texts, cultures, and readers.

When it comes to the reader, the whole process flourishes, because readers cannot stop without asking questions and perhaps cannot continue without finding answers. This is encouragement enough for the reader to take a step toward a new being as a critic. With the appearance of the translation as a readable work, the target reader, unlike the source text's original reader, brings a different linguistic, cultural, and experiential background that profoundly influences how the translation is understood and appreciated.

The translation of *Tripoli the Mysterious* has received another reading of a critical type. It was an achievement of a better understanding of the text in both languages, the source and the target. (Meyer, 2007: 662) suggests, "Just as writing is a creative act, so is reading, as it also produces a text."

Although the target reader has a different background from the source reader, they both share the same admiration for the poetic language of the text. Nevertheless, the target reader should have a different reading because of the complete difference in vision as well as judgment, and what is judgment if not criticism?

The critical reading of the text in both languages had the opportunity to be published in a magazine (*Turath Al-Shaab*). The reading covered ten pages in the magazine under the title *A Pickaxe of Sweet Speech*, in Arabic (*Mawel Min Elghazel Alraqiq*), supported by solid references in philosophy and history.

The reading began with a question: why did the translator make the reader think that Mabel, the writer, created a new picture of the city of Tripoli through love and appreciation, while she used a soft pickaxe (a poetic tone) to undermine every spiritual symbol and cultural value the city possessed? Was it true that the "incomplete picture" of the city was "drawn with a loving and appreciative hand"? And why, in the first place, was the picture taken partially? Was the intention to be void of anything except sweet air? (Todd, 1994: 12), "her air like wine and a climate where it is a sin to acknowledge an ache or pain," and land (Todd, 1994: 206) "waiting only for water to burst into blossom and fruit, to be cultivated and encouraged"? Is this not the picture that makes her ready to be delivered to a new nation of progressive builders? (Todd, 1994: 5) "The city will progress in modern ways"; "sometime Tripoli will be Italian" (Todd, 1994: 7); "Tripoli might be made a place of special importance in judicious hands."

Here are examples of her pickaxe 's impact

"A strange hyphenic quality characterized the native music of Tripoli." P:141

"A blood -curdling chant." P:140



Compared it to the Turkish music, " But this was merely interesting not terrifying." P:141

"Also, a reliable census is almost impossible for under certain interpretations of the Koran its principles oppose such accuracy." P:47

It seems that the pickaxe, which was used to destroy the city's deep character, is again being used to build a legitimacy for the city's occupation by the Italians.

Since translation inherently involves interpretation, critics assess not only the literary merits of a work but also the translator's choices and their impact on meaning, tone, and cultural representation. (Habib, 2005: 285) confirms, "Literature and criticism cannot be insulated from their political, social, and economic frameworks. The acts of reading, writing, and interpretation are not somehow value-free and do not subsist in some atemporal, academic vacuum; they are informed by a much broader cultural and political fabric."

Indeed, the literary critic plays a vital role in analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating texts, shaping how literature is understood and appreciated within cultural and intellectual contexts. Such readings encourage other readers and researchers to read critically and to explore travel literature about Libya more deeply.

Likewise, the translator of a literary work should rise to the level of its writer if the ultimate goal is rewriting, not merely transferring, the text into a new language. (Meyer, 2007: 102) stipulates, "To translate poetry, it is not enough to know the language of the original; it is also necessary that the translator be a poet."

Translation is not merely a linguistic task; it is, in fact, a cultural act. (Al-Jadeed, 2012: 13) distinguishes the nature of this act: "Some cultures are corpses, consuming the productions of others to death, while other cultures are alive and productive. Corpses cannot be enriched or influenced, and whatever is injected into their veins is turned into nothing, whereas living cultures acculturate, influence, and enrich one another through translation."

## Findings of the Study

The study prioritizes the main aim of assessing how critical reading contributes to shaping meaning in Todd's *Tripoli the Mysterious* while maintaining several minor aims:

- Meaning arises from the collaborative, critical interaction between translator and reader.
- Readability results from shared responsibility between the author and the translator.
- Critical reading is propelled by the reader acting as both researcher and critic.
- The shift from a literary text to a historical document is not given adequate consideration by the translator, as evidenced by their translational choices.

## Suggestions and Recommendations

Many historical translations available in the Libyan library and frequently used by researchers across disciplines require systematic and critical scholarly investigation. Establishing an ambitious research program led by translation studies departments at Libyan universities would contribute significantly to minimizing historical fallacies in academic research. In light of the study's objectives and findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Translation studies departments at Libyan universities should initiate comprehensive research programs dedicated to the critical examination of historical translations preserved in the Libyan library.
2. Faculty members are encouraged to promote critical reading practices among translation studies students and to support the production of rigorous scholarly research in this field.
3. Supervisors of postgraduate studies in history and social studies within faculties of education should encourage students to undertake theses and dissertations that critically investigate historical translations.



4. Publishers of historical translations are advised to include scholarly prefaces and explanatory footnotes informed by the findings of critical translation studies.

## Conclusion

Translation is far more than a technical exercise; it is a powerful act of connection. By carrying meaning across languages, translation allows ideas to travel, cultures to meet, and people to understand one another. This nature of translation is examined through a case study selected from travel literature and Libyan historical sources.

The selected case study is *Todd's Tripoli the Mysterious*, which is based on her journeys to Tripoli during the solar eclipses of 1900 and 1905. The work is discussed within the development of travel literature, as it clearly belongs to this genre and reflects its major characteristics.

The author's biography is presented to highlight her genius, which is skillfully and brilliantly reflected in the authorship of the book. In contrast, the case of the translator is different, as he remains anonymous; nevertheless, his translation reflects his craftsmanship and the responsibilities involved in dealing with such rich and complex texts.

The need for a preface in the translation, as well as for additional explanatory footnotes, is justified through comparative textual analysis supported by reception theory. This approach leads to a key finding: critical reading plays an essential role in establishing meaning.

The focus on meaning, which constitutes the translator's continuous mental operation, results in the classification of translation mistakes into avoidable and inevitable types. Examples from the translation are used to clarify the dimensions and impact of these mistakes on the process of meaning construction.

Readability stands as a central concern in the translation process, as a translated text fails to fulfill its purpose, regardless of its accuracy, if it cannot be read with ease and clarity.

The translation's indication in one of the books that outlines travel literature about the city of Tripoli, *Hikayet Medina* by Dr. Khalifa Telesi, is examined through a reader-response strategy. Additionally, the role of critical reading in the birth of meaning is explored by highlighting a published article that addresses the implications of the author's ideology, which is skillfully embedded in the source text within the framework of travel literature.

Finally, the relationship between translation and literary criticism may take the form of either cooperation or conflict. In both cases, however, it opens a wide intellectual space in which the reader can explore and engage with questions and challenges of interpretation.

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