

Arabic Euphemism in English Translation

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Abstract: *The present study aims to address the translatability of Arabic euphemisms into English by investigating Arabic euphemizing strategies and their potential English counterparts. It establishes the construct that euphemism is a pragmatic feature with translational relevance that concerns the degree of politeness between SL and TL. Arabic and English are shown to largely operate comparable strategies including metaphorical expressions, circumlocutions, remodeling, ellipsis, and under-/over-statements, despite the fact that there are some register complications that must be taken into consideration when translating between the two languages. The paper also shows that some euphemistic Arabic expressions are doomed in English translation for lack of correspondence, leaving the translator with only the option to utilize some compensatory strategies.*

1. Definition and Function of Euphemism

Euphemism is a linguistic politeness strategy whereby an offensive or hurtful word/phrase is replaced with one that represents a less direct expression or carries a positive attitude. Lexically, euphemism is one way of creating cognitive synonyms in language, that is, the original expression and its euphemistic counterpart come to share conceptual or descriptive meaning but differ in their attitudinal dimension. The two terms *zabaal* 'garbage man' and '*aamil naḡaafah* 'a cleanliness worker,' for example, denote the same occupation in Arabic but the second one reflects a positive social attitude toward this kind of job, which is lacking in the first term. The second alternative is said to euphemize the first. Similarly, the military phrase '*i'aadat 'intiṣaar* 'redeployment' is more acceptable to listeners/viewers than '*insiḡaab* 'withdrawal' because it is less direct than the latter, despite the fact that both terms denote the same concept in military affairs.

The term 'euphemism' comes from Greek *euphēmism (os)*, which means the use of words of good omen. The Random House College Dictionary (1980:455) defines euphemism as "the substitution of a mild, indirect, or vague expression for one thought to be offensive, harsh, or blunt." More recently, Allan and Burrige (1991:14) offer this definition: "Euphemisms are alternatives to dispreferred expression, and are used in order to avoid possible loss of face." Clearly, both definitions refer to the employment of euphemism by language users to achieve the expression of politeness and demureness in human communication. A speaker's use of the common Arabic euphemism *al-marḡuum* 'the person given mercy, i.e., who died,' for example, instead of the

neutral *al-mayyit* 'the deceased' is usually informed by the addressee's relation to the deceased. The speaker/writer will opt for the euphemism in an attempt to prevent loss of face if s/he believes that the addressee cares for the referent. In some cases, however, the speaker's use of a euphemism may be instigated by general social mores rather than the addressee's face wants. For example, the speaker may opt to utilize the euphemism *ḍawuu-l-'ihtiyaajaat-il-xaaṣah* 'those with special needs' instead of the direct *al-mu'aaqin* 'the handicapped' to express solidarity with the referent rather than maintain his/her face wants. Thus, euphemism may express both negative politeness (i.e. attending to the producer's own wants vis-à-vis avoiding his/her own loss of face), as illustrated in the former case, and positive politeness (i.e. seeing to the receiver's face wants for the purpose of expressing solidarity with him/her), as exemplified by the latter case (For more information on politeness, see Brown and Levinson 1987).

2. Euphemism in Arabic Linguistics

The linguistics of euphemism in Arabic is extremely sparse. There are only a few brief mentions of *at-talattuf* or *at-talṭiif* (al-Askari [verified 1989]; Matlub 1996; Al-Jatlawi 1998). Historically, al-Askari's term *at-talattuf*, which fits the term 'euphemism' very well, hardly relates to this phenomenon as we understand it in contemporary linguistics. He defines it as "*at-talattuf-lil-ma'na-l-ḥasan ḥataa tuḥajjinuhu wa-l-ma'na-l-ḥajjin ḥataa tuḥassinuhu* (p. 482) 'to kindly manage the pleasant meaning to make it objectionable and kindly manage the objectionable meaning to make it pleasant'. His examples show clearly that what he means is the employment of a non-preferred expression in a context where it acquires pleasant connotations, or vice versa. This differs from what we know as euphemism, a resource that necessarily involves the utilization of an alternative expression to replace the original non-preferred one in an attempt to kindly manage meaning via euphemizing.

The lack of a clear treatment of euphemism in medieval rhetoric comes as a great surprise, especially for those who are aware of the striking breadth and depth of this discipline in medieval Arabic linguistics. However, this absence cannot be attributed to a shortage of euphemisms in Classical Arabic. The Holy Quran alone constitutes a rich source for euphemistic expressions intended to avoid blunt or taboo expressions in areas such as sex and bodily effluvia, among others. Consider the two verses below:

(1) 'iḍaa jaa'a 'aḥadukum min-al-ḡaa'itī 'aw laamastum-an-nisaa'a ... [Surat an-nisaa', verse 43]

'If one of you has come back from defecation or you have touched women ...'

(2) fa-lammaa qaḍaa minhaa waṭaran zawwajnaakahaa [Surat al-'aḥḏaab, verse 37]

'After he had got his need from her, we married you to her.'

In these verses, sexual intercourse is euphemistically referred to as 'touching' in the first verse and 'getting his need from her' in the second. Similarly, the first verse euphemizes the act of 'shitting' by the employment of the technical term *al-γaa'it* 'defecation' in order to hide the socially tabooed attitude toward this bodily function.

More recently, Farghal (1995) interprets the process of euphemizing in Arabic in terms of conversational implicature (Grice 1975). In particular, he emphasizes the interaction between the politeness principle (Leech 1983) and Grice's maxims of conversation in euphemistic expressions. Euphemisms are viewed as a pragmatic mechanism that reflects the organic interlock between the politeness principle and conversational maxims. By way of illustration, the Arabic euphemism *wada'a haddan li-hayaatihi* 'He put an end to his life' as a replacement for 'intahara' 'He committed suicide' both flouts the maxim of quality (by being metaphorical) and the maxim of manner (specifically, the sub-maxim 'Be brief') in order to conversationally implicate that the denotatum's life had been full of suffering; hence, from the speaker's point of view, it was good that he killed himself. This conversational implicature is missing in the neutral (but inherently negative) counterpart 'intahara. Similarly, the vernacular euphemism 'a *taak* 'umruh' 'He gave you his age' instead of the neutral *maata* 'He died' flouts the maxim of quality (Don't say what you believe to be false) and, as a result, conversationally implicates the speaker's wish that the addressee live long.

3. A Translational Perspective

There is a consensus among translation practitioners as well as translation theorists that translation is essentially an act of communication that departs from the frontiers of a Source Language (SL) and enters into the frontiers of a Target Language (TL). This journey from SL to TL is supposed to involve transferring meaning in its different linguistic and social manifestations. In reality, however, there is usually a tug-of-war between *form* and *content* in the process of translation because meaning may be grammaticalized and/or idiomatized differently across languages.¹ On the one hand, some theorists emphasize formal equivalence, for example, Catford (1965:20) defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language". Some of them, on the other hand, highlight functional equivalence by emphasizing the reproduction of the SL message by the closest natural equivalent in the TL or by substituting messages in one language for messages in another language (Jakobson, 1959; De Ward and Nida, 1986). However, translation equivalence, whether it be formal or functional, is a correlate of contextual factors such as text type and audience, and it is essentially informed by the principle of relevance (Gutt 1996; Farghal 2004).

Being functional in language, euphemism should be relayed in translation because the failure to do so will result in a deficit in the degree of politeness in the TL text compared with that of the SL text. In the following

pages, we will see whether it is possible to render different types of Arabic euphemism into English. The discussion will center on figurative expressions, antonyms, circumlocutions, remodeling, ellipsis, understatements, overstatements, borrowings, and euphemizers as important euphemizing strategies.

Figurative Expressions

Figurative expressions are the most common device for euphemizing meaning in Arabic in areas such as death, bodily functions, marriage and sex, and so forth. These areas of human experience are, in fact, a common target for euphemism in natural language in general. Therefore, it is expected that euphemistic expressions between languages will be available in translation at varying degrees of correspondence.

First, let us consider the standard Arabic euphemism that views death in terms of a transference to another life and/or joining the supreme Agent, viz. *'intaqala 'ilaa rahmat-il-laah (ad-daar-il-'aaxira, daar-il-baqaa', ar-raiiq-il-'a'laa, jiwaarii rabbih)* 'Lit. He transferred to the mercy of God (the afterlife, the home of eternity, the supreme comrade, the neighborhood of his Lord).' The common divider in these death euphemisms is their inherent fatalistic viewpoint, which may be regarded as a hallmark of Arab culture in general (Farghal 1993a). As can be seen, the literal English translations may not work as equivalents for the Arabic euphemistic death terms above, which effectively find their way into the general unmarked Arabic register and succeed in conversationally implicating that 'the deceased will go to Heaven'. Although the general unmarked English register does not tolerate this fatalistic Arabic viewpoint, it euphemizes death by likening it to a journey in the expression 'He passed away', which can functionally correspond to the Arabic death terms above. More restrictively (i.e. in the religious register only), English euphemizes death in expressions like 'He went to his last home', 'He passed over to the great beyond', 'He answered the last call', 'He awoke to immortal life', 'He met his Maker', etc. Therefore, the translator may employ these marked English death euphemisms as functional equivalents to fatalistic Arabic death terms when translating religious texts only.

In the area of bodily functions and related facilities, both Arabic and English possess several euphemistic expressions that may perform similar functions. Witness the Quranic euphemisms and their English counterparts in (1) and (2) above, viz. *al-yaa'it* and *laamastum* can be euphemistically translated into 'defecation' and 'touching' in (1) respectively, and *wataran* can be euphemistically rendered as 'need' in (2). Also, observe the availability of the Arabic euphemistic expressions *dawrat miyaah* 'water cycle', *hammaam* 'bathroom', *bayt al-'adab* 'home of politeness', *bayt al-raahah* 'home of rest', *twaaleet* 'toilet', etc. for *mirhaad*, and the availability of the English euphemistic expressions 'toilet', 'lavatory', 'bathroom', 'restroom', 'powder room', etc. for the originally euphemistic expression 'water closet (WC)'. The translator, therefore, will find no difficulty in rendering Arabic euphemisms in this case.

However, there are some cases in which Arabic euphemism in this area may pose serious problems to the most professional translator. Following are Pickthall's and Arberry's translations of the Quranic verse *wa'in kuntum junban fattahharuu* (al-maa'idah, verse 6):

(3) And if ye are unclean, purify yourselves (Pickthall 1980:135).

(4) If you are defiled, purify yourselves (Arberry 1980, 1:128).

Notably, both translators were aware of the euphemistic expressions *junuban* in reference to 'having engaged in sexual activity' and *fattahharuu* in reference to 'bathing' and, as a result, attempted to improvise corresponding euphemistic English expressions, viz. they employed 'unclean' and 'defiled' for the former and 'purify' for the latter. In both cases, however, they overtranslated the Arabic euphemisms, which only instigate material interpretations ('having semen on oneself' and 'taking a bath', respectively), by using euphemistic expressions that can be interpreted mainly in a spiritual sense and marginally in a material sense. Farghal and Al-Masri (2000) show that a group of English native speakers interpreted (3) and (4) spiritually rather than materially, thus distorting the intended message in the Quranic verse above.² Apparently, the attempt to maintain these Quranic euphemisms in English translation has communicatively failed. By contrast, a euphemism-free English rendition in this case would have done the job smoothly and unambiguously, as can be seen in (5) below:

(5) If you have semen on yourselves, take a bath.

Finally, the area of sex and related matters may both converge and diverge between Arabic and English. On the one hand, Arabic and English converge on the avoidance of using explicit terms in reference to sexual intercourse and often employ euphemisms for this purpose. Both Arabic and English use euphemistic expressions such as *waq'a* 'have sex with', *naama ma'a* 'sleep with', and *taaraha al-yaraam* 'make love to'. On the other hand, Arabic euphemizes some related terms that are not euphemized in English. For example, the Arabic euphemisms *baa'i'atu hawan* 'a seller of love', *saahibatu-s-sawn wa-l-'afaaf* 'owner of maintenance and chastity', and *kariimah* 'daughter' are to be translated non-euphemistically into 'prostitute/whore', 'bride' and 'daughter', respectively. Clearly, the explicit reference to women in the Arab culture in general may create offence and it, as a result, calls for euphemizing. By contrast, reference to women involves no such cultural sensitivities, hence the absence of corresponding English euphemisms.

Antonyms

The use of antonyms in Arabic euphemisms is an interesting phenomenon. Examples include *mu'aafaa* 'healthy' for *mariid* 'sick', *baṣiir* 'sighted' for '*a'maa* 'blind', '*aa'iduun* 'returnees' for *laaji'uun* 'refugees', *majbuur* 'with a healing limb' for *maksuur* 'with a broken limb.' These positive expressions reflect the desired rather than the existing state of affairs and are reminiscent of another deeply-rooted tradition in Arab culture. Ugly personal names such as *jaḥṣ*

'Donkey' and *kulayb* 'Doggie' were given upon birth to keep envy away, viz. *zaynab bintu jahš* 'Zaynab, daughter of Donkey' was one of Prophet Mohammad's wives. Such proper names are still used in parts of the Arab world. In Egypt, for example, family names such as *al-hayawaan* 'animal' and *al-himaar* 'donkey' still designate big families. Apparently, the use of antonyms in euphemizing has taken an opposite direction from using negative terms, which are meant to drive envy or evil away.

In terms of translation, the euphemistic use of Arabic antonyms cannot be maintained in English translation. Words designating physical conditions/disabilities, for example, are not euphemized in English; hence, 'healthy' and 'sighted' may not be employed respectively to mean 'sick' and 'blind', the way it is in Arabic, other things being equal.³ Apparently, English does not utilize antonyms in euphemizing although auto-antonyms are quite common in it, e.g. 'to dust' can mean 'to remove fine particles from' or 'to sprinkle fine particles onto' and 'to root' can mean 'to remove completely' or 'to become firmly established'. Therefore, euphemistic Arabic auto-antonyms are doomed in English translation. The options available to translators range between overlooking the euphemistic use, for example, by rendering the euphemistic *mu'aafaa* into the non-euphemistic 'sick/ill' and reducing the supposedly negative effect on the receiver by resorting to paraphrase, for example, rendering the above Arabic euphemism as 'not feeling very well'.

Circumlocutions, Remodelings, and Ellipsis

Circumlocutions, another type of euphemism, paraphrase taboos or socially objectionable vocabulary. Examples of circumlocutions include *lam yuhaalifhu-l-hađ* 'Luck did not ally with him' instead of *fašila* 'He failed', *'i'tidaa' jinsii* 'sexual assault' for *'iytišaab* 'rape', *xiyaanah zawjiyyah* 'marriage betrayal' for *zinaa* 'adultery', and *tiġl ġayr šar'ii* 'illegitimate child' for *laqiit* 'bastard'. These Arabic euphemisms, as can be seen, spell out the meaning of their negative counterparts in a more acceptable way. Translation-wise, the above Arabic circumlocutions translate readily into 'He was not lucky', 'sexual assault', 'an affair outside marriage' and 'illegitimate child', respectively. Thus, euphemistic Arabic circumlocutions do not usually involve problems in English translation. This may be attributed to the fact that breaking down lexical meaning by way of circumlocution is a universal phenomenon in natural language, covering all aspects of vocabulary, including the euphemistic use.

For their part, remodelings essentially belong to vernacular Arabic and involve the twisting of the phonological structure of existing taboo expressions for a euphemistic purpose. Popular examples in the Levant may include euphemistic imprecatives such as *yil'an diikak/diixak* 'Damn your rooster/?' for *yil'an diinak* 'Damn your religion' and *yil'an hariišak* 'Damn your ...?' instead of *yil'an hariimak* 'Damn your kinswomen'. As can be noted, such euphemistic imprecatives employ vague and/or nonce words for remodeling their taboo counterparts, in order to lessen their original counterparts' negative effects. In English, the translator may employ the general, dummy imprecative 'Damn it' as

a counterpart for such expressions or, alternatively, 'Sugar!' as a euphemistic remodeling of the familiar English imprecative 'Shit!'. However, if the original imprecative is found, the translator may render it literally, such as 'Damn your religion' and 'Damn your kinswomen'. In some cases, remodelings utilize open-ended words such as the popular euphemistic Egyptian imprecative *yabni-l-eeh* 'son of what' and the Levantine counterpart *yabni-l-laḏiina* 'son of those'. These euphemistic imprecatives are used instead of their potentially obscene counterparts, e.g. *yabni-l-kalb* 'son of a dog', *yabni-l-šarmuūṭah* 'son of a prostitute'. In terms of translation, the euphemistic English imprecative 'Son of a gun', which remodels the obscene 'Son of a bitch', can be effectively used as a functional equivalent in such cases. It should be noted, however, that the obscene imprecative and its euphemistic counterpart in Arabic are gender-marked, viz. *yabni-li-kalb* 'Son of a dog' vs. *yabinti-l-kalb* 'Daughter of a dog', whereas the corresponding English imprecative is gender unmarked, i.e. 'Son of a bitch' can be addressed to both males and females; hence 'Daughter of a bitch' is not acceptable in English. The same thing applies to the euphemistic version, that is, it is gender-marked in Arabic but its English counterpart is gender-unmarked.

A related euphemizing Arabic process is ellipsis. Here the speaker falls short of uttering the complete taboo expression. Examples of elliptical expressions such as *'axu-l ...* 'Brother of ...', *yabn-il ...* 'Son of ...' and *bint-il ...* 'Daughter of ...' function as incomplete imprecatives. Ellipsis can also be observed in English as a means of euphemizing when the speaker falls short of the lexeme 'bitch' by saying 'Son of ----'. In some cases and for the purpose of euphemizing, the imprecative formula is completed with a general and/or irrelevant word instead of an obscene one. Examples include the flippant Egyptian euphemistic imprecative *yabnil eeh* 'Son of what!' and the Levantine flippant imprecatives *yil'an šuylak* 'Damn your work' and *yil'an rooma* 'Damn Rome', among others. Similarly, English may utilize the tag 'you know what' to avoid obscene expressions, for example, 'Son of, you know what' instead of 'Son of a bitch'. To further observe how such strategies can be employed in Arabic, let us consider the following excerpt (both the Arabic text and the English translation) from Najeeb Mahfuz's *Awlaad Haritnaa* (1959), which Stewart translated into English as *Children of Geblawi* (1981):

(6) qaala 'arafa fii ṭiqatin laa ḥadda la-haa muxaaṭiban al-mu'allim-a
said Arafa in confidence no limit for-it addressing DEF-boss-ACC

(wa-huwa yuṭii-hi dawaa'-a aḍ-ḍa'f-i
and-he was giving-him medicine-ACC DEF-weakness-GEN

al-jinsiyy-i): qamḥah min-hu 'alaa funjaan šaay qabil 'adam
DEF-sex-GEN grain from-it on cup tea before without

mu'aaxaḏih bisaa'teen wa-ba'da-ha 'immaa tarḍaa 'an maḥsuub-ak
blame two hours and-after-it either satisfied with me-you

‘arafa wa-’immaa taṭrudu-hu min-al-ḥarah
 Arafa and-or kick-him from-DEF-neighborhood

(7) Arafa with boundless confidence (as he introduces a medicine for sexual weakness to the Trustee): "A grain of that in a cup of tea, two hours before making love, and afterwards either you'll be pleased with me or you can chase me away with your curse."

The Arabic text above avoids the explicit mention of 'sexual intercourse' by invoking the bolded euphemistic expression, which flouts the maxim of relevance and, in effect, refers to sexual intercourse by way of conversational implicature. By contrast, the English translation refers explicitly to sexual intercourse by a lexical euphemism 'making love'. In this way, the pragmatic Arabic euphemism, which is contextually interpreted, is relayed as a lexical euphemism, which is context-independent in terms of interpretation. As a result, the English translation does not maintain the same level of politeness encapsulated in the implicitness of the Arabic euphemism. To preserve the intact politeness of the Arabic text, the translator can adopt a similar euphemizing strategy in English by using a general phrase or an interjection, viz. 'before the thing' and 'before, you know what', respectively.

Understatements and Overstatements

Euphemistic expressions may manifest themselves in understatements. The Arabic word *naksa* 'setback' constitutes a classic example that came into frequent official use after the Arab-Israeli 1967 Six-day War as a euphemism for *hazimah* 'defeat.' This euphemism was not just a word. It provided the Arab world with a psychological frame of reference through which the late Nasser of Egypt, King Hussein of Jordan, and Al-Atasi of Syria were to emerge as heroes from that humiliating war. In terms of translation, 'A spade should be called a spade' in this case; therefore, *naksa* (in reference to that war) is translated into 'defeat' in natural English discourse and only a pretentious Arab-created English text would refer to it as 'setback'. Similarly, the familiar Arabic euphemism 'amaliyyah 'istiṣḥādiyyah' instead of 'amaliyyah 'intiḥāriyyah' is non-euphemistically translated into 'suicide attack/operation' or, sometimes, dysphemistically into 'terrorist attack'.⁴ Other examples include *yusaffii jasadīyyan* 'Lit. purify physically' instead of *yaytaal* 'assassinate', which can be euphemistically translated into 'liquidate', and *al-'islaamiyyuun al-mutaṭarrīfuun*, which is often euphemistically translated into 'Muslim activists/fundamentalists' or 'Islamists' (*an-naaṣituun al-'islaamiyyuun*, *al-'islaamiyyuun al-'uṣūliyyuun*, and *al-'islaamiyyuun*, respectively) instead of the non-euphemistic 'Muslim extremists/ fanatics'.

Conversely, some euphemisms may be realized as overstatements or hyperboles. An interesting recent example is 'umm-il-ma'aarik as used by the ex-Iraqi regime instead of the neutral *ḥarb-il-xaliij-i-ṯaaniyah* 'Second Gulf

War of 1991', which was readily translated into 'Mother of all battles'. However, the Arabic euphemism and its seemingly English counterpart functioned differently. Whereas the Arabic expression originally showed pride in and solidarity with Iraq in its confrontation with the United States and her allies, the English expression was employed humorously and dysphemistically. Therefore, the apparently euphemistic English translation constitutes an antithesis of euphemizing.⁵ Interestingly enough; the Arabic expression came to develop the humorous and dysphemistic use after the humiliating defeat of Iraq in that war. Another recent example is the euphemistic expression *yazwit waašintun wa niyuurk* 'Campaign of Washington and New York' for *hujuum-il-ħaadii 'ašar min sibtambar* 'September 11th attack' in the words of Ben Laden and his followers, which, given the massive volume of the tragedy, never found its way into English discourse, the way 'Mother of all battles' did. This example delves deep into history in search of a phraseology that would revive Islamic religious sentiment and include fresh positive attitudes. In terms of normative Islamic practice, the use of *yazwit* is associated only with the campaigns led by the Prophet Mohammad. The infringement of this tacit agreement among Muslims stems from Ben Laden's awareness of the positive associations of the said term; hence, he purposely used it to euphemize an otherwise objectionable act of terror.

Borrowings

Euphemisms in Arabic may also arise as a result of borrowing foreign words. One of the most common euphemisms of this type is the use of the loan-word *madaam* 'madam' for *zawja* or *marah* 'wife' in many urban areas of the Arab world because it carries a more positive attitude. Other examples include *twaaleet* 'toilet' for *mirħaad* 'toilet', *kwaafeer* 'coiffeur' instead of *ħalaqa* 'barber' and *suubarmaakit* 'supermarket' for *dukkaan* 'shop'. Sociolinguistically, the use of such foreign loans instead of the native counterparts is usually taken to be indicative of the speaker's high level of education and social class. In terms of translation, euphemizing by borrowing represents zero translation whereby the foreign loan preserves its form (though phonologically naturalized) as well as its meaning (which may sometimes undergo semantic modification).

Euphemizers

Arabic is rich in formulaic expressions that are intended to soften the impact of mentioning a taboo or a socially non-preferred expression involving reference to topics such as death, betrayal, failure, and objectionable animals/items. Consequently, I will call such expressions 'euphemizers'. Examples include *laa samah* 'allaah wa laa qaddar 'Lit. May not God permit nor predestine this', 'allaah yihfaḍ maqaamak 'Lit. May God preserve your status', *ba'iid 'annak* 'Lit. May this be far from you', etc. These popular Arabic euphemizers are reminiscent of some archaic English euphemizers such as 'Perish the thought', which are rarely encountered in modern English discourse. It should be noted that Arabic vernaculars as remote from each other as Jordanian Arabic and

Moroccan Arabic utilize varying versions of such euphemizers. For example, Moroccan Arabic and Jordanian Arabic respectively employ the euphemizer *ḥaaṣaak* and *ḥiiṣaak* 'May this not apply to you' right after the mention of what is deemed to be socially objectionable, for example, references to shoes, animals such as donkeys and pigs, and negative attributes such as reckless and stupid. Other euphemizers from Jordanian Arabic include *bala gaafyih* 'without double meaning, i.e., take what I said at face value' and *bala zuṣrah* 'when asking someone about his tribal affiliation' (For more details, see Farghal, 2002).

In terms of translation into English, these Arabic euphemizers can be problematic because present-day English largely lacks the existence of formulaic expressions in this aspect of human interaction. However, English manages to soften the mention of socially non-preferred or objectionable phrases by general expressions such as 'I'm sorry to say' and 'excuse my language'. Therefore, when the taboo expression obtains in both languages, Arabic euphemizers are translatable into English. By contrast, if the taboo Arabic expression is not taboo in English, such euphemizers are doomed in translation. The examples in (8) and (9) illustrate this point:

- (8) a. muḥammad-un muḥtaal-un **ba'iid** 'ann-ak
 Mohammed-NOM cheat-NOM far from-you
 'Lit. Mohammed is a cheat, may this be far from you.'
 b. Mohammed is a cheat, I'm sorry to say.
- (9) a. 'ayna al-ḥammaam-u 'ajalla-ka 'allah-u
 Where DEF-bathroom-NOM elevate-you God-NOM
 'Lit. Where's the bathroom, **may God elevate you?**'
 b. Where's the bathroom?

As can be seen, the bolded Arabic euphemizer in (8a) can be rendered as the bolded English general expression in (8b) because socially tabooed expressions in (8) coincide between the two languages. By contrast, the bolded Arabic euphemizer in (9a) is doomed in English translation because what is socially tabooed in Arabic, i.e. *ḥammam* 'bathroom' is not socially tabooed in English, hence the use of the omission strategy in (9b). To shed more light on this subtle aspect of Arabic discourse, let us examine an authentic translation example from Mahfuz's *Awlaad Haritnaa* (1959), along with its English translation from Stewart's *Children of Geblawi* (1981):

- (10) wa sa'ala-hu qadrii al-naaḍir: hal min jadiid-in
 and asked-him Qadri DEF-Principal: Q from new-GEN

'an zawju-ka?
 about wife-your

fa-'ajaaba 'arafa wa-hwa yattaxiḍu majlisa-hu 'ilaa jaanib-i-
 hi:

then-answered (he) Arafa and-he taking seat-his to side-
GEN-his

‘aniid-ah ka-l-bayl rabbu-naa yihfaḏ maqaam-ak
stubborn-she as-DEF-mule God-ours preserve status-your

- (11) Kadri (the Chief) asked Arafa: "Any news of your wife"?
Arafa answered as he sat down beside him:
"Stubborn as a mule!"

As can be observed, the translator, P. Stewart, unjustifiably opted for omitting the Arabic euphemizer in translation. Had Stewart given it a deeper thought, he would have captured the Arabic euphemizer by rendering it into general euphemistic English expressions such as 'I'm afraid to say' or 'excuse my language'. Thus omission, which may be adopted when there is no correspondence in social taboos between the two languages, is inadvertently applied in (11) above.

4. Conclusion

The paper shows that Arabic euphemism is a rich lexical resource that utilizes a variety of euphemizing strategies, which aim to avoid offence and improvise politeness in communication. The translator, whose task is to produce a TL text that bears a close semantic and semiotic resemblance to the SL text, should consider euphemism when translating from Arabic into English. The failure to do so will affect the level of politeness between the two languages.

In terms of strategy, Arabic and English, in the main, seem to operate similar euphemizing methods including metaphorical expressions, remodeling, ellipsis, circumlocutions, and under- and over-statements. However, the translator should guard against a register differential when considering euphemistic correspondences. In particular, s/he should be aware of the fact that the Arab culture, in contrast with the English/American culture, is overwhelmingly fatalistic. This fact, for example, may create a situation where an Arabic euphemistic expression, which belongs to the general, unmarked register, will mistakenly call for a corresponding English euphemistic expression, which belongs to the religious, marked register. This kind of apparent correspondence, in particular, abounds in the area of death terms between the two languages.

In some cases, the Arabic euphemistic nuance is doomed in English translation. Arabic euphemistic antonyms are a clear case for which no lexical correspondence can be found in English. Another familiar example involves Arabic euphemizers, which hardly find corresponding formulaic expressions in English. However, the translator may compensate such euphemizers by employing general English softening expressions if there is a correspondence in

the socially tabooed item between the two languages. In the absence of such taboo correspondence, the Arabic euphemizer is subject to omission in English translation.

Finally, in a few cases the psychology of the audience in the two languages may create a mismatch at the attitudinal rather than the phraseological level. The overall mood of the SL audience and TL audience derives mainly from social or subjective reality rather than objective reality. Thus, what embraces a euphemistic use in the SL may come to embrace a dysphemistic use in the TL.

Notes

1. On the one hand, grammaticalizing meaning by using the Open Principle (Sinclair, 1991) may differ between languages. For example, Arabic may use the cognate accusative to express emphasis (*šatama-l-mudiira šatman* 'He insulted the manager insulting', whereas English may not. Instead, English may use the auxiliary verb 'do' to express emphasis, viz. 'He did insult the manager' (for more on cognate accusatives, see Farghal 1992, 1993b). On the other hand, meaning may be idiomatized differently across languages. For instance, the Arabic thanking formula in response to an inquiry about health usually includes thanking God, whereas the corresponding English formula usually includes thanking the inquirer rather than God, thus the Arabic formula literally translates into 'I'm fine, thank God' rather than 'I'm fine, thank you'.
2. Here are some sample interpretations of 'unclean' and 'defiled' by the subjects:
 - *atheists, worshippers of idols, murderers, common criminals and thieves.*
 - *possibly sinners – those who have done wrong against society or others.*
 - *eaten the wrong food, unwashed, morally corrupt.*
 - *criminal people, atheists.*
 - *any sinner in a biblical sense, anyone from a leper or a whore to an outcast or a low class person.*
 - *have touched certain criminals, dead people, etc.*
3. However, the speaker may effectively flout the maxim of Quality (Grice 1975) and, as a result, create irony where the opposite of what is said is intended, i.e. 'healthy' can be ironically employed to mean 'sick'.
4. The dysphemistic use of lexical items in language takes an opposite directionality from euphemism by injecting the lexical item with a negative rather than a positive attitude. For further details about this phenomenon, see Farghal (1995).
5. This English translation was intralingually remodeled in 'Mother of all bombs' in reference to an American mammoth bomb that had lately been used in Afghanistan and Iraq by the Americans. However, the remodeling came to lose

its humorous and dysphemistic interpretation in favor of a euphemistic use intended to avoid the mention of the massive destruction that the bomb may cause when used. The new English expression was readily translated into 'umm-il-qanaabil in Arabic, though with a rather negative than positive attitude.

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