

## **TRANSLATIONAL MISCUES IN MODERN ARABIC VERSE: A CASE STUDY**

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### **1. Concept of Miscue**

Historically, the term 'miscue' was first employed by Goodman (1962) where he develops a system for comparing expected oral reading responses with observed oral reading responses. His system is concerned with meaning and how it changes when miscues occur both at the word and sentence levels. To show the importance of miscues, he argues that the written language becomes parallel to the oral language in a literate society. To him, reading (the process through which miscues occur) is a psycholinguistic process involving the use of language in its written form to get to meaning, which may be twisted by misreading a word or a sentence .

Subsequent work has focused on the interaction between different cue systems in the reading process (i.e. phonetic, graphic, syntactic, and semantic systems). Chafe (1970) views the reconstruction of meaning as the function of all these systems together, arguing that attempts to separate them is merely a linguistic tradition. Similarly, Burke (1981) explains that it is impossible to deal with any of these systems without addressing the others since they are interrelated. For his part Sims ("1976)\_\_, states that substitutions, insertions, omissions, or reversals, which cause the most frequent miscues, may occur at the sound, morpheme, word, phrase, and clause levels, arguing that (p.49) "In order to gain a fuller understanding of the reading process and of the miscue phenomena, one must examine miscues, not simply as changes involving individual words, but as phenomena which occur in a total language context" (cf. Mont oro 1976).

Also, there has been emphasis in the existing miscue research on the interaction between the reader and the text. Rausch (1976) argues that words in the reading process possess a semantic relationship in the mind of the reader in a way such that he will anticipate the forthcoming word from the previous one, with the possibility that the reader may come up with a substitution that has no semantic relationship with the expected response. He concludes that (p.55) "The preservation of meaning through restructuring plus substitutions that vary from zero to close semantic relationship with the original reflects a strong awareness of meaning without close attention to individual words." Along the same lines, Page (1976) considers reading as a process in which the reader attempts to reconstruct the author's meaning. According to him, meaning in the context of miscue analysis is treated as "analogy, or the relationship between the reader's idea and what the idea represents", emphasizing the interrelation between meaning and knowledge during the comprehension process. Finally, Durkin (1978) considers any deviation from what is printed as a miscue because deviation alters the meaning of words and sentences. She divides miscues into four types: substituting one word for another, inserting a word, omitting a word, and inability to identify a word.

## 2. Translational Miscues

Translating involves many types of problems, some of which relate to *reading*, which is, according to Encarta 97 Encyclopedia, "An activity characterized by the translation of symbols or letters into words and sentences that have meaning to the individual." Therefore, the ultimate goal of reading is to be able to understand written material, to evaluate it, and to use it for one's own needs. Translational miscues may be viewed as the written traces of what is assumed to have been oral miscues during the reading process. They may be phonological, morphological, syntactic, or semantic. It should be noted that the area of translational miscues is still virgin ground as the existing miscue literature is dedicated to examining miscues in terms of education rather than in terms of translation. This paper, therefore, is meant to bridge this gap by systematically presenting a translational account of miscues, which are posited to form a subcategory of translational mistakes (i.e. mistranslations) and a completely different category from translational errors (Pym 1992: 178-9).

The question that poses itself now is: How do translational miscues form a special subcategory of translational mistakes? To answer this query, one must look for a procedural distinction. On the one hand, translational mistakes result from

... conscious decision-making while the translator is not aware of the fact that s/he is committing a mistake. Translational miscues, on the other hand, are due to an accidental and/or subconscious phenomenon that involves minimal decision-making while the translator is not aware of the fact that s/he is committing a miscue. In this way, a translational miscue must be based on a mistaken oral response during the decoding process in reading, while a translational mistake may result from a host of other factors such as deficiency in language competence and inability to grasp a proposition.

Translational miscues may occur both at the word and the phrase/clause levels. At the word level, they may result from misreading one letter or more in a word, or from misassigning phonetically-unrealized vowels within a word, or from calling up a sense of the word that is incongruent with the context in question. The situation at the phrase/clause level is similar as miscues may bring about serious distortions of the meaning by assigning erroneous grammatical relations which are usually signified by phonetically-unrealized case markers in Arabic or by invoking irrelevant composite senses of phrases/clauses.

The present study addresses itself to translational miscues in modern Arabic' verse, namely in a collection of poems entitled *Victims of a Map*, which consists of a select group of poems by three renowned contemporary Arab poets, viz. M. Darwish, S. Al-Qasim, and A. Adonis as translated into English by Abdullah Al-Udhari (1984). While translational miscues may turn out to pertain to translating from Arabic into other languages in general as Arabic is highly rich in phonetically- unrealized vowelling and/or case-assignment and an elaborate network of lexical ambiguity (among other sense relations), the translating task will often be more complex and challenging when it comes to modern Arabic poetry . Ismail(1972: 174) has the following to say about this complexity .

*The orientation of the neo-: poetic movement  
experience deals with language in a special and  
innovative 1-vay. [our translation}*

Such a creative use of language in modern Arabic verse is expected to furnish rich soil for translational miscues. In this spirit, Pickering and Hooper (1982: 570) write that "No word in great poetry can be moved or replaced without harming or changing the whole" and that (p.568) "This careful. Use of language [in poetry] is the most significant difference between ordinary prose and poetry."

Moreover, modern poetry is viewed as a new experience. The modern poem, argues Adonis (1978), is a case rather than a mere group of words and meanings. Similarly, Lewis (1969: 113) contends that "The modern poet then is faced with a difficulty of communication as great in its way as the difficulty presented by his subject matter." Thus, unlike non-poetic discourse, the importance of Manner may greatly exceed the importance of Matter in verse. To this effect, Boutlon (1977: 152) writes:

*Poetry is made of words and obviously, the choice of words is important in poetry; indeed, in a sense it is the whole art of writing poetry.*

### 3. Phonological Miscues

Sims (1976: 46) defines sub morphemic (i.e. phonological) miscues as "those which involve changes of one or two phoneme sequences within a word." The reader may substitute one vowel sound for another, e.g. *care* for *car* and *gave* for *give*, or one phoneme sequence for another, e.g. *kisser* for *killer*, or omit or add a sound, e.g. *right* for *bright* and *see* for *seed*, or make a reversal of the phonemes, e.g. *skate* for *steak* and *kiss* for *sick*.

This type of miscues is very common in reading Arabic, especially in vowels where we have long and short vowels enjoying a wide distribution. Consequently, we find a large number of words featuring the same radicals but different vowels. For instance, the word *liilm* means 'patience, forbearance, discrement, arid gentleness', while the word *liulm* means, 'a dream'. It should be noted that such vowel differences are mostly unrealized phonetically and if they are phonetically realized, they will be superscripted or subscripted depending on the intended lexical meaning. Vowel miscues may seriously distort the intended meaning in the translation of verse as can be illustrated by the following example taken from Adonis's poem ج ج-و 'Psalm' along with its English translation:

يقبل أعزل كالغابة وكالغيم لا يُردُّ، وأمس حمل قارة  
ونقل البحر من مكانه.  
يرسم قفا النهار، يصنع من قدميه نهاراً ويستعير حذاء  
الليل ثم ينتظر ما لا يأتي.  
حيث يصير الحجر بحيرة والظل مدينة، يحيا - يحيا ويضللُ  
اليأس، ماحياً فسحة الأمل، راقصاً للتراب كي يتشاءب،  
وللشجر كي ينام.  
وها هو يعلن تقاطع الأطراف، ناقشاً على جبين عصرنا  
علامة السحر.

He comes unarmed like a forest, like a destined  
cloud.

Yesterday he carried a continent and changed the  
position of the sea.

He paints the back of day and creates daylight out of  
his feet, borrows the night's shoes and waits for  
What will not come.

He lives where the stone becomes a lake, the shadow  
a city - he lives and fools despair, wiping out the  
vastness of hope, dancing for the soil so it can yawn,  
for the trees so they can sleep.

And here he is speaking of crossroads, drawing the  
magic sign on the forehead of time.

In this poem, Adonis intratextually (for more on inter-, intra-, and  
contratextuality, see Martin 1985, Lemke 1985, and Hatim 1997) creates a  
vivid image where his subject performs extraordinary actions, viz.  
"carrying a continent", "painting the back of day", "creating daylight out of  
his feet",

"fooling despair" and "wiping out the vastness of hope", among others.  
This intratextual weaving of the image culminates in his subject' drawing

The sign of daybreak on the forehead of time", thus intertextually  
establishing an oft-cited association between a physical phenomenon  
(daybreak) and a spiritual phenomenon (hope), which, together, function  
as a declaration of freedom in the Palestinian context. Being unaware of  
this poetic discourse, the translator fell victim to a phonological miscue  
(substituting [i] for [a] whereby he misread the key word السحر [al-  
sahar]

'daybreak' as *السحر* [al-sihr] 'magic', and subsequently missed the intended meaning altogether in his translation.

Sometimes, the phonological miscue constitutes the replacement of a consonant with another as can be illustrated by the following stanza from Adonis's poem *اغنية 'A Song'* along with its English translation:

من يعطيني ورقة أجملها أكداً من البخور والصندل  
 أنقظها كالعروس وأجلوها  
 أقرأ عليها سورة مريم  
 أهز فوقها جذوعي من الشوق والحلم  
 وأرسلها إلي أحبائي  
 مليئة كالتفاحة  
 خفيفة وخضراء كمهرة الخضراء!

Who will give me a piece of paper to wrap incense  
 and sandalwood,  
 Adorn it with dots like a bride's make-up, polish it,  
 Bless it with the Koran's praise of the Madonna,  
 Shake my roots of longing and dreams over it  
 And send it to the loved ones,  
 Full like an apple,  
 Fine and green like Khadir's colt.

In this stanza, the translator fell victim to a phonological miscue by replacing the pharyngeal consonant [c] with [r], thus *translating juuzl* 'branches' as *juuur* 'roots', and consequently disrupted the coherence of the poetic discourse, which is established through intertextualizing with the highly celebrated Quranic verse in which *Allah* asks Maryam [Virgin Mary] to shake the branch of the palm tree in order to get fresh dates, viz.

(Maryam: 25) *و هزي اليك بجذع النخلة تساقط عليك رطبا جنيا*  
 did the

translator obliterate this intertextual web, but he also failed to furnish coherence in the poetic discourse as, in the most creative poetic context, one cannot imagine the shaking of roots over something, for roots are not to be shaken and if ever -they were, the possibility of shaking them over something else is eliminated due to their being located underground and/or deep inside.

The same phonological miscue occurs in Al-Udhari's translation of the following stanza from Darwish's poem *نساءر كالناس* "We Travel Like

Other People", where a metaphor that is developed intratextually is disrupted:

نساء كالناس , لكننا لا نعود الى اي شيء .  
 كأن السفر طريق الغيوم . دفنا احبتنا في ظلام الغيوم و بين جذوع الشجر  
 و قلنا لزوجاتنا : لدن منا مئات السنين لنكمل هذا الرحيل  
 الى ساعة من بلاد , و متر من المستحيل

We travel like other people, but we return to nowhere. As if  
 travelling  
 Is the way of the clouds. We have buried our loved ones in the  
 darkness of the clouds, between the roots of the trees.  
 And we said to our wives: go on giving birth to people like us  
 for hundreds of years so we can complete this journey  
 To the hour of a country, to a metre of the impossible.

It should be noted that the poet in the above stanza wants to communicate the message that the action at hand is not an ordinary burial in that the loved ones are not buried underground (i.e. between the roots of trees) but rather in the darkness of clouds and between the branches of trees. This creative poetic metaphor is designed to show that formal attributes of human activities may not signify their authentic nature, e.g. 'travelling' as a human activity would be genuine only and only if 'the traveler' would return to a free homeland, which does not obtain in the Palestinian context, to which the poet is schematically making reference. In effect, it is the intratextual twinning of the out-of-the-ordinary poetic image and the socio-cultural realities of the communicative context that brings meaningfulness to the above text. This being the case, the translational miscue in this poem amounts to offering a fleshless skeleton insofar as poetic discourse is concerned.

Our last example of phonological miscues comes from Adonis's poem 'The Desert (The Diary of Beirut Under siege, 1982)' and involves the substitution of the ulottal ston ['] in *a!-* 'amal' 'hope' for the [r] in *al-ram'll* 'sand', as can be illustrated below:

شجر ينحني ليقول وداعا  
 زهر يتفتح , يز هو , ينكس اوراقه ليقول وداعا  
 طرق كالفواصل بين التنفس و الكلمات تقول وداعا  
 جسد يلبس الرمل , يسقط في تيهه ليقول وداعا  
 ورق يعشق الحبر  
 و الابدية و الشعراء يقول وداعا  
 و القصيدة قالت وداعا .

Trees bow to say goodbye  
 Flowers open, glow, lower their leaves to say goodbye,  
 Roads like pauses between the breathing and the words say  
     goodbye,  
 A body wears hope, falls in a wilderness to say goodbye,  
 The papers that love ink,  
 The alphabet, the poets say goodbye,  
 And the poem says goodbye.

The stanza above demonstrates the poet's deep pessimism by making everything bid farewell as if an imminent, overall disaster were to take place. In such an atmosphere, there is no room for 'hope', viz. 'A body wears [wearing] hope', which can only be an indication of a vision of life, despite the fact that the original phrase, viz. 'A body wearing sand' can only be an indication of 'death'. This being the case, the phonological miscue inadvertently replaces a thought-world of death with a thought-world of hope.

#### 4. Morphological Miscues

The morphological miscues discussed in this section belong exclusively to inflectional morphology. It should be noted that inflectional morphemes may constitute an integral part of poetic discourse in that they may be thematically employed to communicate ideological moves. Consequently, the translator of verse must be aware of the nuances of meaning deployed by such grammatical elements. To get started, let us examine two translational miscues relating to singularity vs. plurality in poetic discourse. The following extract is taken from Darwish's *إذا كان لي ان اعيد البداية* "If I were to Start All Over Again".

إذا كان لي ان اعيد البداية , اختار ما اخترت : ورد السياج  
 اسافر ثانية في الدروب التي قد تؤدي و قد لاتؤدي الى قرطبة .  
 اعلق ظلي على صخرتين لتبني الطيور الشريدة عشا على غصن ظلي

If I were to start all over again I'd choose what I had  
     chosen: the roses on the fence.  
 I'd travel again on the road which may or may not  
     lead to Cordova.  
 I'd hang my shadow on two rocks for the fugitive  
     birds to build a nest on my shadow's branch,

As can be seen, the translator inadvertently rendered the plural  $\gamma.9J1$  'the roads' as the singular  $\text{الدرب}$  'the road' and consequently caused serious damage to the poetic discourse. That is, by speaking about many roads, the poet intends to communicate the message that he has many options where some lead to Cordova and some do not. In contrast, by restricting this state of affairs to one road, the translator obliterates the proposition of choice and, as a consequence, distorts the conveyed meaning.

Later on in the same poem, Al-Udhari had another translational miscue by rendering the singular  $\text{وردتي}$  'my rose' and  $\text{خطوتي}$  'my step' as the plural 'my roses' and 'my steps', respectively, as can be seen below:

أعودُ، إذا كان لي أن أعود، إلى وردتي نفسها وإلى خطوتي  
نفسها  
ولكنني لا أعودُ إلى قُرْبَةِ.

I will return if I have to return to my roses, to my steps,  
But I will never go back to Cordova.

It is unfortunate that the translator erased the symbolism embodied in the uniqueness of the signifieds which the poet deploys, viz.  $\text{وردتي}$  'my rose' and  $\text{خطوتي}$  'my step' by translating them into 'my roses' and 'my steps', respectively. It should be clear that the poet is making reference to unique entities, that is, 'my rose' to symbolize 'his occupied homeland (Palestine)' and 'my step' to symbolize 'his infancy', but the translation, sadly, betrays the poetic discourse by dispensing with the encapsulated intimacy and uniqueness, thus reducing the symbolism to mere reference to ordinary belongings.

Another area for morphological miscues is possessive markers in poetic discourse as can be illustrated by the following example from Darwish's poem  $\text{مطر ناعم في خريف بعيد}$  'A Gentle Rain in a Distant Autumn':

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>A gentle rain in a distant autumn<br/>And the birds are blue, are blue,<br/>And the earth is a feast.<br/>The birds have flown to a time which will<br/>not return.<br/>You'd like to know my country?<br/>And what's between us?<br/>My country is the joy of being in chains,</p> | <p>مطر ناعم في خريف بعيد<br/>والعصافير زرقاء .. زرقاء<br/>والأرض عيد.<br/>والعصافير طارت إلى زمن لا<br/>يعود<br/>وتريدون أن تعرفي وطني؟<br/>والذي بيننا؟<br/>- وطني لذة في القيود</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

A kiss sent in the post.  
All I want  
From the country which slaughtered me  
Is my mother's handkerchief  
And reasons for a new death.

- قُبِّلْتِي أُرْسَلَتْ فِي الْبَرِيدِ  
وَأَنَا لَا أُرِيدُ  
مِنْ بِلَادِي الَّتِي ذَبَحْتَنِي  
غَيْرَ مَنْدِيلِ أُمِّي  
وَأَسْبَابِ مَوْتٍ جَدِيدٍ ..

The translational miscue in the above stanza impersonalizes a personal entity, viz. 'my kiss' is rendered as 'a kiss' and consequently marginalizes the poet's intimacy to his homeland, for the poet is identifying occupied Palestine with his own kiss rather than with a kiss understood generically.

Further, Arabic comparative and superlative forms may constitute a major area for translational miscues. The following poem (the Golden Age) by Adonis is an illustrative example:

"Take him away, Officer ..."  
"Sir, I know the gallows  
Are waiting for me  
But I'm only a poet worshipping my fire  
And I love Golgotha."

- "جُرِّهْ يَا شَرِطِي ..."  
- "سَيِّدِي أَعْرِفُ أَنَّ الْمَقْصَلَةَ  
بِانتِظَارِي  
غَيْرِ أَنِّي شَاعِرٌ أَعْبُدُ نَارِي  
وَأُحِبُّ الْجَلْجَلَةَ."

"Take him away, Officer!  
Tell him: The Officer's boot  
Is handsomer than your face."

- "جُرِّهْ يَا شَرِطِي"  
قُلْ لَهُ إِنَّ حِذَاءَ الشَّرِطِيِّ  
هُوَ مِنْ وَجْهِكَ أَجْمَلُ."

Age of the golden boot  
You are the handsomest and most  
expensive.

أَهْ يَا عَصْرَ الْحِذَاءِ الذَّهَبِيِّ  
أَنْتِ أَغْلَى أَنْتِ أَجْمَلُ.

The translator, being insensitive to the significance of comparative and superlative forms in poetic discourse, relayed the comparative 'more expensive' as the superlative 'most expensive' and the comparative 'handsomer' as the superlative 'handsomest'. Notably, the poet's diction is based on a comparison of two items and should not be construed in an absolute sense or as relative to choice among a multiplicity of items. Therefore, the translator's option for the superlative instead of the comparative forms amounts to a major distortion of the message, that is, the juxtaposition of power (i.e. the golden shoes representing the occupiers) with weakness (i.e. the poet's folks under occupation) is completely erased in the translation.

An equally interesting translational miscue relating to comparatives and superlatives comes from the translation of Al-Qasim's poem 'End of a Discussion with a Jailer' as can be shown below:

|                                     |                         |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| From the window of my small cell    | من كُوةِ زنانتِي الصغرى |
| I can see trees smiling at me,      | أبصر أشجاراً تبسّم لي   |
| Roofs filled with my people,        | وسطوحاً يملأها أهلي     |
| Windows weeping and praying for me. | ونوافذ تبكي وتصلّي      |
| From the window of my small cell    | من أجلي                 |
| I can see your large cell.          | من كُوةِ زنانتِي الصغرى |
|                                     | أبصر زنانتك الكبرى      |

Most importantly, the poet's use of the superlative forms *الصغرى* and *الكبرى* must be construed in an absolute rather than relative sense if it were to communicate the schema the poet is working with. The translator, however, inadvertently relayed the superlative forms in question into gradable adjectives, viz. 'small' and 'large', respectively. As a result, the translator's option distorts the poetic thought-world by interpreting these superlative forms, which are supposed to be taken in an absolute sense, i.e., 'micro-cell' and 'macro-cell' respectively, in a relative sense. The movement from ungradability to gradability, i.e., 'micro-' and 'macro-' vs. 'small' and 'large' cripples the poetic discourse encapsulated in the symbolism of the poem, that is, 'the macro-cell' represents 'the entire (occupied Palestine) homeland (Palestine)'. In effect, the poetic schema takes a concrete entity (the macro-cell) as a point of departure for initiating a symbolic entity (occupied Palestine). Unfortunately, this area of cognitive correspondence between the two entities is lost altogether in the translation above.

## 5. Syntactic Miscues

Translational miscues in the area of syntax manifest themselves at the phrase and clause levels. At the phrase level, miscues in poetic discourse relate mainly to the Arabic phrase called *المضاف و المضاف اليه* 'Construction of Addition', which is sometimes interpreted inadvertently as adjectival rather than additive by translators. Following are illustrative examples from Darwish's poem *عندما يذهب الشهداء الى النوم* 'When the Martyrs Go to Sleep'.

عندما يذهب الشهداء إلى النوم أصحو، وأحرسهم من هواة الرثاء  
أقول لهم: تصبحون على وطن، من سحابٍ ومن شجر، من سرابٍ وماء  
أهنتهم بالسلامة من حادث المستحيل، ومن قيمة المذبح الفائضة  
وأسرق وقتاً لكي يسرقوني من الوقت. هل كلنا شهداء؟

When the martyrs go to sleep I wake up to guard  
them against professional mourners.

I say to them: I hope you wake in a country with  
clouds and trees, mirage and water.

I congratulate them on their safety from the  
incredible event, from the surplus-value of the  
slaughter.

I steal time so they can snatch me from time. Are we  
all martyrs?

The translator, who was miscued by the 'Construction of Addition', rendered *هواة الرثاء* 'lovers of mourning' as 'professional [amateur] mourners'. It should be noted that while both renditions in English may carry the intended pejorative nuances, only the rendition taking the Arabic phrase as a 'Construction of Addition' proper may refer to all categories of mourners (i.e. professional, amateur, or otherwise). As a matter of fact, the poet intends to harshly criticize those writers whose tacit profession is to compose insincere elegies upon the falling of Palestinian martyrs in the occupied Arab land. Similarly, the translator was miscued by the phrase *حادث المستحيل* (a Construction of Addition) in the above extract by translating it as 'the incredible event' instead of 'the event of the incredible'. This miscue twists the reference from 'the incredible as an event. (by way of metaphor)' to 'the event that took place though it was thought to be incredible', thus mitigating the mood of melancholy and despair cast by the original phrase.

At the clause level, translational miscues may involve tense and voice, among other grammatical relations. Following is an extract from Darwish's poem *مثل هذا في النشيد* "Is it in Such a Song?" whose English translation features a syntactic miscue relating to tense:

و ماذا تقول الحياة لمحمود درويش ؟ عشت .. عشقت .. عرفت ,  
و كل الذين ستعشق ماتوا ؟  
افي مثل هذا النشيد نوسد حلما و نحمل شارة نصر و مفتاح اخر باب  
لنخلق هذا النشيد علينا ؟ و لكننا سوف نحيا .. لان الحياة حياة .

What does life say to Mahmud Darwish? You have  
lived, loved and those you loved are dead?  
Is it in such a song we cushion a dream, hold a  
victory sign and the key to the last door  
So as to shut this song from us? But we will live  
because life goes on.

It is clear that the replacement of the future verb form 'ستعشق' (you) will love' with the past verb form 'you loved' in the translation has erased the paradox intended by the poet, that is, 'all those you will love are dead', which is meant to convey the totality of loss, inclusive of the future. Notably, the paradoxical inclusion of the future in the past is an integral part of the poetic discourse, but is, unfortunately, completely missing in the translation.

The translator may sometimes fail to assign the correct voice, as can be illustrated by the translation of the following extract from Adonis's poem 'The Desert (The Diary of Beirut under Siege, 1982) (مختارات من يوميات حصار بيروت 1982):

|                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A star was drowned in blood,<br>The blood a boy was talking about<br>And whispering to his friends:<br>Only some holes known as stars<br>Remain in the sky. | غرقت نجمة في الدماء-<br>الدماء التي كان طفلٌ يحدث عنها<br>ويوشوش أصحابه:<br>لم يعد في السماء<br>غير بعض الثقوب التي سُميت أنجماً ... |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The syntactic miscue above involves the rendering of an active verb form 'drowned [sank]' as a passive verb form 'was drowned [was sunk]' instead of the creative poetic metaphor 'A star sank in blood'. As a matter of fact, the poet, on the tongue of a child, is establishing cognitive correspondence between the massive killing of civilians and the disappearance of stars, i.e. hope. It should be noted that the translator committed a translational mistake in addition to this translational miscue as he erroneously used the English verb 'drown' instead of the correct English verb 'sink' in his translation.

## 6. Semantic Miscues

Semantic miscues occur both at the word and clause/sentence levels. In either case, a semantic miscue involves the translator's assignment of a contextually incongruent but a lexically related sense or proposition. Contexts (both linguistic and physical, Yule, 1985) play a vital role in the assignment of meaning through an indispensable interrelation between linguistic meaning and world knowledge (Page, 1985). However, abstract paradigmatic lexical relations may sometimes intervene during the process of translation such that syntagmatic and/or semiotic lexical relations are disrupted - a situation which gives rise to a semantic miscue. Following is a semantic miscue at the word level in the translation of the first stanza of Darwish's poem 'عازف الجيتار المتجول' 'The Wandering Guitar Player':

|                                      |                           |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| He was a                             | كان رساما                 |
| painter But                          | ولكن الصور                |
| pictures Usually                     | عادة                      |
| Don't open doors                     | لا تفتح الابواب           |
| Nor break them                       | لا تكسرها                 |
| Nor turn the fish away from the face | لا ترد الحوت عن وجه القمر |
| of the moon.                         |                           |

The words 'whale' (حوت) and 'fish' (سمكة) are co-hyponyms since both are sea creatures belonging to the class of fish, yet they stand for referents that carry different associations in Arabic, viz. the 'whale' is associated with monstrosity, while the 'fish' is invariably associated with positive connotations. The translator, being unaware of this important distinction, was miscued into rendering 'the fish' instead of 'the whale', thus obscuring and distorting the poetic discourse, as pictures [paintings]

cannot combat monstrosity (i.e. occupation)<sup>1</sup>. It should be noted that the 'moon' in this poem is a symbol of freedom for the Palestinians living under the yoke of occupation, while the 'whale' is a symbol standing for the occupiers. It seems the poet is communicating the message that it is not by painting and the like, but by getting up in arms that Palestinians can restore their occupied homeland.

Sometimes, semantic miscues at the word level may relate to collocational meaning rather than lexical sense proper, as can be illustrated by the closing stanza of Adonis's poem 'نوح الجديد' 'The New Noah':

|                                                           |                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| We have an appointment with death,                        | موعدنا موت                      |
| We have become familiar with our shores<br>of despair,    | وشطاننا ياس ألفتنا، رضينا<br>به |
| We have grown to accept its frozen sea<br>with iron water | بحراً جليدياً حديد المياه       |
| And we sail through it to its end.                        | نعبره نمضي إلى مُنتهاه،         |
| We carry on moving and never listen to<br>that God,       | نمضي ولا نصغي لذاك الإله        |
| We long for a new god.                                    | تقنا إلى ب جديد سواه .          |

The translator, being insensitive to collocational meaning, was miscued into rendering 'iron water' as 'iron water', which may not make sense in English at all, instead of the potential English collocation 'numbing water', which captures the intended meaning. As a result, this semantic miscue disrupts the poetic coherence of the text, leaving the target reader at his wits' end as to what 'iron water' signifies.

In some cases, semantic miscues may stem from dialectal differences in the lexicon, as can be demonstrated by the following stanza from Adonis's poem 'The Desert (The Diary of Beirut under Siege, 1982)':

|                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| You will see             | سوف ترى             |
| Say his name             | قل اسمه             |
| Say I painted his face   | او قل رسمت وجهه     |
| Stretch your hand to him | مد يدك نحوه         |
| Or walk like any man     | او سر كما يسير كل   |
| Or smile                 | راجل او ابتسم او قل |
| Or say I was once sad    | حزنت مخررة سوف      |
| You will see             | ترى ليس هناك وطن    |
| There is no homeland ... |                     |

As can be seen, the translator was miscued into relaying 'man' as 'pedestrian', which is a sense specific to Egyptian colloquial Arabic, instead of 'pedestrian', which is the sense in Standard Arabic. In fact, the poet is conveying the message that there are many ways to affiliate with a homeland, one of which is to 'walk [to it] like any other pedestrian'. Consequently, the rendition of 'man' as 'pedestrian' distorts the poetic discourse as it is not only men who affiliate with the homeland, but also women and children. However, the search for a homeland, Adonis argues, is a futile enterprise because there is no homeland in the first place.

So much of semantic miscue at the word level. Let us now turn to some examples featuring semantic miscues at the clause/sentence level. Following is an example from Darwish's poem 'مطار أثينا' 'Athens' Airport', 'where the presence of an ambiguous clause miscued the translator:

قال الموظف: أين أوظف مالي؟ فقال المثقف: مالي ومالك؟

An employee said: "Where can I invest my money?"

An intellectual said: "Your money and mine?"

Clearly, the translator misinterpreted the expression *مالي و مالك؟* by translating it into "Your money and mine", when it actually means "This is none of my business!" Not only was the translator insensitive to the poetic context where his generic referents expounded differing points of view vis-a-vis Palestinian socio-cultural realities, but he was also unaware of the poetic utilization of two different varieties of Arabic: Standard Arabic vs. Colloquial Arabic. The translator, not being cognizant of this symbolic poetic shift in style, viz. the abrupt employment of colloquial instead of standard Arabic, committed a semantic miscue, and consequently missed the point altogether. It should be noted that the poet invests two discourses or thought-worlds, i.e., the one of the Employee, which is predominated by material interests, and the one of the Intellectual, which is supposed to be free of such interests. It is unfortunate that the translation fuses the two polar discourses into one by equating between the Employee and the Intellectual in terms of interests. This being the case, the poet's schema, which can be argued to be deeply rooted in the Palestinian socio-cultural reality in particular and the Arab one in general, is, absolutely incongruent with that of the translator. However, it is needless to say that the poetic pun, which is doomed in translation, adds to the aesthetic value of the text in Arabic.

Another semantic miscue at the sentence level occurs in the translation of Darwish's poem 'نحن نحب الخريف' 'We are Entitled to Love Autumn', as can be illustrated below:

ونحن يحقُّ لنا أن نحبَّ نهايات هذا الخريف، وإن نسألَه:  
أفي الحقلِ متسعٍ لخريفٍ جديدٍ، ونحن نمددُ أجسادنا فيه فحما؟  
خريفٌ يَنكسُ أوراقه ذهباً، ليتنا ورق التين، يا ليتنا عشبةٌ مَهْمَلَةٌ  
لنشهدَ ما الفرقَ بين الفصول. ويا ليتنا لم نودعَ جنوبَ العيون لنسألَ عما  
تساءلَ أبائنا حين طاروا على قمة الرمح. يرحمنا الشعر والبسملة.

We are entitled to love the end of this autumn and  
ask:

Is there room for another autumn in the field to rest  
our bodies like coal?

An autumn lowering its leaves like gold. I wish we  
were fig leaves, I wish we were an abandoned  
plant.

To witness the change of the seasons. I wish we  
didn't say goodbye to the south of the eye so as  
to ask what

Our fathers had asked when they flew on the tip of  
the spear. Poetry and God's name will be  
merciful to us.

By examining the translation closely, one can see how the translator was  
miscued into relaying the sentence

افي الحقل متسع لخريف جديد , و نحن نمدد اجسادنا فيه  
فحما ؟

as involving a purpose relationship rather than a circumstantial  
relationship. It should be noted that the autumn is employed as a symbol of  
death with leaves falling all over, saving no room even for a new death.  
Therefore, the sentence above may be relayed as 'Is there any room for a  
new autumn with us resting our bodies in it like coal?', where the question  
is rhetorical in nature. However, this rhetorical question is rendered  
erroneously in the translation above such that it is still begging an answer.

Our last example of semantic miscues at the sentence level is drawn from  
the translation of Darwish's poem 'A Gentle Rain in a Distant Autumn', as can be shown below:

A gentle rain in a distant autumn  
And the birds are blue, are blue,  
And the earth is a feast  
**Don't say I wish I was a cloud over**  
an airport.

All I want  
From my country which fell out of  
the window of a train  
Is my mother's handkerchief  
And reasons for a new death.

مطر ناعم في خريف بعيد  
والعصافير زرقاء .. زرقاء  
والأرض عيد  
لا تقول لي أنا غيمة في المطار

فأنا لا أريد  
من بلادي التي سقطت من زجاج  
القطار  
غير منديل أمي  
وأسباب موت جديد.

As can be noted, the rendition of the sentence (.) لا تقولي انا غيمة في المطار .) 'Don't say I wish I was a cloud over an airport' is semantically miscued, as there is no indication of wishing to be a 'cloud', which is a negative symbol in this poem, on the part of Darwish's subject. This sentence, in fact, is merely a request by the poet to his subject not to say that she is only a cloud at the airport, thus belittling herself greatly, for he will be asking for nothing but his mother's handkerchief and reasons for a new death, which is not asking for too much. However, the translation does not communicate such a message; on the contrary, it causes a breakdown in the coherence of the poem by bringing in a *wish* that is completely incongruent with the subsequent modest demands.

## 7. Conclusion

The present study constitutes a contribution to miscue analysis, which is originally a reading-based orientation, from a translational perspective. It has been shown that the discussion of translational miscues, which are argued to be the printed traces of oral miscues in reading, gives an insight into the nature of translational problems in general and miscued translational responses in particular. Thus, an elaborate examination of translational miscues in Modern Arabic Verse as exemplified by three celebrity Arab poets (M. Darwish, S. Al-Qasim, and A. Adonis) has been followed. Throughout, it has been pointed out that poetic discourse may be seriously twisted or even be crippled by the translator's falling victim to phonological, morphological, syntactic, or semantic miscues. That is, if the translator is miscued during the process of translating, s/he may end up presenting a thought-world that markedly conflicts with the one communicated by the poet. To minimize miscues, therefore, the translator of poetry should first establish a cognitive rapport with the text, as such a thing would be the only possible guarantee for genuine translatability.

### Notes

1 Further and along the same lines, the poet may have resourcefully fallen back on popular Arab folklore where a hostility is established between "the whale" and "the moon", which may culminate in the whale's blocking moonlight from reaching the Earth. This important connection was brought to our attention by Professor Lewis Mukattash, the Editor-in-chief of I.J.A.E.S

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