

***Girls of Riyadh* Revisited: Investigating the Quality of the English Collaborative  
Translation of Rajaa Alsanea's Arabian Novel**

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**Abstract**

The paper aims to assess the quality of the English collaborative translation of Rajaa Alsanea's Arabian novel *Girls of Riyadh*, focusing on linguistic and cultural features of the Target Text, a few of which are sometimes nonexistent in the Source Text. The mixed literal/functional approach to collaborative translation seems to be inconsistent, the paper observes, and it is possibly due to both the apparent tension between the self-translator and her co-translator Marilyn Booth and the prominence of the target culture sometimes recurrent in the Source Text. The paper addresses two questions: To what extent has collaborative translation affected the quality of rendering linguistic, social, and cultural references of the Source Text, such as idiomatic expressions, lexical terms, songs, names of celebrities, religious, and literary references, and traditional festivities? How effective have the literal and functional approach been in this collaborative translation? The findings of this study show that the translation procedures employed, such as omission, addition, and alteration, are sometimes unacceptable. Significantly, the study raises awareness about how the potential tension between the self-translator and the co-translator in the inclusion and exclusion of certain parts of texts can affect the quality of the end product. This paper recommends a fresh 'critical translation' of the ST that fills specific points which has been overlooked in the current 'simple translation': i.e., by paying attention to the message and intention of the author and suggesting to the use of different procedures by the two translators. The paper recommends that instead of implementing erratically two opposite approaches, the functional and literal approaches, as has been done, collaborative translators should follow one of them only. The current study suggests potential solutions to improve the quality of the English translation of this novel.

**Keywords:** Arabic self-translation, English translation, Functional equivalence, *Girls of Riyadh*, Literal translation, Literary translation.

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## Introduction

The paper aims to assess the quality of the English collaborative translation of Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh*, focusing on linguistic and cultural features of the Target Text (TT), a few of which are sometimes nonexistent in the Source Text (ST). This lack of features in the TT is possibly due to the apparent tension between the self-translator and her co-translator Marilyn Booth and the prominence of the target culture sometimes recurrent in the Source Text. Two research questions are posed: To what extent has collaborative translation affected the quality of rendering linguistic, social, and cultural references of the ST, such as idiomatic expressions, lexical terms, songs, names of celebrities, religious, literary references and traditional festivities? How effective have the literal and, or functional approach been in this collaborative translation?

The outline of the current study is as follows: It first introduces the reader briefly to the novel (the ST), then provides a review of the literature published about the importance of paratextuality (e.g., the translator's introductory notes), 'faithfulness' in translation and how it is affected by patronage, shedding light on 'collaborative translation,' and 'simple' and 'critical' translation. Then the methodology of the study is explained, and it is followed by the analysis section, which will examine in depth the translated extracts. The discussion section of the study will provide answers to the two research questions and interpret the findings. The concluding remarks will be the last part of the study.

### *Background about the Novel and its Translation*

To understand the dynamics of the English translation of the Arabian novel *Girls of Riyadh* (2005) by the Saudi writer Rajaa Alsanea,<sup>1</sup> one needs to provide some background about the story and its translators - Alsanea (the self-translator) and Marilyn Booth (her co-translator). They translated the book in 2007. The book sold 3 million copies and was translated into 40 languages (*Arabnews* online, 2014), and another source stated the sales reached 4 million (*Sayidaty-net Magazine*, 2015).

The novel presents social exchanges among four girls over a whole year who grew up in the Saudi capital Riyadh and talked about their own experiences. These exchanges are organized chronologically, following the Islamic Hijri calendar. The novel is a collection of their emails, namely the Saudi author's interactions with her female friends, who felt somewhat embarrassed because publishing their emails and memoirs exposed them to the public. Therefore, Alsanea decides to change all their real names in the novel. However, she published the emails without revision: i.e., any typographical, grammatical, and other errors in these emails were intentionally not corrected. But it is essential to note which errors in the ST are preserved or fixed in the TT. Which other minor or significant changes did the two translators make to the TT? Also, are they minor or crucial changes? How can this English rendering be due to self-translation? Which translation approach is consistently followed in the process? How effective are the translation procedures employed? Answering these questions helps us understand the approaches used in the TT; these questions are responded to in the preface, note, or introduction of the TT itself.

*The Self-Translator's Note:* In her introductory note to *Girls of Riyadh* (2007) – to the translation of *Banat al-Riyadh* (the original title of the novel) - the self-translator Alsanea outlines the translation scheme outlined in presumably the two translators' minds. She states her keenness to change the Western world's view of Saudi women, and therefore change clichés about Saudi culture. This change is an outstanding goal that Alsanea sets to achieve through the

translation of her novel. Also, she contrasts the language of her original book and the English version.

This statement paradoxically highlights the demerit of the current translation of the novel. It contradicts the self-translator's, the author's, own aim from the book, which is her keenness to preserve the Saudi dialect spoken by all the characters in the novel, in addition to the Kuwaiti nature. She expresses her concern about the film/ television re-production of her work by a confident director (*Girls of Riyadh* 2007, p. 212). She also fears the actors and actresses will not be Saudi and that it is possible that the women in the novel will not be men dressed as women.

*The Co-translator's View:* Booth (2008) disagreed with the adjustments and modifications of her draft translation. In her explanation of the features of the original and the nature of the translation practice required, Booth rightly points out, "Imageries of globalized consumption (...) brings local cultures (of song, wedding production, dress) into conversation with Europeanizing practices" (p. 199). Booth complains, "The published translation dilutes those very [cultural and linguistic] features" (p. 200). Unlike the self-translator, the co-translator defends her literalist approach to translation. But one might add that the literalist approach does not always yield a successful text and can be 'unacceptable' because of its awkward style in rendering, for instance, 'watermelon on the knife,' which is a cultural expression and its relevance to marriage, as we shall see later. The tension between the two translators is apparent. This tension has resulted in using two approaches to translation, literal and functional.

*The Collaborative Work:* The current text under investigation is a collaborative work between Alsanea and Booth but with the latter as the principal translator, even though her name is second to the self-translator in the published translation. It is hard to pinpoint the exact degree of collaboration between Booth and Alsanea. There is no *carte blanche* given to Booth, who is the main translator; the evidence is her article in 2008, in which she claims that the author and the publisher had modified her final draft, and she was not informed of the process till the final copy was decided between the two and then given to the main translator, Booth. In the current study, Booth is referred to as a 'co-translator' and Alsanea as a 'self-translator.'

It is hard to pinpoint the exact degree of collaboration between Booth and Alsanea. There seems to be Booth (the co-translator) was given that liberty. The evidence is in her two articles in 2008 and 2013, in which Booth stated that she was not informed of the modifications made by the publisher in consent with the self-translator Alsanea.

It is indeed helpful that the self-translator in the current study is undoubtedly valuable in revealing any ambiguity or 'blind spots,' but the exchanges (2007, 2008, and 2013) between the two translators are certainly 'not always fruitful.' There is a 'fight for control' by the self-translator. The latter's *auctoritas* is seen in the absence of the co-translator's voice in the preface.

## Literature Review

This section will briefly describe the rules or principles of translation from ancient times, then refer to the importance of introductory notes by translators, and provide a glimpse of collaborative translation and simple as opposed to critical translation.

From the old times, rules and regulations of translation seen in the literature published aim to control the quality of the end product – the TT. Various rules, laws, or principles of translation were set in works, such as Lemaistre's *Règles de la traduction française* [Rules of French translation] published in 1650 (Lefevere, 1992); de Tende's *Sieur de l'Estaing, Règles de la*

*traduction* [Rules of translation] published in 1665; Tytler's (1790) "Principles of translation" (Lefevere, 1992). The current study by no means claims to lay down rules or principles. Still, it modestly proposes potential solutions to specific issues encountered in the already rendered translation by Booth and Alsanea in an attempt to demonstrate whether the quality of their translation is affected or not.

A scholar as early as the year 1420, Bruni, translator of Plato and Aristotle, in *De interpretatione recta* ("The right way to translate"), expressed his dismay at previous translators' numerous mistakes in the introduction to his translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* from Greek into Latin. He then explained how to correct them; he added,

I hear that many people thought that my corrections were too harsh. Their argument runs as follows: even if the translators made mistakes they wrote down what they understood in good faith and for that they deserve praise, not blame... I was distressed indeed at the sight of those books that are full of sweetness, elegance, and inestimable value in Greek, and I myself was pained to see how these books had turned out so vile and degraded in Latin because the translations are riddled with impurities. (as cited in Lefevere, 1992, p. 82)

This statement has prompted the current researcher to look deeply into the translation of the novel and see how it could have been improved. But before that, one needs to know any paratextuality (e.g., notes, preface) that might provide information about the translation process of this novel. Not only are these notes essential to bear in mind, but also any messages provided by translators.

### ***Translators' Introductory Notes***

It is common to see translators include prefaces or introductions in their works. One notes Lefevere's remarkable and seminal contribution in 1992 and his historical organization of excerpts taken from various introductions and prefaces initially written by the scholarly translators centuries ago. Lefevere's contribution starts with the basis of Translation Studies, i.e., its reliance on the theory and practice of translation in old times, going back to Cicero (46 BC) and St. Jerome (395 AD, four centuries later), who both translated the Bible from Greek to Latin, commented on their translation experience and started the well-known, centuries-old dispute about the two main approaches to translation: the word-for-word and sense-for-sense dichotomy. Such a dichotomy was developed further.

Furthering this binary debate is Schleiermacher's lecture (1813/1992) about the two different types of translation and the concept of foreignizing and domesticating in translation, that is, moving the reader to the author in the first approach or moving the author to the reader in the process in the second. Venuti (2000) favors foreignization (see Venuti's in/visibility and cultural approach in 1995). However, Lefevere's book (1992) is most appropriate and relevant to this paper as it offers what translators and scholars have to say about their translations. One of them is the literary writer and translator Arnold (1861), who has emphasized 'faithfulness' and stated, "The translator's "first duty is to be faithful" (Lefevere 1992, p. 68).

Nord (1997) mentions the Horatian "fidus interpres," or "trustworthy interpreter" [i.e., translator] and stresses, "Trust may be more important than quality. Translations which members of a culture have come to trust may mean more to them than translations that can claim to represent the original better" (p. 2). But how can the audience trust translators to produce a reliable, trustworthy TT? We all know the Italian adage "Traduttore, Traditore" [translators are traitors].

One assumes that self-translators are not traitors because they know what they have precisely written in the original and can therefore convey the message and intention truthfully. After all, they comprehend the original fully and are subsequently allowed to enjoy some freedom to change particular parts of the TT at their volition. However, the current researcher wonders whether they are excused from resorting to specific procedures, such as omissions and additions, from interfering and re-ordering particular parts of the TT, simply because they know their intention in the original text. Are they not crossing the lines by exercising such freedom? This freedom is investigated in the analysis.

*Faithfulness* and trust are somewhat relative but should by no means be taken for granted, even if the novel's author herself is the self-translator and her co-translator is a prominent scholar and an established translator. Du Mans (1555), a French poet and grammarian, in his *Art Poétique* ("Poetics"), describes how a translator's effort is received if he "render[s] render the original faithfully, to the best of [his] ability, [he] will only gain respect for having redrawn the original portrait, but fame remains with the original. If [he] render[s] it badly all the blame falls on [him]" (as cited in Lefevere, 1992, p. 52). So, it is a lose-lose situation. Despite all the great effort and labor to produce the translated work, fame stays with the original, and shame falls on the translator. But it should only be so when several omissions and additions are unacceptable, as in the case of the current study.

In regards to what is 'unacceptable' translation, Arnold (1861) states,

If a text is considered to embody the core values of a culture, if it functions as that culture's central text, translations of it will be scrutinized with the greatest of care, since "unacceptable" translations may well be seen to subvert the very basis of the culture itself"...If, on the other hand, a certain culture considers itself "central" with regard to other cultures, it is likely to treat the texts produced by those cultures in the rather cavalier manner [Johann Gottfried] Herder deplors in the French translations of Homer: "Homer must enter France a captive and dress according to their fashion, so as not to offend their eyes." (Lefevere, 1992, p. 70)

Arnold confirms, "The translator's 'first duty is to be faithful,' but the question at issue between them is, in what faithfulness consists" (Lefevere, 1992, p. 59). Lefevere observes that translation should be judged not only on linguistic grounds but also on cultural grounds and acculturation "because translation involves much more than the search for the best linguistic equivalent" (p. 59). Linguistic backgrounds and cultures combined help in producing an appropriate equivalent. Faithfulness or lack of it can be affected by patronage.

But what affects translation is also the issue of *patronage*. Du Bellay bluntly states the effect of patronage on the translator's freedom and their obedience to being "at the command of princes [patrons] and other great lords" (Lefevere, 1992, p. 22). This is more so when the co-translator is the author, as in the case of Booth with *Alsanea*. The translator's freedom is aptly observed and described by Dryden (1680; Lefevere, 1992), who considers the translation hard labor when ordered by the patron. He told it by referring to the ST as the original soil, which is "sometimes barren," and we, as translators, get punished. Still, if the ST is fruitful and we succeed, we are not appreciated. Still, the author is the one who would receive praise. Lefevere (1992) pointed out:

When Horace, for instance, speaks of a "faithful translator," he has the person in mind, much more so than the work that person produces. Translators, in Horace's understanding,

thrive on the trust their patron and their public put in them. They do not have to translate “word for word” because both patron and audience literally “take their word” at face value. (p. 14)

When it comes to the issue of ‘faithfulness,’ according to Horace, translators are not asked to translate ‘word-for-word’ as they are trusted by the patron and audience, and therefore, they take the translator’s word for it.

It is indeed an advantage to have the author collaborating with the translator; this relationship can yield fruitful results: i.e., an excellent translation; however, this relationship has created severe tension that we have seen in Booth’s article. Bruni (1420) writes, “The translator transforms himself into the author with all his mind, will, and soul, and he also ponders the problem of how to transform the shape, the stance, the gait, the style, and all the other features, and how to express them. The result will be a wonderful translation” (Lefevere, 1992, p. 84). These features include figures of speech, he adds. But other socio-cultural markers, such as songs and poems, are sometimes either overlooked or omitted partly or wholly, as we see in the translation of the novel.

### ***Collaborative Translation***

The question is, Has the author given the co-translator *carte blanche* (See Hersant 2017) or made her the second author? Cordingley et al. (2017) believe that such a task “presented the translator with the daunting challenge of equalling the comprehension of the author in the author’s tongue while matching that author’s skill and style in another” (p. 2).

Collaborative work (‘collaborative translation’) is not new; it goes back to the old times. O’Brien (2011) pointed out,

the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek is reputed to have been undertaken by seventy-two translators working in collaboration with one another. A more recent example is the active collaboration of James Joyce with several translators in the endeavour of translating his own work (Costanzo 1972). (p. 17)

She aptly explained the different uses of the term ‘collaborative translation,’

Collaborative translation (...) refer[s] to the situation where two or more translators work together to produce one translated product. The term has also come to be closely linked with the concepts of community translation, social translation, volunteer translation, fan translation, fansubbing and crowdsourcing. (O’Brien, 2011, p. 17)

Pym (2011) explained the harmful/positive use of ‘collaboration’ and its adjective ‘collaborative’:

‘Collaboration [...] always sounds like illicit help given to the enemy’...[However] in twenty-first-century English ‘collaborative’ forms part of a set of positive values founded on transparency, the circulation of data, the flattening of hierarchies and participation in democracy. (Cordingley et al. 2017, p. 17)

If we are to use ‘collaboration’ to carry ‘positive values,’ clarifying unintended ambiguity in the original, achieving transparency in the transfer of the source language (SL) messages, and employing the democratic approach in the two translators’ interaction with each other, and not controlling one another, then this collaboration is undoubtedly constructive, but this current discussion proves the lack of these critical features in the collaboration/relationship between the self-translator and the co-translator. Further, Joanna Huss 2018 warns of more indeterminacies

concerning ‘collaborative translation,’ which still “confronts definitional, theoretical, evidential, and methodological indeterminacy” (p. 389).

Moreover, Hersant (2017) refers to an unexplored theoretical gap and points in general to the benefit of the relationship between the author (and not the self-translator) and the translator, and in particular to clarify any ‘blind spots’ in the ST, but that relationship is full of obstacles. He points out some concerns with “correction and revision, intention and auctoritas [authority], the desire for mastery and the fight for control” (p. 91).

### ***Simple or Critical Translation***

In addition to the differences between the self-translator and the co-translator, one needs to classify the current translation of the novel. In his ‘Poetry and truth,’ Goethe (1814) differentiates between two types of translation; the former is intended to address the general audience, and the latter is for scholars and academics (Lefevere, 1992). Goethe writes,

If you want to influence the masses a simple translation is always best. Critical translations vying with the original really are of use only for conversations the learned conduct among themselves... The literal, the interlinear, and other such types of translation of literature are obviously not aimed at influencing the masses. (as cited in Lefevere 1992, p. 75)

This current translation of *Girls of Riyadh* can therefore be classified as ‘simple translation,’ and the self-translator’s note indicates that she aims to address the masses in the Western world and correct certain misconceptions about the source culture. But this method should not be adopted to take certain liberties, in its omissions and additions, without the consultation of her co-translator, a professional and an academic. Footnotes and explanations are para-texts and are helpful with the non-Muslim Anglophone reader in mind because the translation refers to Islamic law and certain conventions and traditions, as we shall see in the section below on implementation.

It also appears that ‘simple translation’ means, in the publisher’s and self-translator’s minds, freedom to change the TT as they please and see fit without consulting the professional co-translator. The changes, using omission and addition translation procedures, are not related, for instance, to the implementation of Levy (1967)’s Minimax principle (in Hatim and Munday 2004): i.e., to achieve maximum benefit with minimum cost on the part of the Anglophone reader.

Gutt (1991) explained that in direct and indirect translation, there is, on the one hand, “the need to give the receptor language audience access to the authentic meaning of the original, unaffected by the translator’s interpretation effort...[and] the urge to communicate as clearly as possible” (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p. 63). As the self-translator in *Girls of Riyadh* is already aware of ‘the authentic meaning of the original,’ this concern is nonexistent. Still, the question is whether or not ‘the urge to communicate as clearly as possible’ in the Target Language is achieved when the co-translator is not fully involved in the modifications. One assumes that these modifications have resulted in omissions and additions by the self-translator and not by the co-translator.

### **Methodology**

The focus of this current study is to discuss linguistic and cultural references, such as idioms, names of celebrities, traditions, literary allusions, and religious references and see how they are rendered in the TT. A few issues were identified and classified. Translated extracts were provided, along with potential solutions. The current study suggests that these solutions could

have improved the quality of translation further. Also, the study offers Back Translation (BT) of each extract by the current researcher to help understand how the new proposed TTs are rendered.

The selection criteria of these translated extracts are: the relevance of these extracts to the categories of issues encountered by the researcher, and their level of complexity and importance with all sections found to be problematic in the translation of the novel. The extracts were then analyzed in the Analysis section according to the types they fell under. The categories include, but are not limited to, paratextuality, intertextuality, omission, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references, including religious terms.

As part of the methodology in this study is the implementation of Neubert and Shreve's (1992) Critical Translation Model (CTM) (the first out of seven models proposed by the two scholars), which focuses on the TT but keeps an eye on the ST. The two scholars explained that:

The critical model normally presupposes a finished translation. The translation exists in time and space. The critic's objective is evaluative commentary. This perspective on translation is result-oriented and static. There is no inherent interest in understanding how the translation was accomplished or in understanding how the translator used particular translation procedures. (p. 16)

The main focus of this study is on the TT only, with an eye on the ST, looking at the end product and its linguistic, social, or cultural references - such as specific linguistic expressions, songs, and poems - to see if they are rendered, or omitted partly or wholly. The approach of this model is evaluative in that it suggests what potential solutions could have been used, since the TT is static and cannot be changed because it has already been officially published. However, Neubert and Shreve did not go into detail on which features to evaluate in the TT, but instead they only indicated the features of the ST and their counterparts.

The model applied in this study helps identify and classify first the main features of the ST, then analyze their corresponding 'equivalence' and how they are rendered in the TT. It is the retrospective approach: i.e., the translation is already finished and not in the process, like the second model (Practical Translation model) which considers the ST as the point of departure and envisages what the TT would be prospectively: i.e., the TT does not exist in the latter model.

The other five models of Neubert are: (1) *The Linguistic Model*, which focuses on the linguistic mechanisms related to replacing SL signs with target language (TL) signs; there is no consideration of external factors, such as critical norms or the constraints of practice. It emphasizes, instead, the systemic relationships between the SL and TL. (2) *The Text-linguistic Translation Model* focuses on the seven standards of text linguistics (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). In (3) *the Sociocultural Translation Model*, texts are seen as unique in the history and social structure of a specific culture, and they are not repeatable. (4) *The Computational Translation Model* looks at the human and non-human process of translation: i.e., computer-assisted translation and machine translation. (5) *The Psycholinguistic Translation Model* involves recording the workings of the translator's brain ('the black box'): i.e., how does the brain of the translator work using the Think-Aloud-Protocol (TAP)? The current study is limited to the Critical Translation model.

Also, it is worth noting that to understand the complexities of the author/self-translator and the co-translator's relationship, the research has relied on both the author's note or preface to the published translation and the co-translator's two articles in 2008 and 2013. Such information has



proven to be helpful. These documents offer some inside information about the translation process the novel undergoes. This technique adopted by the researcher has helped to draw general points about the features of collaborative translation and its complexities, which could contribute to Translation Studies.

## Analysis

### Implementation

#### *Translating the Title*

As indicated in the methodology, the objective of the comments of the current study is evaluative, identifying the distinctive features of the ST and analyzing their correspondence in the TT. *Ab initio*, there is the tricky task of rendering the Arabic title of the current novel in the TL. Indeed, even in the Arabic version, the author herself has initially been uncertain about what the title of her book would be, as she has indicated in the last chapter of her book, providing us with several titles, such as ‘Letters about my female friends,’ ‘A story scandalously uncovered,’ ‘Letters from a female friend,’ ‘No way out,’ and ‘Story of my female friends.’ Such information is unjustifiably removed from the TT.

Eventually, the two translators rightly unanimously conform to one title; this is clear because neither of them has commented on it, *Girls of Riyadh*, following Vinay and Darbelnet’s (1958) direct translation strategy. This method is effective. The translated title *Girls of Riyadh* is commendable as it has a particular effect on the mind of the Anglophone reader. Transliterating the Arabic title in English: i.e., using Vinay and Darbelnet’s borrowing strategy *Banat al-Riyadh* would have made the TT more foreign.

The current rendering is booming and comprehensible. It is advisable to translators and scholars, one might add, that translating titles should always be done last in the process to produce one of the most appropriate equivalents. Such collaborative effort achieves “not only linguistic readability but also cultural comprehensibility” (Coldrin, 2015, as cited in Cordingley et al., 2017, p. 9). In his ‘Principles of Correspondence,’ Nida (1964) states,

It stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations. The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail. (p. 126)

It is the transfer of meaning, and there is no ‘absolute’ equivalence. The translation scholar Peter Newmark (1988) defined translation as the task of “rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text” (p. 5). The aim of translation should always be to preserve the message relayed by the author. The advantage of the current translation is presumably that the author is the self-translator who is keen to keep the original message. This merit is true to a certain extent, as we will see later.

The self-translator’s, Alsanea’s note (2007) explains that the TT relies on the ‘gist’ of the ST. ‘Gist translation’ compared to ‘exegetic translation’ Dickins explains in his book *Thinking Arabic Translation* (2002) aims to separate ‘the gist of the (...) message from all the circumstantial details and the tonal subtleties” (p. 8). So subtle details are not required, but how can you measure that? Gist translation is a kind of summarisation, whereas Booth is keen to convey the subtle nuances. The self-translator appears to have exercised authority over her co-translator, and this way, the quality of the end product is compromised and sometimes mediocre, as we will see in the examples. Now just because the author has partly translated the book, it does not imply that she

has authorized her to take liberties or follow the functional approach without consulting with the co-translator who adopts the literal translation approach and who aims to stay ‘closely to the original.’

*Paratextualtiy (notes and explanations)*

Paratextual material, either in notes or explanations, is used. But it follows no strict systematic format in the current TT, sometimes using footnotes and at other times explanations. The advantage we have in the current research is that both the self-translator and her co-translator have declared very clearly their views about the translation either in the preface or translator’s note or in the form of an article in a journal later on. Having mentioned the name of the author first in the final product, followed by the co-translator, indicates that more authority lies in the self-translator. If the researcher were to translate such a project, he would have involved the author only to explain unclear specificities in the ST relating to Saudi culture and society. This method helps in the analysis of the ST in preparation of the translation.

We know that the self-translator has decided to use spoken English and to follow the functional approach in translation where the intention of the author is known to the self-translator; however, the process the co-translator adopted, Booth, is somewhat different, to be more literal as in her discussion (2008) about ‘Ladies and Gentlemen’ (in the final product) and her own proposed version ‘Ladies, girls, and gentlemen’ (in the draft). Indeed, the more dynamic and functional the former is, the more successful the product here is, as it is more common in English; so, the argument presented by the co-translator here is somewhat invalid. However, certain parts in the TT show that there is no need to be less, if at all, shocking, e.g., referring to ‘Always’ as ‘sanitary pads.’ It is rather hard to know which party in this collaborative work has done what. This point is rather frustrating and extremely complicated because one is unsure which party is to blame for a specific rendering.

With plenty of explanations and footnotes, which are highly commendable to familiarize the reader and contextualize the TT, Alsanea renders the TT successfully. Examples of extra descriptions in the TT for foreign names of places or lexical items are,

1) **ST:** جدة

**BT:** Jeddah

**TT:** Jeddah—a port city with a long tradition of bringing together people from many places and therefore the most liberal city in the kingdom.

2) **ST:** القصيم

**BT:** Alqasim

**TT:** Qasim, a city known for its ultraconservative and strict character.

But the notes in 1) and 2) are judgemental, using the expressions ‘most liberal,’ ‘ultraconservative,’ and ‘strict.’ They do not just describe the geographical location of these two cities. Some explanations of some Arabic terms are appropriate, e.g.,

3) **ST:** الشلة

**BT:** The group

**TT:** their little clique—the *shillah*

4) **ST:** الشيشة

**BT:** the hookah

**TT:** the *shisha*—otherwise known as the hookah or hubbly-bubbly.

The direct translation is presented before the borrowed item in 3), whereas 4) shows the borrowed item first, followed by its meaning. There is no consistency in the order of explanations or use of modifying material. Footnotes are also used. Evidence is more explicit in the following example,

5) **ST:** وارتدت لميس ثوباً أبيضاً رجالياً مع شماغ وعقال

**BT:** Lamees wore a white dress worn by men with its headdress and headband.

**TT:** Lamees wore a masculine-style flowing white *thobe* with a *shimagh* draped over her head and kept in place with a snugly fitting black *eqal*.\*

\*Saudi men's garments; a *thobe* is a long white loose dress, while a *shimagh* is a red and white triangle-shaped cloth worn on the head topped by an *eqal* to hold it in place. An *eqal* is a thick, round, ropelike sash. Nowadays, the *shimaghs* and *thobes* are designed by such famous names as Gucci, Christian Dior, Givenchy, and Valentino.

*lithaam* as an item of clothing, the TT explains in the body of the TT, covers everything from the bridge of the woman's nose to the bottom of her throat, whereas *abaya* is described in one footnote. This inconsistency, using explanation sometimes in the body of the text and at other times in a footnote, is unacceptable. Also, why are European names mentioned? Interestingly, there is a profuse but unnecessary use of phrases footnotes, and this explains why the Arabian and Arabic novel is only 163 pages. In contrast, the English translation, the TT, stretches over 303 pages (i.e., that is almost double the number of the ST pages).

### ***Intertextuality, a Complete Translation Loss in the TT***

Such language variations from classical to modern English and allusive references to songs can be considered intertextuality. De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) discussed intertextuality, which "concerns the factors which make the utilization of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts" (p. 10). Intertextuality is one of the seven standards of textuality; the two scholars' concept can be simply summarised as inserting a previous text within the current text (the body of the text), that previous text can be either a text mentioned earlier in the exact current text, for instance, mentioned few pages earlier in the form of a statement by one of the characters in the novel, or a previous text written in the past by another writer (See also Khuddro & Hussain, 2016). Previous texts in the current novel are mentioned directly or indirectly, be it a full quote or the title of a book or song. This intertextuality is often used and can be detected even in the first few pages of the novel, e.g.,

6) **ST:** هذه ليلتي، وقصة الأمس بطلاتها "منكم وفيكم". فنحن من وإلى الصحراء نعود...

**BT:** This is my night, and it is also yesterday's story whose heroines are 'those of you and among you.' We are from the desert, and to the desert, we shall return.

**TT:** Tonight's the night. The heroes of my story are people among you, from you and within

you, for from the desert we all come and to the desert we shall all return.

A simple comparison between the back-translation and TT above shows that intertextuality exists and is referred to indirectly in the titles of two songs by the famous Egyptian singer Um Kulthum, 'This is my night' and 'Yesterday's story,' covertly rendered in the TT and hardly noticeable by Anglophone readers, one assumes. Intertextuality is also directly referred to in the cliché in the ST 'منكم وفيكم' (from you and within you), successfully rendered in the TT. Moreover, there is still another intertextuality successfully generated and easily realizable by the Anglophone readers, the allusion to the common phrase used in English burial service, 'ashes to ashes and dust to dust.' This phrase shows how the quality of translation is affected.

### *Omissions Unjustified*

Significant markers in the ST are related to the recurrent change of register, shifting from formal to informal style and vice versa in the author's narration (e.g., quoting the late Syrian poet's, Qabani's poem *in part* in standard style within the author's conversational narration, but unexpectedly mentioned *entirely* in the TT).

Omissions in the TT are sometimes precariously bordering on the brink of disaster, e.g.,

7) **ST:** بدا واضحا له... انها (ميشيل) ولميس فتاتان جريئتان تبحثان عن المغامرة

**BT:** It was clear to him... that she [Michelle] and Lamees were brave enough to search for an adventure.

**TT:** Michelle had stood out from the start as a girl who was possibly bold enough to be looking for adventure.

A quick comparison between the back-translation and TT reveals the omission of the name Lamees from the TT, which is inexcusable. Part of the 'kernel' of the sentence is missing; the denotative meaning is lost, and the whole kernel meaning is lost. Hatim and Munday (2004) explained the term 'kernel,'

(a term which Nida borrows from Chomsky's transformational generative grammar) ... Kernels are basic structural elements to which syntactically more elaborate surface structures of a language can be reduced ... Kernels consist of combinations of items from four basic semantic categories... [one of which is] object words (nouns referring to physical objects including human beings). (p. 46)

This omission of the second character in the TT is undoubtedly unacceptable.

### *Arabic English, a Missing Feature in the TT*

A fascinating feature of the ST is the explanation of dialects by the locals. Some pronounce 'k' as 'dj', and others pronounce it as 'ts'. Translation loss occurs here too. Ideally, two dialects could have been included in the TT, such as Scots and Irish pronunciations, perhaps just like the American accent of th as 'd' and not as 'ð', e.g., in the sentence 'He is thirty, and his wife is thirty-two,' the number 30 is pronounced 'dirty.' The 1920 play *Emperor Jones* by O'Neil is about African Americans. Also, several spellings are not only in Arabic, but also in English; the reason is that the author wants to publish them in these emails as they were without revising them, such as *Entellectuell*, and *bregnant*. These nuances are removed from the TT or rendered correctly.

Faithfulness also implies preserving the foreign languages used in the original. For instance, the phrase 'complete makeover' is transliterated in the novel using borrowing but back-

translated into English as ‘complete makeover,’ there is translation loss, and the foreignness in the ST is lost in the TT. A similar example is ‘lip gloss,’

8) **ST:** لب قلوب للشفاه

**BT:** Lp qlos for lips.

**TT:** A swipe of lip gloss.

Foreignness is lost in translation in the TT above. Another example is the adjective ‘so cute,’ which is transliterated in the ST using borrowing, but its equivalent in the TT is ‘so cute.’ It appears that domestication is the primary strategy in their translation, as Schleiermacher explained in his lecture in 1813: i.e., to keep the reader in peace and move the author to the reader. Here is an example,

9) **ST:** وبعدين كليات العرايس الكوول بيتأخروا شوي تيعملوا سسبنس!

**BT:** And anyway, all *cool* brides arrive a little late to add suspense.

**TT:** And anyway, all the *cool* brides these days start things on the late side to add a bit of suspense. Some never walk down the aisle before two or three a.m.!

Domestication, a strategy not favored by Schleiermacher, is seen in ‘walking down the aisle,’ but why add ‘before two or three am!’ which is total foreignization. Western weddings are held in a church or the registry office mainly during the day, either in the morning or afternoon and sometimes in the evening, but not at 2 am or 3 am, which is traditional in Saudi Arabia.

Apart from English, for instance, ‘*may rest in peace*’ both transliterated in Arabic in the ST, using borrowing a technique highlighted by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), one can see the use of another foreign language (French words, such as *moi*, *déjà vu* and *petite*). Could it be because European languages are “the language of progress” in Arabic which is used to show off having introduced into Arabic vernacular in the girls’ emails or is merely used for advertising (Zanettin, in Baker & Saldanha, 2009, p. 41)? Could this form be as ‘prestigious’ as André’s description of Latin and Greek, “which were prestigious and dominant in many Western education systems until the second half of the twentieth century, and then Modern Languages” (André 2009, in Baker & Saldanha 2009, p. 139)? Maybe it is just to show that the Arabic language is now full of foreign phrases used by young people. This feature might have a literary value. But some French words are not even italicized in the TT, simply because of their everyday use in English. This lack of markedness touches upon the quality and effect of the translation.

#### *Idiomatic Expressions*

One idiom in the ST needs to have a corresponding idiom in the TT to create an effect similar to that felt by the source audience. But is this the case in the translation of the following idiom, e.g.,

10) **ST:** ستكون ليلة منيلة ستين نيلة

**BT:** It will be a nightmarish night sixty times over.

**TT:** [This] night cursed by sixty curses.

Is this not a literal translation that lacks the Egyptian vernacular language used in the ST functional translation? Is it not the one that the self-translator has planned to use so that it will be more effective, the one the target reader is presumably provided with: i.e., ‘This night is truly a nightmare’?

The same can be said about the following example,

11) **ST:** الزواج كالبطيخ على السكين

**BT:** Marriage is like a melon on the knife.

**TT:** Marriage was...like the watermelon on the knife, you never knew what you were going to get.

The idiom in the TT, 'the watermelon on the knife,' is non-sensical because interlinear translation is used, despite the self-explanatory clause 'you never knew what you were going to get.' For the Arabophone readers understand the idiom to purchase a watermelon (or indeed a melon, and only in the Gulf is it translated as 'a watermelon,' but in the Levant, it is a melon). The seller cuts it for you to see if it is ripe. But for Anglophone readers, it would be better to say, 'you truly never know know the person you are marrying' exciting discussion about the translation of the pronoun 'you' into English) (See Khuddro, 2013, pp. 56-57). There is an unsuccessful word choice in the following example,

12) **ST:** سوف تترهين في دار أبيها،

**BT:** She would act like a nun in her father's house.

**TT:** She would shut herself up like a monk in her father's house.

It should be 'like a nun,' a gender-related item. The reason for making such an error can be attributed to the root of the Arabic word 'رهين' (verb) *to live in a monastery*, 'راهب' (masculine noun) *a monk*, and 'راهبة' (feminine noun) *a nun*.

### **Cultural References**

#### *Habits and Taboos*

Exchanging telephone numbers is one of the habits among young people, e.g.,

13) **ST:**

دونت الفتيات ما تيسر لهن من أرقام الهواتف التي جاد بها الشباب... أو بالبطاقات الشخصية التي يمد الجريئون من الفتيان أيديهم بها عبر النوافذ لتلتقطها الجريئات من الفتيات أيضاً.

**BT:** The girls jotted down as many phone numbers as the boys could give ... or written them down from the business cards the brave boys were keen to pass through the car windows only to be snatched up by the courageous girls.

**TT:** The girls also copied [the boys' phone numbers from]... personal business cards, pass[ed]... through the windows to be snatched up by the girls, who were every bit as brave as the aspiring Romeos.

The target cultural reference 'the aspiring Romeos,' familiar to the Anglophone readers, is certainly a welcome addition; but why not enhance with their 'aspiring Juliets?'

Drinking is also taboo in the source culture and is less marked in the TT, domesticating unnecessarily the phrase 'her father's wine cabinet' as 'her father's storage cellar.'

14) **ST:** تشاركت لميس مع ميشيل تلك الليلة في شرب زجاجة الشامبين الغالية التي أخذتها الأخيرة من خزانة والدها

**BT:** Lamees shared with Michelle that night the expensive champagne bottle that Michelle had brought from her father's cabinet.

**TT:** Lamees joined Michelle that night in consuming a bottle of expensive champagne. Michelle had fetched it from her father's storage cellar.

Bowdlerizing is used to lessen the shocking effect on the target audience. Still, is it so surprising in the minds of the target readers to render the known brand of sanitary towels 'Always' in English as "a pack of sanitary pads" to translate better understand "the gist of the text"? Interestingly, in the original, that brand is transliterated, using borrowing to convey the foreignness used in the original. That foreignness is lost in translation, hence translation loss.

#### *Eponyms*

The novel is full of names of celebrities in both English and Arabic cultures, actors like Hussein Fahmi, known in the 1970s, and actresses like Mari Munib (1905–1969) (who is distinguished for her funny Arabic accent in one of her Egyptian plays, analogically similar to the English language spoken by the French) and titles of films one of which is surprisingly omitted, even though it refers to the concept of vanity, the 1990s Egyptian film *Fish, Milk, Tamarind*. In English name-dropping is common in popular culture, too. Celebrity names have specific connotative meanings in the minds of the target readers due to their behavior, such as mentioning Oliver Reed to indicate that the person is almost always drunk. Further examples of name-dropping in the TT are, such as Barry Manilow transliterated باري مانلو *bary manlo*, and Mr. Hyde مستر هايد *mstr hayd*.

#### *Religious Expressions*

There are some religious lexical items or terms used and appropriately explained, e.g.,

#### 15) **ST:**

لم تصافحه اقتداءً بقمرة التي أخبرتها عند خطبتها أن أمها نبهتها ألا تمد يدها لراشد إذا ما دخلت عليه في وقت الشوفة (الرؤية الشرعية).

**BT:** She [Sadeem] did not shake hands, following Gamrah, who told her that at her engagement party, the latter's mother warned her not to shake hands with Rashed at the *shoufa* (the lawful 'viewing' [of the bride]).

**TT:** It was the occasion of the *shoufa*, that one lawful "viewing" of the potential bride according to Islamic law.

The explanation of the term 'shoufa', is highly commendable. But specific details in the above example are advertently omitted in the TT. There is no excuse for such omission. This translation is a typically 'gist translation,' as Dickins calls it. 'Gist translation,' as Dickins calls it in his book *Thinking Arabic Translation* (2002, pp. 8-10), aims to separate 'the gist of the...message from all the circumstantial details and the tonal subtleties' (8). Details are ignored in the above example, affecting the quality of the translation. A better rendering is of the religious quote in the original:

#### 16) **ST:** كل ابن آدم خطأ وخير الخطائين التوابون

**BT:** Every child of Adam errs; the best of them all is the one who repents.

**TT:** Every child of Adam commits errors, and the best of those who commit errors are those who repent.

Rendering direct translation successfully serves the purpose of the translation. Perhaps a better rendering would be to opt for the more idiomatic well-known quote by Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (1711): 'To err is human, to forgive divine.'

However, one cannot deny the successful rendering of the following sentence using the functional approach or even the pragmatic approach which Nida called earlier the dynamic equivalence in the 1960s,

17) **ST:** أنا لميس والأجر على الله

**BT:** I am Lamees, and Allah may repay you.

**TT:** Hey, I'm Lamees! The one and only.

This statement shows the strong personality of Lamees in the novel. This effort is based on Levy's (1967) Minimax Principle in the decision-making process, and a good solution is yielding 'maximum effect for minimum effort' by the Anglophone reader. Further, the use of Allah in Arabic is everyday but sometimes is not required to be translated into the TT, as in the above example.

As seen in the Analysis section, several categories under which these above-translated extracts have been analyzed, starting with the issue of translating the title of the novel, followed by the usefulness of paratextuality if used faithfully, then either missing translation entirely when it comes to intertextuality as we have found. In addition, we have seen omissions unjustified in the TT. Another missing feature we have located is the Arabic English, unfortunately, nonexistent in the TT, which yields a complete translation loss, but it cannot be helped sometimes. Also, we have seen how idiomatic expressions and cultural references (including habits and taboos and religious terms or expressions) are sometimes successfully rendered in the TT using dynamic equivalence as in example 17 and how that equivalence is highly commendable in example 15.

## Discussion

As we have seen earlier, the first research question is: To what extent has collaborative translation affected the quality of rendering linguistic, social, and cultural references of the ST, such as idiomatic expressions, lexical terms, songs, names of celebrities, religious, literary references, and traditional festivities? This question has been answered in the analysis of translated extracts; sometimes, the rendering has been a failure in the form of complete translation loss or the feature missing in the TT. The second research question is: How effective have the literal and, or functional approach been in this collaborative translation? As we have seen in examples 15 and 17, the TT has been successful. In other words, the quality of rendering into English has been successful using functional equivalents that serve the purpose: i.e., conveying the message to the audience.

The study has found that qualifying the translation as collaborative has its downside. It has created tension and affected a few parts of the translation; otherwise, it could have been more successful. It is true that 4 million copies were indeed sold up to 2015, but this is not proof of the quality of the translation. This paper has shown that even though specific 'blind spots' hidden in the ST were revealed by the author, the collaboration/relationship between the two translators has affected the TT; the evidence is the examples discussed in the paper.

It is evident in the original that such a linguistic feature is so significant that losing it in the translation is detrimental to its effect on the Anglophone reader. It has also become detrimental in its use of spoken English only, ignoring all the language varieties used in the ST. One of the solutions to rendering dialects in translation can be using various dialects in the TT. For instance, one can use English dialects other than the constant spoken English used throughout the TT, such



as Scot, Irish, Welsh, Canadian, US, South African, Indian English, and Australian or New Zealand dialect (Ausie's or Kiwi accent, see Khuddro's analysis of the translation of 'Kiwi' 2009). This technique would add a similar linguistic flavor to the TT, though not a precise one identical to the ST because such dialects have no similar cultural background in the TL.

Also, speaking the English language as a non-native does not mean the self-translator (the author) is capable of introducing changes to the TT as she is not a linguist but is a dentist by profession. On the other hand, the linguist's most literalist approach sometimes lacks cultural comprehensibility, as in 'a watermelon on the knife' or 'Ladies, girls and gentlemen.' It is assumed that joint work in translation, particularly with the author, should yield a successful, wholly streamlined translation with a specific approach throughout the TT, and not two different approaches to producing translation: functional and literal approach.

The study has found that specific translation procedures, such as omission, addition, and alteration, are used by the self-translator in an attempt to domesticate the TT and influence the Anglophone reader. These procedures are sometimes effective but at other times damaging. The paper has argued how much liberty the publisher and self-translator have undertaken in these renderings, leaving the co-translator in the dark during the editing process. Subsequently, the paper finds that the translation procedures are sometimes rather unacceptable because they are a mixture of literal almost interlinear translation and functional translation. This mixture reflects the tension between the two translators. Only one approach should have been used to create consistency in translation. The paper has demonstrated that on certain occasions the most literal bordering precariously on the interlinear translation is used, and such an approach is unacceptable because of its awkward structure and lopsided style. It recommends producing a 'critical translation,' a more scholarly TT, to fill the gaps mentioned in the paper.

Even though the examples are carefully and conveniently selected, they are representative; however, one limitation could be to include other examples, but this task cannot be done in the current study due to time and space. Also, Neubert and Shreve's Practical Translation Model or any other five translation models can be implemented in future research.

## Conclusion

This research has assessed the quality of the English collaborative translation of Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh*, focusing on the rendering of linguistic and cultural features of the TT, a few of which are sometimes nonexistent in the ST. Also, the apparent tension between the self-translator and her co-translator (Booth) might have been the reason for the occasionally unsuccessful instances discussed in the analysis section. Translation loss has sometime been seen in the example of Arabic English, which is impossible to render due to the prominence of the target culture sometimes recurrent in the original text (the ST). Also, given that no systematic method has been used throughout and having followed both functional and literal approaches erratically in the TT, particularly as the two methods hardly converge in one text, collaborative translators should always state in their introductory note that only one translation approach is used. No two opposing methods are to be used. Another point missed is that the collaborative work should have suggested recommendations for further joint translation that will benefit translation studies from the shared experience of the two translators.

**Endnote:**

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