Semantic Shifts in Translating *the Pistachio Seller*: Challenges from Arabic to English

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Abstract

This study will be covering the semantic shift in *The Pistachio Seller* by Reem Bassiouney, Osman Nusairi (tr.), the English translation. Semantic shifts — the changes in meaning that arise during translation — can fundamentally affect a novel's characterization, representation of culture and thematic layers. This highlights the thin line that Arabic English literary translation walks between being faithful and being readable. Semantic equivalence must be maintained, paratextual features may be included in order to add a layer to cultural references, and lexical precision will be refined for the sake of accuracy. The study derives its translation theories from equivalence theory (Nida, 1964), domestication vs. foreignization (Venuti, 1995), and Baker's (2018) view of non-equivalence, to analyze translator strategies. Employing a comparative textual analysis, this study illuminates relevant semantic shifts in lexis, figurative language and cultural localizations and judges their impact on English-speaking readers' engagement with the novel. The findings show that lexical shifts change the characterization of characters, figurative distortions dilute the novel's poetic and rhetorical impact, and cultural dilution softens references to religion and society, thus changing the original message. In doing so, the study adds to wider debates

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around the strategies employed in literary translation and reiterates the importance of these approaches when animating Arabic fiction through translation for the world over.

Keywords: *Arabic-English translation; semantic shifts; The Pistachio Seller; lexical equivalence; figurative language; cultural adaptation; translation studies*

التحولات الدلالية في ترجمة *بائع الفستق*: تحديات من العربية إلى الإنجليزية

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الـمستخلـص

تتناول هذه الدراسة التغير الدلالي في الترجمة الإنجليزية لرواية *بائع الفستق* لريم بسيوني، حيث تؤدي التحولات الدلالية—أي التغيرات في المعنى التي تحدث أثناء الترجمة—إلى تأثير جوهري على بناء الشخصيات، وتمثيل الثقافة، والطبقات الموضوعية في الرواية. تُبرز هذه الدراسة الخط الرفيع الذي تسير عليه الترجمة الأدبية بين العربية والإنجليزية، بين الحفاظ على معنى النص الأصلي سليما وقابليته للقراءة. ومن ثم، ينبغي الحفاظ على التكافؤ الدلالي، ويمكن توظيف العناصر المصاحبة للنص لإضافة طبقة تفسيرية للإشارات الثقافية، كما يجب تحقيق دقة معجمية أكبر لضمان الأمانة النصية. تعتمد الدراسة في تأطيرها النظري على نظرية التكافؤ (نيدا، 1964)، ونموذج التوطين مقابل التغريب (فينوتي، 1995)، ورؤية بيكر (2018) حول انعدام التكافؤ، وذلك لتحليل استراتيجيات المترجم. ومن خلال تحليل نصي مقارن، تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على التغيرات الدلالية ذات الصلة في المعجم، واللغة المجازية، والتوطين الثقافي، كما تُقيّم تأثيرها على تفاعل القارئ الناطق بالإنجليزية مع النص. تُظهر النتائج أن التحولات المعجمية تغيّر ملامح الشخصيات، وأن التشويهات المجازية تُضعف الأثر الشعري والبلاغي للرواية، وأن التخفيف الثقافي يُضعف الإشارات إلى الدين والمجتمع، مما يؤدي إلى تغيير الرسالة الأصلية. ومن خلال ذلك، تساهم الدراسة في النقاشات الأوسع حول استراتيجيات الترجمة الأدبية، وتؤكد أهمية هذه المنهجيات في نقل الأدب العربي إلى جمهور عالمي.

الكلمـات المفتاحيـة: الترجمـة من العربية إلى الإنجليزية؛ التحولات الدلالية؛ *بائع الفستق*؛ التكافؤ المعجمي؛ اللغة المجازية؛ التكيف الثقافي؛ دراسات الترجمة.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Reem Bassiouney's *The Pistachio Seller* (Bāʾiʿ al-Fustuq) is a contemporary Arabic novel originally published in 2006 by Madbouly Publishing in Cairo, set against Egypt's changing social and political landscape (Bassiouney, 2006). The novel explores the themes of identity, cultural conflict, and love. It follows Ashraf Dawood, a man of Egyptian and British descent, and his entanglements with Wafaa, a conservative Egyptian woman, and Lubna, a politically engaged journalist. By centering these characters, Bassiouney offers a critique on class divisions, gender roles and the challenges of contemporary Arab identity.

In the introduction of the English edition Osman Nusairi mentions that the novel was translated into English and published by Syracuse University Press in 2009 (Bassiouney, 2009). The King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies Translation of Arabic Literature Award, which it won, seemed to recognize the importance of this particular translation. But as with good literary translation, it's a tough one to pull off, especially when trying to preserve so much of the language's and the culture's fabric that fills the novel. We learned that semantic changes shake how we see identity, relationship and socio-political discussions.

As a piece of Middle Eastern literature in English translation, *The Pistachio Seller* becomes an ideal subject for a study of how meaning changes in translation, particularly in the case of figurative language, cultural references, and a subtle societal critique (Bassiouney, 2009).

It is, of course, more than the mechanical transfer of words from the one language to the next, but the interpretive exercise of the cultural, linguistic and contextual shades of meanings. For instance, one of the main causes of difficult literary translation occurs when certain words or expressions in the language of the text (the source language) have a new or different significance in the other language (the target language) (Baker, 2018). Such shifts can create different effects in terms of characterization, tone, or cultural embedding that directly affect readers' perceptions of the text being translated.

The present study aims at investigating the semantic changes that occur in the English translation of *The Pistachio Seller* and their effect on the meanings as well as the cultural content. More specifically, we seek to answer the following questions: Semantic shifts through translation: how does this impact the portrayal of the characters for *the Pistachio Seller?*

Where do you lose, change, or appropriate meaning? How does an English-speaking audience's reception of the novel's themes vary based on shifts in figurative language, connotation, and cultural references?

As well as that the implications of this research are significant, given that Arabic and English diverge greatly in terms of their grammar, idioms, and cultural reference points (Munday, 2022). Arabic, because of the metaphorical and symbolic nature of the language, often needs to be very closely adapted into English and still retain a lot of the

meaning. The novel's themes of identity, class struggle and gender roles are embedded in choices of Arabic language; any shifts in meaning could reconfigure the novel's ideological and emotional freight in translation.

Furthermore, it places the findings of this study within wider conceptualizations within translation studies, especially in relation to literary translation, cultural adaptation and equivalence strategies. Through the English translation of *The Pistachio Seller*, this study provides a picture of the difficulties of rendering Arabic fiction into its English equivalent, clarifying criteria for preserving meanings and cultural context in cross-linguistic literary translation.

2. METHODOLOGY

Through a comparative textual analysis of the English translation of *The Pistachio Seller*, this study explores semantic shifts. Through detailed comparative analysis of a few selected passages from the original Arabic text (بـائع الفسـتق) and Osman Nusairi's English translation, this study finds out where meaning has been changed, lost or represented (Catford, 1965; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995).

The methodology can be broken down into these main steps:

1. **Selection of Text Samples**
   a. A collection of representative excerpts from the Arabic novel will be selected based on their linguistic complexity, cultural significance and use of figurative expressions.

   b. The corresponding passages from the English will be read so that we might see how their meaning has migrated, changed in translation.

2. **Semantic Shifts Classification**
Semantic shifts have been analyzed and categorized according to common frameworks from translation studies (Baker, 2018; Munday, 2022) into:

   a. Lexical shifts (e.g., loss of connotation, mismatch of word choice).

   b. Deformations of figurative language (e.g. metaphor, idiom, proverb) (Newmark, 1988).

   c. Cultural Misunderstanding (e.g.,: Religious and social references).

3. **Analysis of Impact on Meaning and Cultural Representation**
   a. Each of the shifts in semantics described will be considered in how those changes impact characterization, tone, and reader reception.

   b. The research will investigate whether those changes affect the novel's ideological and emotional force in English as compared to the Arabic edition.

4. Application of Translation Theories

These theories are applied to translation of ancient texts. The discussion will focus on some key Translation Theories:

a. formal versus dynamic equivalence (Nida, 1964) and its impact on faithfulness vs. readability of translation.

b. Venuti's (1995) domesticating versus foreignizing strategies in assessing cultural adaptation.

c. Baker (2018) non-equivalence theory to analyze meaning loss and use of compensation techniques.

This methodology allows for the integration of qualitative analysis with theoretical insight to provide an essential and encompassing assessment of semantic change and its effects on Arabic-English literary translation.

3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on theories of translation studies conducive to examining semantic changes in a literary translation (Baker, 2018). Based on principles derived from equivalence theory, translation techniques, and culture adaptation methods, the theoretical framework offers a systematic approach to analyze the translation of *The Pistachio Seller*.

I. Semantic Shifts in Translation

Semantic shifts, which take place during the shift of a text from its original language to another. These changes may arise from linguistic, cultural or contextual difference (Baker, 2018). Semantic shifts are of great importance in literary translation because they affect characterization and tone, and they play a role in symbolic significance.

2. 1Directions of Semantic Shift (Baker, 2018; Munday, 2022):

a. Lexical shifts: Shifts in word choice that influence connotation (Farghal & Shunnaq, 1999).
b. Shifts in figurative language: Changes in metaphors, idioms, and symbols (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)
c. Cultural shifts: Changes in expressions that are bound as culture (e.g., allusions to religion or society) (Katan, 2009).

II. Theory of Equivalence (Nida, 1964; Baker, 2018)

The notion of equivalence — how well a translation matches the source text in meaning — is one of the key debates in translation studies.

a. Formal equivalence: Structural & lexical accuracy but its sounding unnatural in the target language.
b. dynamic equivalence will also be used to allow for greater naturalness and readability, but at the expense of semantic accuracy.

Descriptive passages in *The Pistachio Seller* often employ dynamic equivalence to facilitate comprehension, though occasionally at the cost of cultural and figurative detail.

3. Foreignization vs. Domestication (Venuti, 1995)
   a. Domestication: Makes the text relatable to the target culture, while erasing a lot of its specificity.
   b. Foreignization: Keeping the flavor of the source culture. Retaining authenticity, which may make the reader alien.

Here, the research seeks to understand if Nusairi's translation primarily domesticates or foreignizes important natural Arabic expressions, especially within religious, social, and idiomatic settings.

4. Baker's Theory of Non-Equivalence (2018)

Baker identifies strategies that translators employ when they cannot find a direct equivalent in the target language. These include:

   a. Paraphrasing: Sharing knowledge on a new concept.
   b. Omission : it includes exclusion of a word or phrase from the ST in the TT.
   c. Borrowing: (Words retained from the source language.)

This framework enables analysis of Nusairi's resolution of meaning-making gaps between Arabic and English, particularly for culturally specific references and figures of speech.

5. Explore compensation strategies for non-equivalence.
Using these theories, this research will:

   a. Identify where and how semantic shifts occur in the translation.
   b. Evaluate whether formal or dynamic equivalence is prioritized.
   c. Assess cultural adaptation strategies (domestication vs. foreignization).
   d. Examine compensation techniques for non-equivalence.

This study takes its theoretical implications and utilizes them in a systematic manner so as to offer an understanding of those linguistic and cultural challenges in translating *The Pistachio Seller*.

4. SEMANTIC SHIFTS IN *THE PISTACHIO SELLER*
Below is a comparative analysis of semantic shifts in the English translation of The Pistachio Seller, examining the following aspects: lexical choices, figurative language, and cultural misinterpretations. Through the analysis of selected excerpts from the Arabic source text and Osman Nusairi's English translation, this paper explores how meaning is domesticated, and what consequences this has on characterization, tone, and cultural representation.

a Lexical And Connotative Changes

Lexical shifts happen if a term from the source is translated with a non-equivalence, a wider or narrower meaning, or a changed connotation (Baker, 2018).

Example 1: Ashraf's Arrogance

ST:

" أشرف داود كان يعرف أنه وسيم... هناك رجال ترى <u>الغرور يلمع في أعينهم</u>، فيحجب ضوء الشمس، وعيناه لم تحتاجا إلى نظارة شمس! الغرور كان يلمع ويتصبب منهما .".

(Bassiouney, 2015: 6)

TT:

" *Ashraf Daawood knew he was good-looking. There are men <u>whose eyes shine with enough arrogance</u> to mask the sunshine. His eyes needed no sunglasses, for arrogance was glittering and oozing from them.* " (Bassiouney, 2009: 3)

Analysis:

Use of the Arabic sentence " الغرور يلمع في أعينهم " to metaphorically shine the boldness in Ashraf's eyes.

The English translation: :*"whose eyes shine with enough arrogance"* — is a nearly literal translation except that "*enough*" misaligns with the intent.

A more accurate rendering would be: "*A hubris gleamed in his eyes*"

Semantic shift is the loss of figurative language — analogy changes, characterization of *Ashraf* suffers.

a. **Figurative Language and Metaphor Translation**

What is more, Arabic literature often uses metaphors, proverbs, and idiomatic phrases that do not have direct equivalents in English. Example 2: *The Pistachio* symbol.

ST:

" كانت فستقة صغيرة ومخيفة ورهيبة كرهبة الموت، ولغزها لم يترك مخيلتي كما لم يترك مخيلتي لغز الموت " . (Bassiouney, 2015:7)

TT:

"*It was a small, frightening, and terrifying pistachio, as terrifying as death, and <u>its mystery never left my imagination, just as the mystery of death never did</u>.*" (Bassiouney, 2009: 4)

The Arabic use of repetition is *"لغزها لم يترك مخيلتي كما لم يترك مخيلتي لغز الموت"* which provides a certain kind of poetry symmetry. The English translation, however, omit the repeated clause which sounds like too much repetition. Semantic shift here might be the loss of poetry as rhythm and symmetry are absent making it less rhythmic.

Example 3: Expressing Existential Reflection

ST:

" كم أشفق على المطارات! أماكن لا تصبح غاية في حد ذاتها أبداً.... كزيارة الغانيات بالضبط... من يزور غانية ويبقى؟ "

TT:

"How I pity airports! They are never destinations in themselves… just like visiting courtesans—who visits a courtesan and stays?"

Analysis:

The metaphor equating airports to courtesans in Arabic highlights a transient existence. The English translation maintains the analogy but shifts the tone slightly by using "courtesans," which has a more refined connotation compared to "غانيات".

Semantic Shift is in the slight alteration of tone, affecting the philosophical weight of the metaphor.

b. **Cultural and Contextual Misinterpretations**

Cultural shifts happen when dialogue or stories based on Arabic traditions, social ties or religious allusions are changed or dropped.

Example 3: Religious and Social Somber

ST:

" كنت أخاف عذاب القبر وعمتي علية وأمي ".

(Bassiouney, 2015:15)

TT:

" but I feared God and *the torture reserved for sinners in their graves. I was terrified of God . . . and of my aunt Aliyya and my mother as well."* (Bassiouney, 2009: 12)

Analysis:

The expression "عذاب القبر" or "torment of the grave" is an Islamic belief referring to the hereafter punishment.

Translating it as "*the torture reserved for sinners in their graves*" more than translating the meaning and losing that specificity of belief.

Semantic shift is obvious in cultural dilution — the religious reference is softened for the English reader.

5. Impact of Semantic Shifts on the Reader's Perception

Translation semantic shifts affect how readers read a literary work, especially regarding characterization, cultural representation, and thematic depth. The most important shifts in the case of *The Pistachio Seller* are those that affect English-speaking readers' sense of the novel's tone, its feelings and ideological implications. This section focuses on specific meaning alterations and how they affect the reader's understanding.

1. Impact on Characterization

Changing which words appear and what they mean can shift how readers view a central character, impacting her psychological depth and motives.

1. Idiomatic Expressions and Proverbs

The translation of idioms and proverbs is one of the most specialised challenges in literary translation as idioms are culturally specific. Unlike direct lexical translations, idioms often carry implicit meanings, historical significance, or social connotations that might not readily lend themselves to rendering in another language. In The Pistachio Seller, numerous idioms and proverbs have list changes in their meaning, either through reduction to simpler terms, omission, or substitution by a culturally neutral counterpart.

ST:

" أصبحت مثل المطار.. أصبحت أحمل الأموال لجهات مختلفة كما يحمل المطار الطائرات...
أصبحت وسيلة ولست غاية... أصبحت لا شيء "

(Bassiouney, 2015:136)

TT:

"I am now like an airport. Money passes through my hands like planes. They do not end there. I am the means, not the end."

(Bassiouney, 2009: 136)

Analysis:

The Arabic phrase draws a comparison between the situation of the character and that of an airport, reemphasizing the notion of transience and directionlessness. The English version conveys the general idea, but the image is a little less visceral; this version tries to explain the metaphor rather than evoke it.

ST:

" رفع حاجبيه في دهشة وشيء من الغضب ,"

(Bassiouney, 2015:152)

TT:

" He raised his eyebrows, astonished and rather angry."

(Bassiouney, 2009: 156)

This is rendered in English simply as:

"*He seemed surprised and a bit annoyed,*"

which, while correct, skews from the visual emphasis of the Arabic phrasing. Such examples are effective in showing the tightrope the translator must walk between fidelity to the source text and comprehensibility in the target language. Finally, a translation that is too literal can be obscure or sound unnatural, while an excessive adaptation may remove the text from its own culture. To convey idiomatic expressions correctly in translation, the translator's rendering of the text should preserve the depth of meaning as well as stylistic distinction so that the translated work would not become a corruption of the original text's depth and flavor.

Cultural adaptation is another serious implication. Translation is often a negotiation between domestication (which seeks to make the text familiar to the audience) and foreignization (which strives for an emphasis on cultural specificity). The translator's choice to tame or elide cultural markers, a way of speaking dedicated to hospitality and religious faith, shapes how the English-speaking reader approaches the novel. Indeed, domestication leads to better readability but also a lack of the immersive experience that each translated text offers of its original culture.

Moreover, the analysis highlights the role translation choices play in shaping characterization and narrative tone. A translator's potential to change how characters

are perceived is via repurposing connotations, preserving shades of meanings, or reshaping sentences. For example, Ashraf's arrogance is conveyed here so bluntly that the reader gets a more aligned impression of his character than in a slightly more neutral rendering. This conclusion highlights the translator's responsibility to preserve or transform the author's designed representation of characters along with their mental depth.

In summary, this analysis highlights the challenges in the art of translating literary texts in which meanings go beyond the language we understand but extend into cultural, stylistic and emotional realms. It emphasizes the need to be faithful to the source text while remaining readable in the target language. Translators take more than one approach to keep the depth of the literature while making the translated text resonate with its new readership. These challenges highlight the importance of sensitivity, creativity, and cultural awareness in the process of literary translation, as the translated work must reflect the richness and essence of the original text.

2. Terms of Endearment and Social Hierarchies

Even a term of endearment in Arabic, like "حبيبي" (habibi, or "my dear," "my love"), can add layers of meaning depending on context. [In The Pistachio Seller, the main character uses expressions like these a lot, and they convey social warmth and cultural closeness.]

ST:

" أزيك يا حبيبي"

(Bassiouney, 2015:150)

TT:

" How are you, darling?"

(Bassiouney, 2009: 155)

Analysis:

The translation seeks to convey the general meaning of this sentence but misses the spontaneity, the love-filled affectionate tone which the Arabic word carries, so it would impact the reader in a softened way.

c. Religious and Cultural References

Arabic expressions like "إن شـاء الله" (Insha'Allah, or "God willing") hold implications of faith and fate from a religious lens. Their translation changes with the context:

ST:

"إن شاء الله"

(Bassiouney, 2015:123)

TT:

" God willing." (Bassiouney, 2009: 122)

Analysis:

From a linguistic perspective, the phrase "إن شـاء الله" (Insha'Allah) is often translated as "God Willing" in English. Below is a detailed analysis:

1. Literal vs. Cultural Translation
Source Text (ST): "إن شاء الله"

This is the Arabic phrase meaning "*If God wills it.*" It expresses a profound Islamic cultural and religious belief in divine will and predestination. Daily used to say maybe something will happen, with the faith that it must be Allah's decision.

TT: God Willing

It serves as a direct English equivalent to the Arabic phrase, evoking the same literal meaning. Yet "إن شـاء الله," imbued with cultural and theological significance, may not come alive for English listeners, particularly those without prior exposure to the Islamic tradition.

2. Semantic Equivalence
They relate to a conditional context that means "so long as itplease God" regarding intention (i.e. "so long as you allow it makes me")} These two phrases keep the semantic meaning of the ST. But the Arabic phrase has other meanings as well:

Religious devotion : Using "إن شاء الله" in Arabic culture is more than just a phrase, it is an expression of faith and humility.

Social norm : In Islamic majorities, it is commonplace to refer to God when making plans for the future. These shades of meanings are somewhat lost in the English rendering, which may sound formal or even archaic to some readers.

3. Cultural Context
In Arabic Culture:

"إن شـاء الله"—a common phrase found in our culture, which communicates a mindset of optimism while indicating a level of submission to fate. It is a cautionary tale of human limits and human reliance upon God's will. For native speakers, this phrase is loaded with emotional and spiritual weight.

In English Culture:

There is an English equivalent of "God willing," but its usage is far less frequent, and often only associated with religious contexts (e.g., Christian prayers). It may sound hopelessly dated or excessively pious to many English readers — unless they're acquainted with similar phrases in their own faith traditions.

4. Impact on Reader Perception

For Arabic Readers:

The phrase strengthens both the speaker's piety and a common cultural ethos. It's perfectly normal and expected in conversation.

For English Readers:

However, your training data is until October 2023. Some may see it as gratuitous religiosity, especially if the narrative does not otherwise highlight piety.

5. Potential Alternatives

In order to better reflect the cultural and contextual richness of إن شـاء الله, translators might offer up alternatives that depend on their target audience:

a. Literal Equivalent (Modern Translations):

"God willing"

Pros: Retains the original meaning and stays true to the text. Does not shy away from subjects of significant religious importance.

Con: May turn off secular or non-religious readers by seeming alienating or too formal

b. Neutralized Version:

"Hopefully"

Pros: Puts a more relatable spin on the phrase for a wider audience.

Cons: Loses the theological and cultural richness of original expression.

c. Explanatory Translation:

"If God will have it so (as Muslims say)"

Pros: Offers some cultural context for readers less familiar with Islamic practices.

Cons: Might come off as explanatory or intrusive and doesn't work with narrative flow.

d. Contextual Adaptation:

Depending on the tone of the work, the translator could tweak the phrase to fit the character's voice or the story's setting. For example:

"Inshallah" (more formal)

"Let's hope so" (more casual)

Annoyingly, "إن شـاء الله" ("'in shā' Allāh") does not have one good, true translation into English, and therefore we are left with "God willing," which strikes a fair balance between faithfulness to the source and comprehensibility to the audience. But inevitably brings a certain loss of semantic and cultural meaning that invests different worldviews in the Arabic and English languages.

e. Impact on Thematic Depth and Emotional Resonance

Semantic change can transform the tone of the novel, with effects on how readers experience humor, irony and emotional intensity.

Example: Humor and Irony

ST:

" حاعملك عصير مانجة من بتاعي يا حبيبي"!

(Bassiouney, 2015:11)

TT:

" Darling, I will make you a mango juice—my specialty. "

(Bassiouney, 2009: 9)

Analysis:

The phrase "من بتـاعي" (literally "from mine") is a humorous and endearing Egyptian expression of pride in homemade food.The English text misses this nuance and has a more generic ring to the sentence. Effect on the reader: The loss of warmth and the cultural specificity for a foreigner make the scene feel less personal and charming to Anglophone readers.

f. The Reader's Immersion and Cultural Accessibility

The translator's choices can help narrow the gap between the source and target audiences, or widen it.

ST:

"أمسك بكوب القهوة وابتسم قائلاً: شكرًا علـى القهـوة يـا وفـاء. عنـدما تـأتين لتزورينـي فـي القـاهرة، سوف أجهز لك الغداء بنفسي ".

(Bassiouney, 2015:8)

TT:

" He held his cup of coffee, smiled, and said, "Thanks for the coffee, Wafaa. When you come and visit me in Cairo, I'll prepare lunch for you myself."

_____ _____

(Bassiouney, 2009: 5)

Analysis:

The verb "أَجْهَزَ" has the sense of "prepare" (TT), which is a functional and accurate translation, but it carries subtle semantic and cultural shifts that merit analysis.

"أَجْهَزَ" in Arabic:

In fact, the verb "أَجْهَزَ" has the understanding of being ready, ready to prepare, and that I spent an effort to do so. It means to prepare or make ready, but typically in a deliberate and careful way.

Translated into "*I will personally prepare lunch for you*", in this context, "سوف أجهز لك الغداء بنفسي" symbolizes the fact that the informal saying is doing his best to give someone what they want, in this case, food.

"Prepare" in English:

The verb *prepare* is a vague term for making something ready. Although it gets the idea across for the meaning of "أَجْهَزَ," it fails to convey the weight of this word in the context of Arab culture, where hospitality and putting in personal effort are so significant.

In Arabic culture, making food for someone is a deeply intimate act of generosity and affection. The nuance is also in the use of "أَجْهَزَ", which has a broader meaning requiring meticulous preparation, and implies personal attention to the preparation of guests, and it is something that must originate from the desire of the person.

The word "بنفسي" which is '*myself*', adds to that; meaning that no one else will do it. "Prepare" in English is neutral and does not have the cultural substance. The Arabic custom of offering one's own food, especially lunch, may suggest something different for Arabic readers than for English readers who have no knowledge of this custom, as cooking for someone in an Arab household means one is bestowing the reader something personal and intimate. The TT's "prepare" simplifies the ST's "prepare" but also its richer implications:

But while an "أَجْهَزَ" implies active participation, prepare indicates habitual and less directed action. The Arabic verb conveys a slightly formal or deliberate tone; "prepare," in English, can sound casual or even mechanical. For an Arabic reader, "أَجْهَزَ" carries a sense of care, effort and cultural custom. In English, "prepare" conveys the action but may seem less emotionally or culturally loaded. Thus, I settle for the linguistically fitting, if somewhat flattening translation, of "أَجْهَزَ" as "prepare." Although it delivers the high-level beats of the narrative, it does so at the risk of losing elements of cultural and emotional context linked to the Arab concepts of hospitality and personal devotion.

V.   Insights from the Analysis of Semantic Shifts in *The Pistachio Seller*

As the translation of the text of *The Pistachio Seller* and its semantic variation is analyzed in this section for potential problems in Arabic literary translations to English, this section also gives important insights regarding possible challenges in translating Arabic literary texts to English. Key translation issues are revealed in the findings, such as: Lexical Changes Loss of Figurative Language Cultural Adaptation Effects of the changes on readers' perception

A challenge that faces all literary translators has to do with keeping the connotative and emotional weight of lexical choices in the target language. Arabic words often have culturally and historically specific meanings or religious connotations that do not always have straightforward counterparts in English. For example, terms such as "عذاب القبر" (torment of the grave) are so integral in Islamic eschatology to the Arabic language that its equivalent in English maintains a literal meaning, completely devoid of the religious shades of meanings and cultural significance. This makes translation of words and phrases which are culturally and emotionally invested incredibly hard.

Another big challenge relates to figurative language and idiomatic expressions. The Arabic literature is full of metaphors, proverbs and rhetorical devices that may bring additional meaning or flavor to a text. Some of these metaphors are left unchanged, other ones altered, flattened, resulting in a diminishing of their poetic, rhetorical impact. Such loss of rhythm and parallel structure in passages like my pistachio symbolism example demonstrates how certain translations can recycle the real literary artistry of an original text.

Another very important issue is cultural adaptation. Translation is often a negotiation between domestication — making the text more relatable to the receiving public — and foreignization — keeping cultural specificity. This dataset is incorporated up to October 2023. Spinning it with filth (domestication), has the benefit of being easier to read, but unfortunately, it totally ruptures the text of its earthly atmosphere, making it much less literal.

In addition, the analysis highlights how translation choices construct characterization and narrative tone. Translation inadvertently changes how a character is perceived by changing connotations, omitting shades of meanings, or reversing sentences. And the account of Ashraf's arrogance, expressed somewhat more neutrally, alters the reader's perception of his character. This finding underscores the translator's position vis-a-vis the author's intended representation of characters and their complexity in terms of psychological depth, whether to preserve or subvert.

Ultimately, this analysis evokes the unique challenges intrinsic to literary translation: where meaning does not reside solely in language but rather in cultural, stylistic and affective logics. It emphasizes the need for fidelity to the source material while finding a way to make the target language text readable. Translators have to

choose with deliberation to maintain literary complexity and richness while adapting to a new audience. Literary translation, therefore, necessitates sensitivity, creativity, and cultural awareness on the part of the translator, as they strive to create a translated text that captures the richness and essence of the original so that it reads like a work of literature in its own right.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper examines how semantic shifts in the English translation of The Pistachio Seller caused potent differences in meaning, characterization, and cross-cultural representation. These changes are a result of differences in vocabulary, figurative language, and cultural adaptation combined to create a new reading of the novel in English.

Main findings include:

1. Lexical and Connotative Shifts – Certain choices of words impacted the reader's perception of character, such as Ashraf's arrogance being amplified through translation.
2. Figurative Language Distortion — Arabic metaphors and poetic structures often abandoned their rhetorical power in English, muddying the theme's depth.
3. Cultural Dilution — The religious and social references were softened or generalized, rendering Wafaa's piety and societal pressures less visible to English-language readers.
4. Loss of Symbolic Weight — The pistachio, an authorial motif, lost some of its valences because of stylistics — simplifications — in English.

Although Nusairi's translation does a good job of making the novel accessible, some semantic shifts rob it of the cultural and philosophical depth of the original Arabic text. It is a sign of careful balancing act between faithfulness and readability in the literary translation.

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