



Arabic Apology Expressions in English

Layali Amer Yahya Amer¹, Mangatur Nababan¹, Muhammad Yunus Anis¹

¹Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia

email: amerlayali2020@yahoo.com; Amantaradja@yahoo.com; yunus_678@staff.uns.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The translation of speech acts, particularly apologies, present a significant challenge due to their cultural specificity. This study attempts to examine the translation techniques utilized to render apology utterances at the micro level in Naguib Mahfouz's novel "Sugar Street". Using a descriptive qualitative method, apology expressions identified in the Arabic source text and their English translations were analyzed according to Molina and Albir's (2002) classification of translation techniques. The investigation found 51 instances of translation techniques applied to 10 apologetic utterances, some of which required more than one technique. The study showed that the most frequently used strategy was "established equivalent," which allowed the translator to transmit the core illocutionary impact of Arabic apologies in a natural and conventionalized manner for English readers. This study emphasizes the relevance of pragmatic equivalency in literary translation. It also contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics by demonstrating how culturally embedded speech acts are negotiated and reconstructed during translation, providing useful insights for both literary translators and scholars.

Keywords: Translation Techniques, Arabic Apology, Sugar Street

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INTRODUCTION

Translation functions as a vital mechanism for bridging the cultural and linguistic barriers. However, this process transcends a straightforward lexical transfer, as it entails careful navigation through intricate layers of social contexts, cultural norm and pragmatic function inherent in language. To a translator, one of the most challenging aspects to deal with is culture specific speech acts in which the meaning that is intended deeply tied to the sociocultural conventions of the original language. A good illustration of this complexity is the speech act of apology whose expression and social function can differ significantly across culture (Blum-kulka et al. 1989).

While much research has been done on the cross-cultural pragmatics of apologies (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Blum-kulka, 1984; Trosborg, 1995) as well as the broader challenges of Arabic-English translation (Hatim & Mason, 1990), there is a specific gap in the analysis of these

speech acts within the context of modern Arabic literature. Earlier research on Arabic Apology, such as (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Al-Zumor, 2011 ; Alfghe & Mohammadzadeh, 2021) has primarily concentrated on apology expressions, but there has been insufficient investigation of how these nuanced utterances are rendered in translated literary works where cultural authenticity and characterizations are essential. Naguib Mahfouz novel's "Sugar Street" (السكّرية) Al-Sukkariyya, 1957) presents a detailed exploration of Egyptian social life and dialogue, serving as pertinent example for examining the translator's role in effectively conveying Arabic apology strategies to an Anglophone audience.

The current study intends to this gap by analyze the translation techniques used in "Sugar Street" for rendering Arabic apologies into English. It specifically examines the preservation, adaption or transformation of pragmatic strategies of apology in Arabic during translation process. In this way, the study enhances translation theory and practice by advancing to a more profound comprehension of cross-cultural translation of speech acts especially apology.

METHOD

This study adapted a qualitative descriptive research methodology to examine the translation techniques used to render Arabic apologies into English in Mahfouz's novel "Sugar Street". This approach is particularly suited for this study because it seeks to provide a thorough and clear explanation of the translation phenomena without extensive abstraction, hence preserving proximity to the data source (Sandelowski, 2000).

A case study design was employed, focusing on "Sugar Street" as a valuable source of genuine literary instances featuring various occurrences of apologies in different social and linguistic contexts. The case study facilitated an in-depth analysis of the translation process in its real-world setting, permitting a contextualized interpretation of the data (Yin, 2018).

The collection of data was accomplished through document analysis which included a comparative examination of the original Arabic text and its English translation, and from this analysis 10 utterances for apology were collected from the novel "Sugar Street". The study adhered to the taxonomy of translation techniques proposed by (Molina & Albir, 2002), offering a systematic framework for classifying the translation procedures. Examples of apologies were identified using this framework and the techniques applied by the translator were coded and described.

FINDINGS

There are 51 uses for the translation techniques to render the 10 apology expressions since there are instances where a single expression is translated requiring several techniques. The translator chose 7 out of 18 techniques suggested by Molina & Albir (2002). Those are established equivalent, implicitation, paraphrase, pure borrowing, discursive creation, modulation, explication. The predominant techniques employed are the established equivalent (60.78%), paraphrase (11.76%), implicitation (9.80%). While other techniques have been less often utilized such as explication (5.88%), pure borrowing (5.88%), modulation (3.92%) and discursive creation (1.96%) as shown in table (1) below.

Table 1: The Translation Techniques used in rendering the Apology Expressions in the novel “Sugar Street”

No	Translation Techniques	Frequency	Percentage
1	Established Equivalent	31	60.78%
2	Paraphrase	6	11.76%
3	Implicitation	5	9.80%
4	Explication	3	5.88%
5	Pure Borrowing	3	5.88%
6	Modulation	2	3.92%
7	Discursive Creation	1	1.96%
	Total	51	100%

a. Established Equivalent

Example 1

SL: “أعتذر عن ذلك”

Gloss:

أعتذر (/ʔaʕtaðiru/) – "I apologize"

عن (/ʕan/) – "for"

ذلك (/ða:lika/) – "that"

TL: " I apologize for that"

The context of this example is when Ahmed was trying to take permission from his classmate, Sabria Alawi to propose her. The utterance was said by Ahmed when Sabria was very surprised from what he asked for. The utterance “أعتذر عن ذلك” is an apology produced by Ahmed for surprising her with his request. The sentence “أعتذر عن ذلك” was translated into English “**I apologize for that.**” by using the established equivalent technique since this Arabic expression has a direct English equivalent.

Example 2

SL: إأسفة!

Gloss:

آسفة (/ʔa:sifa/) – "sorry"

TL: "sorry"

The context of this example is when Sabria Alawi and Ahmed were discussing about the marriage proposal that he offered to her but she demanded that she wanted a rich man that can afford her a good life. So, she refused Ahmed's proposal and apologized to him by saying “آسفة:”. Here, the established equivalent technique was used to translate the Arabic utterance “آسفة” into English as **“Sorry!”** because this is the direct English equivalent.

b. Paraphrase

Example 3:

SL: كلانا ظاهرة طبيعية علمية ، لا نسأل عما وجدنا أنفسنا عليه ولكننا مسئولون عما نعتقد ونفعل

Gloss:

كلانا (/kila:na:/) – "both of us"

ظاهرة (/ðʕa:hiratun/) – "a phenomenon"

طبيعية (/tʕabiiʕiyyatun/) – "natural"

علمية (/ʕilmiyyatun/) – "scientific"

لا نسأل (/la: nasʔalu/) – "we do not ask"

عما (/ʕamma:/) – "about what"

وجدنا (/wadʒadna:/) – "we found"

أنفسنا (/ʔanfusana:/) – "ourselves"

عليه (/ʕalajhi/) – "upon"

ولكننا (/wa:lakinana:/) – "but we"

مسئولون (/masʔu:lu:na/) – "are responsible"

عما (/ʕamma:/) – "for what"

نعتقد (/naʕtaniqu/) – "we believe in"

ونفعل (/wa-nafʕalu/) – "and we do"

TL: “We're both scientific curiosities. Let's not ask where we began. What we're responsible for is our convictions and our actions.”

The situation illustrated in this example arises when Ahmed's colleague, Sawsan, accused him that he still maintains deeply embedded bourgeois traits and that he is proud to be a member of Shawkat family. Then he became upset from what she said about him and told her she is wrong and unfair about that. After that, she tried to express her apology through giving some explanation

bout the situation. Using the paraphrase technique, the translator transformed the dense, philosophical Arabic statement “لا نسأل عما وجدنا أنفسنا عليه ولكننا مسئولون عما “كلانا ظاهرة طبيعية علمية ، نعتق ونفعل into clear and natural-sounding English dialogue by breaking it down into shorter and more direct statements while retaining the core meaning as in : **“We're both scientific curiosities. Let's not ask where we began. What we're responsible for** is our convictions and our actions.”

c. Implicitation

Example 4:

SL: “إني آسف جدا يا كمال”

Gloss:

إني (/ʔinni:/) – "I am"

آسف (/ʔa:sifun/) – "sorry" (masculine)

جدا (/dʒiddan/) – "very"

يا (/ja:/) – "O"

كمال (/kama:l/) – "Kamal"

TL: " I'm very sorry, Kamal."

This example emerges from a situation in which Kamal was about to be transferred to Asyut. So, he tried to request his old friend Fuad Jamail Al-Hamzawi to rescind the transfer but he apologized for not being able to help him. The implicitation technique was utilized to translate this apology phrase “إني آسف جدا يا كمال” from Arabic into English " **I'm very sorry, Kamal.**" without including the expression in bold “O, Kamal” as in the original language “يا كمال” because this component of the Arabic source text is grammatically redundant and unnecessary in English.

d. Explication

Example 5

SL: “ليس هجرا ولكنه تقاعد”

Gloss

ليس (/laysa/) – "it is not"

هجرا (/hadʒran/) – "abandonment"

ولكنه (/wa-lakinahu/) – "but it is"

تقاعد (/taqa:ʕud/) – "retirement"

TL: "It's not desertion but retirement.

In this instance, the scenario refers to AlHamzawi who worked in Al-Sayyid Ahmed's store. He told Al-Sayyid Ahmed that he was not able to work again and wanted to retire. However, Al-

Sayyid Ahmed felt depressed and sad since he was his loyal only assistant for many years. Then he asked to Al-Hamzawi if he decided to desert them, but Al-Hamzawi tried to explain that "It's not desertion but retirement. By applying the explicitation technique, the translator added the explicit subject “it” to meet English grammar standards and to emphasize the apologetic nuance, ensuring that the original message remains subtle while maintaining naturalness and directness.

e. Pure Borrowing

Example 6

ST: آسف يا باشا ، لا أستطيع

Gloss:

آسف (/ʔa:sif/) – "I'm sorry"

يا باشا (/ja: ba:ʃa/) – "O Pasha"

لا أستطيع (/la: ʔastatʕi:ʔ/) – "I cannot."

TL: "I'm sorry, **Pasha**. I can't."

This example takes place during a conversation in which Abd-Arahim pasha had a telephone call from the pasha. It seemed that the pasha asked Abd-Arahim pasha to do something but he refused and offered the pasha an apology. Here, the translator used the pure borrowing technique while translating the Arabic apology utterance “آسف يا باشا ، لا أستطيع” into the target language “I'm sorry, Pasha. I can't”, especially the word “**pasha**” since it is loaded with cultural and historical that would be lost if it was replaced with a simple English equivalent.

f. Modulation

Example 7

SL: معذرة عن سخاوتي "

Gloss:

معذرة (/maʕðʕiratan/) – "excuse me"

عن (/ʕan/) – "for"

سخاوتي (/saʕa:fati:/) – "my silliness"

TL: "Forgive **my foolish behavior**."

This example occurs when Ahmed was trying to embarrass her after she refused his proposal. Then he apologized by saying “معذرة عن سخاوتي”. This Arabic phrase is translated into English as “Forgive my foolish behavior.” The phrase in bold “**my foolish behavior**” has been translated by using modulation technique in order to make the apology sounds more authentic and specific in English.

g. Discursive Creation

Example 8

SL: "إني مشغول نهاري وليلي بمكتبي"

Gloss:

إني (/ʔinni:/) – "I am"

مشغول (/maʃɣu:l/) – "busy"

نهاري (/naha:ri:/) – "my day"

وليلي (/wa-lajli:/) – "and my night"

بمكتبي (/bi-maktabi:/) – "with my office."

TL: "I work all day at school and every evening in my office."

The context of this example is when Kamal's family (his mother, sister and brother- in law) asked him why he has not married yet though he has a job. Also, his mother wished to have grandchild from her only living son, Kamal. However, he had to apologize by saying "إني مشغول نهاري وليلي بمكتبي" which is translated into "I work all day at school and every evening in my office." The translation technique employed for the phrase in bold is the discursive creation, where the translator created a detail "at school" based on his understanding about the character's life which makes the dialogue more vivid and concrete for the English- speaking audience.

DISCUSSION

The novel "Sugar Street" "Al Sukariyya" illustrates both pragmatic and linguistic factors in cross-cultural communication by analyzing the translation techniques used to render apology expressions. A total of 51 translation techniques were used by the translator to translate 10 expressions of apology, indicating that some utterances necessitated several techniques to accurately convey their meaning and function in the target language.

The results show that only 7 out of 18 translation techniques proposed by Molina & Albir (2002) were used to translate the apology expressions in Mahfouz's novel "Sugar Street", established equivalent, implicitation, paraphrase, pure borrowing, discursive creation, modulation, and explication. This selective use of techniques reflects the translator's prioritization accuracy, naturalness and cultural appropriateness in the English translation of Arabic apologies.

The frequently use of established equivalent indicates that numerous Arabic apologetic statements posse exact English equivalence. This supports the results of earlier research by (Cohen, & Olshtain (1981) and Blum-kulka & Olshtain, (1984) which posits that the universal

function of apologies often facilitates direct lexical and structural correspondences across languages. (For example, expressions like “أسفة:” were translated as “Sorry” and “أعتذر عن ذلك”, as “I apologize for that”, demonstrating a direct equivalent in both form and function. This is in line with the idea that employing established equivalent is effective when the source and the target language have similar conventions (Baker,2018).

The second most utilized technique is paraphrase, which was employed in instances involving longer or more sophisticated Arabic utterances, as seen in “.....كلانا ظاهرة طبيعية علمية”. This demonstrates the translator’s effort to emphasize communicative clarity and pragmatic effect rather than literal accuracy. This kind of paraphrasing aligns with Molina & Albir’s (2002) assertion that paraphrase is especially appropriate in situations where the literal translation could lead to expressions that sound unnatural or ambiguous in the target language. Moreover, this aligns with Baker’s (2018) explanation of sense-for-sense translation which asserts that even in cases when linguistic structures diverge, rephrasing ensures pragmatic equivalence.

The strategic utilization of implicature and explicitation tackled the pragmatic and structural inconsistencies between Arabic and English. For instance, the vocative marker “O” as in “يا كمال” “O, Kamal” was omitted because it is often superfluous in English. This finding supports Klaudy’s (1998) theory, as cited in (Klaudy & Károly (2005) on implicature and explicitation, which highlights the fact that the translators frequently add or delete features to attain naturalness and fluency in the target language,

Less commonly used techniques -pure borrowing, modulation and discursive creation were used in some situations to emphasize the need for cultural or stylistic adaption. Borrowing term such as “Pasha” maintains cultural specificity that would be diminished by substitution, supporting Venitu’s (1995) claim foreignization strategy. In order to make the apology sound natural in English, modulation was used to modify respective and tone. Discursive creation, on the other hand, involved creative re-expression to produce a more vivid and contextually appropriate target text. This implies that, as Newmark (1988) indicated, creative solutions are occasionally required to address the pragmatic gap.

In sum, the results confirm that translating apologies transcends linguistic transfer. In order to achieve a balance between pragmatic force, literal meaning and cultural resonance, a careful selection of techniques is required.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the need for nuanced application of techniques to maintain both

cultural meaning and pragmatic intent when translating apology expressions rather than word for word translation. The predominance established equivalent technique shows how pragmatically Arabic and English express apologies, whilst the employment of paraphrase and implicitation showcases the translator's awareness of contextual and stylistic nuances. Nevertheless, the study may not accurately portray the diversity of apologetic techniques employed by translators or genres due to its limited data collection and focus on a single work. To validate these patterns, future research should include a larger corpus as well as comparison analyses across other translators and literary works. The findings hold important pedagogical implications, underscoring the necessity to train translators to be culturally and pragmatically aware while interpreting speech acts, especially apologies.

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