Understanding the Strategies Used to Translate Colloquial Egyptian Humour: A Study of Khaled Al Khamissi's *Taxi (2006)*

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Abstract
Translators face immense challenges translating humor in a way that does not lose the essence of the original text. These difficulties are especially notable in translations between languages as disparate as Arabic and English, as they come from different language families. The present study aims to understand the strategies required for translating colloquial Egyptian humor into English and highlights the issues involved in the process of this translation. For this purpose, the study selected the book *Taxi* by Khaled Al Khamissi, as it is composed of 58 fictional monologues of taxi drivers in Cairo. The study highlights the challenges faced in translating colloquial Egyptian humor, along with the cultural differences that hinder its translation. The results show that translation is a major hurdle for culture-based and word-based humor because of cultural and linguistic differences; miscommunication and failure to translate humorous intent are due to lack of knowledge of the source culture. The impact of the humor is not transferred to the target text because a literal translation of word-based humour is not possible. A combination of procedures is used to transfer a humorous effect when translating culture-based humor. The study concludes that universal humour is easier to translate than culture-based humour, as the translator is familiar with the concepts involved.
Keywords: colloquial language, Egyptian humor, Khaled Al Khamissi's Taxi, translation strategies

The role of language translation is highly significant in promoting the effective exchange of ideas and experiences between different cultures. Through translations, target text readers may be exposed to a myriad of cultures, customs, and traditions that they may otherwise be unaware of (Brislin & Freimanis, 2001). The translator ensures that the essence of the original text is maintained across different languages by providing a comprehensive and accurate translation. Thus, it follows that any incompetence on the part of the translator results in poor textual translations, which in turn leads to a low understanding and level of communication overall between different cultures. Translations have occurred between many world languages, including English and Arabic. However, various complexities arise in effectively translating between these two languages because of their highly disparate nature and form. One of the aspects of language that has proven a challenge to translate from English to Arabic, and vice versa, is humor. Humour is considered a significant component of humanity and has deep roots in cultural and linguistic contexts. As a result, it tends to play a vital role in enabling intercultural communication.

Humour can be classified into three main types: physical (depending on actions), verbal (depending on words), and visual (depending on images). Studies have noted that the use of techniques such as irony, ridicule, and exaggeration can produce humor without necessarily evoking laughter (Berger, 1993). However, the cultural and language-specific elements of humour present complexities in enabling effective translation that extend beyond cultural and linguistic borders. Specifically, translators face challenges in translating elements of humor that are simply not translatable without reducing the impact of their meaning. Therefore, their capability in searching for creative solutions to counter these issues has been sorely tested.

Studies have discussed the prominent role humor has played in defining Egyptian culture since pharaonic times (Harutyunyan, 2012; Houlihan, 2001). In fact, Egypt is greatly recognized in the Arab world for its humor. In the wake of the Arab Spring of 2010, the creative use of humour by Egyptians to defy censorship and criticize the president and government were widely noted (Harutyunyan, 2012). The objective of this study is to analyze a book entitled *Taxi* (2006) by Khaled Al Khamissi, which provides many examples of Egyptian political humor. In this book, taxi drivers ironically express their opinions about the government and their former leader, President Mubarak, and the oppression of Egyptians during his presidency. They also draw attention to the poor economic conditions of their country and their own difficult lives in a sarcastic and humorous way using colloquial language.

The topic of the translation of humor from Arabic to English has not been studied extensively. The majority of the previous studies have emphasized humour translations from English into another foreign language. Therefore, this study is novel in that it addresses an extensive understanding of humor translations into English from Arabic. A key feature of this study is its emphasis on the need for translators to develop an understanding of colloquial language as opposed to solely focusing on standard language. Since colloquial language is commonly used by the public, it is essential that its significance is adequately addressed. This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the problems and challenges faced in the translation of Arabic humor. Therefore, the following research questions have been developed:

1. What are the challenges faced in translating colloquial Egyptian humor?
2. How do cultural differences hinder the translation of colloquial humor?
3. What are the strategies employed by the translator to translate such type of humour?

Theoretical Background

The translation of linguistic jokes from Arabic to English is challenged by the incongruities present within the specific language. Usually, the process of translation results in cultural and linguistic problems owing to the incompatible and incorrect meanings of linguistics in a given joke (El-Yasin, 1997). At times, the jokes depict accidental facts concerning Arabic culture and language that have no equivalents with the target language. One needs to decipher the meanings of a given joke to attain amusement and laughter (Nash, 1985).

Defining Humour

Humour is commonly understood as the ability to be funny and to provide amusement by provoking people to giggle, chuckle, and laugh. Scholars from different fields, such as linguistics, psychology, and sociology, have studied humor closely. Vandaele (2002) observes that works on humor lack a proper description and definition of humor, and explains that humor is anything that has a humorous effect. Moreover, he emphasizes that humor is not just an experience of positive excitement, but it may be unappreciated when the outcome is that of disgust or disappointment (Vandaele, 2002).

Different scholars define humor and its various functions and formulated many theories of it. It is important to note that humor, a multifaceted phenomenon, cannot be integrated into a single general theory. Attardo (1994) explores different linguistic theories of humor that are divided into four classifications: structuralist theory, semiotic theory, script-based theory, and sociolinguistic theory. Raskin (1985) defines two modes of communication: the first, no–bona fide communication, is a humorous form of communication, while the second, bona fide communication, is more serious and earnest. Bona fide communication is involved in conveying a variety of information types, such as those concerning politics or current affairs (Raskin, 1985).

According to Newmark (1981), a joke that is capable of evoking amusement can be compensated by a word or phrase that possesses a different but associated meaning. The complete explanation of humor as a phenomenon has been suggested by Aristotle, Bergson, Hobbles, Bateson, and Kant. Their theories have significantly contributed toward the understanding of humor along with certain limitations and deficiencies (Alharthi, 2015, 2016).

Translation of Humour

Vandaele (2002) notes that the translation of humor is not as straightforward as the translation of other types of writing and that it varies qualitatively from other types of translation. Evidence suggests that translating humor is more difficult. When translating humor, one must dedicate more attention to the cultural and linguistic aspects of the text. When the translator gives extra credence to none–practice-oriented, linguistic, and cultural analyses, he or she can overcome

the reproduction challenges. However, translators do feel overwhelmed and are disheartened by the complexity and the intricacy of the whole concept of humor.

Schmitz (2002) states that there are three types of humor: reality-based or universal humour, word-based or linguistic humor, and cultural-based humour. Universal humor comprises humour that has to do with the general functioning and running of the world. He suggests that beginning translators must start with universal humour, which is relatively simple, and then move on to cultural humour, which requires more learning and study. Eventually, the translator can move on to linguistic humour, the most challenging and difficult type for foreign-language students. The linguistic type of humor translation is so complex that most of the time, the translator resorts to replacing a joke with a different joke from his or her collection (Schmitz, 2002).

According to Nida (1964), the process of translation completely indicates the structural equivalence of the translated texts, in which the text is reproduced in its literal meaning. This type of translation permits the readers to identify the possible source language concerned with the customs, the meaning of the expression, and manner of thought. The principle of equivalent effect provides the basis for translating a text that produces dynamic equivalence rather than a formal one. This type of translation aims to complete the natural expression related to the receptor modes of behavior. The behavior is relevant within the context of its own culture and significance.

Translatability and Untranslatability

Some types of linguistic humor are untranslatable and serve as a significant source of discussion amongst translation researchers. Attardo (1994) notes that Cicero categorized linguistic humor into the two groups of referential humor and verbal humor. He argued that verbal humor was untranslatable, as it included graphemic and phonemic representation of the humorous elements. Many scholars and translators use this specific distinction (Attardo, 1994). Laurian (1992) explains that verbal humor can be translated by using functional elements contingent on the ability of the translator. Additionally, he asserts that the functional approach applies to referential humor too, as it is culture-bound and may not have the same effect on the target language.

Complications often occur when translating cultural jokes. Although these jokes might be similar in terms of semantics, there are missing features that render some of them untranslatable. These missing features are the cultural and pragmatic aspects (Raphaelson-West, 1989). When translating cultural humor, the consideration of cultural issues is imperative. It is a challenge for the translator to decide whether to use a literal translation of a joke that does not have the same humourous effect in the target language or to use a different joke in the target language that produces the same funny effect from the source language.

Egyptian Humour

The use of humor as a tool for communication in Egypt has been noted since ancient times (Harutyunyan, 2012). William Fry, an American sociologist, indicates that the use of humor may

date to dynastic times (Williams & Chesterman, 2002). Furthermore, Houlihan (2001) maintains in his *Wit and Humour in Ancient Egypt* that the ancient Egyptians were thoroughly charmed by writings that incorporated word play, wit, puns, irony, satire, and other highly sophisticated literary elements. The author asserts that the Egyptian artisans who built the tombs of the pharaohs had a unique sense of wit and humor (Houlihan, 2001). Additionally, the entire Arab world is very familiar with Egyptians' love of a healthy dose of humor. The Arab people use the phrase *ibn nukta*, which means "son of the jokes", to describe Egyptians. It may be difficult for an Egyptian to translate a joke because Egyptian humor is rooted in the language itself.

The present study has provided analysis and discussion of the key issues in translating humor between English and Arabic and focusses particularly on strategies for the translation of humor between these two very different languages and cultures. The parameters, including spatial and temporal constraints, source texts, and natural humor require further research and understanding of the wide cultural and linguistic gaps between the two languages and cultures.

Material and Methods
Research Data
The study used the collection of short stories entitled *Taxi* to understand the challenges faced by translators in translating humor. This collection is composed of 58 short stories written by Khaled Al Khamissi. Dedicated to the lives of poor people (Al Khamissi, 2014), *Taxi* provides insights into modern Egypt and Cairo by narrating the fictional stories of taxi drivers whom the author met during his journeys. The English version of this book, initially translated by Aflame Books in 2008, was republished by Bloomsbury Qatar in 2011. The translated book was rejected by native English and Arabic speakers because of some issues. Al Khamissi commented that the collection was difficult to translate because of the lack of an established tradition of translating colloquial Arabic. The writer stated that working with colloquial Arabic was new for the translators, who had no prior knowledge regarding it, although they were experienced in translating standard Arabic content (Johnson, 2011).

Taxi has been chosen as the object of study in part because it has achieved great success and has been translated into ten different languages (Al Khamissi, 2014). The book is also rich in humorous elements and has played a role in the revival of the Egyptian dialect in the literature of modern Egypt because the text tends to explore different political and social issues. The most distinguishing factor of *Taxi* is that it is written in two different languages, standard Arabic and colloquial Egyptian Arabic. It is important to discuss Wright's method of translating Egyptian humor and discover the reason he decided to use standard English instead of cockney slang when translating the conversations of taxi drivers.

Research Methods
The study, a comparative analysis of *Taxi* and its English translation, investigates the source text (ST) and randomly chooses several examples that represent a case study of colloquial Egyptian humor. The translation strategies have been determined based on the framework proposed by Mailhac (1996). Back-translation is not possible in cases when the translator has already used a

literal translation for the same word or expression. The translation strategies are identified and analyzed to see whether they successfully transferred the humorous effect of the text.

Data Collection

The book *Taxi* by Khaled Al Khamissi was selected for this study. It comprises 58 monologues of taxi drivers in Cairo, whom the author met. The author produced a series of stories depicting the experiences of different drivers to capture the broadest possible picture of modern Egypt and modern Cairo. This is an effective book for analysis because it has captured the main point at which the taxis are just considered a mean of transportation, rather than becoming a topic of debate. The immense cost and toll of Egypt's endemic corruption is among the major points made by Al Khamissi and is well-illustrated by numerous stories. The humorous elements, including the discourses, have been extracted and categorized according to the model proposed by Schmitz (2002):

- Word-based humor: "وبعدين اللي حصل في العراق ده احتلال رسمي نظمي فهمي" (Al Khamissi, 2006, p. 52), back-translated as "Anyway, what happened in Iraq was an official Nazmi Fahmi occupation". "Nazmi" and "Fahmi" are proper nouns, which may indicate that this is the occupation of a person named Nazmi Fahmi. However, the speaker in the ST uses these nouns as a fixed expression to mean official and organized occupation. It has been said that Rasmi Fahmi Nazmi was the name of a character in an old Egyptian film called آه من حواء, and people have borrowed it as a fixed expression to mean that something is official and organized, as in this context. This sentence is translated as "Anyway, what happened in Baghdad was an official occupation" (Al Khamissi, 2006, 2011). Here, the translator deliberately omits the words نظمي فهمي, which are the humorous elements in this sentence, and keeps رسمي or "official", which is enough to convey the intended meaning without transferring the humorous effect. He chooses to do this because the effect created by the original words is language-based and thus untranslatable.

- Culture-based humour: "بعدها الحياة فرمتني فرم، بقيت عامل زي' 'فرج الله' (فرج الله ماركة لحم مفروم)" (Al Khamissi, 2006, p. 41), back-translated as "After that life minced me up; I became like Faragallah" (Faragallah is a brand of minced meat). The taxi driver here tries to make fun of himself by claiming that his difficult life has minced him up like Faragallah. The translator uses a combination of procedures here to translate the phrase: cultural borrowing in not changing the brand Faragallah and compensation in adding "minced meat" to make it more understandable. His translation is, "After that life really minced me up; I became like Faragallah minced meat' (Al Khamissi, 2006, 2011). Then the translator adds a footnote: "Faragallah is a brand of preserved meat". This footnote is available within the text itself in the ST (not as a footnote) as a clarification by the author to ST readers who are not familiar with this brand name. Here, the reader of the translated text (TT) will be able to understand the intended meaning, and the humorous effect is successfully rendered. However, it may not be perceived by the TT readers in the same way as it is perceived by the ST readers because of the use of the footnote. The use of footnotes should be limited

as much as possible when translating jokes because they can impair their humorous effects (Tisgam, 2009).

- Universal or reality-based humor: "قالوا للأعور حنضربك على عينك" (Al Khamissi, 2006, p. 93). The translator translates this example literally as "They tell the one-eyed man they'll hit him in the eye" (Al Khamissi, 2006, 2011). This expression means that the one-eyed man will be indifferent if someone hits his eye because his eye is already damaged.

Results and Discussion
Word-Based Humour
Example 1:

'وح ألقى العيال مش واكلة وأمهم حايسة ولايصة' (Al Khamissi, 2006, p. 72)
"I'd find the children hadn't eaten and their mother at her wit's end" (Al Khamissi, 2006, 2011).

In the above sentence, the driver has explained the messiness of his house when he gets home. The driver used the two words (حايسة ولايصة) to mean that his wife is confused and does not know where to start when dealing with the children. The translator uses cultural substitution here since this is an example of word-based humor. The interesting part here is that, in Arabic, these words rhyme humorously. Some Egyptians use the word لايصة without even knowing what it means, with the word حايسة as a fixed expression. One of its meanings, as indicated in the Lesan Al Arab dictionary (2014), is "moving one's eyes left and right as if wanting something". The translator has substituted this expression with the English idiom "at her wit's end", which means "drained of all ideas or mental resources or utterly confused and frustrated" (The Free Dictionary, 2014). The meaning of the text, then, is rendered successfully; however, the equivalent rhyme could not be rendered due to differences between English and Arabic.

Example 2:
"أهو ده اللي حصل، بعد ماخلصوا المشروع طلعوا لهم وقالوا لهم ماينفعش ده أمن قومي وأمن خالتي.. باعتبار إن قومي ده يبقى جدي." (Al Khamissi, 2006, p.113)
Back-translation: "It's national security or my auntie's security or whatever, in which case I suppose that 'my nation' would be my grandfather's!"

Translation: "That's what happened. After they'd finished work in the project, they jumped on them and said it wouldn't do. It's national security or my auntie's security or whatever, in which case I suppose the 'national' bit would be my grandfather's!" (Al Khamissi, 2006/2011)

This example demonstrates word play resulting in humor as the driver makes use of the homonymous relationship between the word قومي, both an adjective which means national and the noun that means "my nation". Then, he sarcastically uses other kinship nouns because he is not convinced of the claimed relationship between the project and national security. The translator uses a combination of procedures. He translates the first part literally, which does not transfer the humorous effect completely; this humor is lost in translation because in English, there is no such homonymous relationship between the words. In the second part, the translator uses a

compensation strategy by adding the noun 'bit' to avoid having an incomplete sentence, because in the Arabic sentence, the driver ironically uses ''قومي'' as a noun.

Culture-Based Humour
Example:

''عارفين إيه أحسن هدية تجيبوها للمدام؟ تذكرة على عبارة السلام'' (Al Khamissi, 2006, p. 189)

"Know what's the best present you can get your wife? A ticket on el-Salam ferry to Safaga!" (Al Khamissi, 2006, 2011)

This joke is associated with cultural humor, as it does not seem funny to those individuals having no background knowledge about the el-Salam ferry (most of the passengers died when the ferry sank in 2006). A combination of procedures has been used here by the translator. He has translated the name of the ferry and compensated by adding "Safaga", which was the destination of the doomed ferry. Although the translator fails to transmit the humorous effect in full, many of the TT readers may not be familiar with this tragic accident. This understanding is needed to get the main point of the joke, which is that men want to get rid of their wives.

Universal-Based Humour

Example:

''أنا شخصيًا مش عارف ايه اللي ممكن يطلع في أمخاخهم غير الصبار'' (Al Khamissi, 2006, p. 45)

"Personally, I don't know what will grow in their brains beside cactus!" (Al Khamissi, 2006, 2011).

With the above statement, the driver describes how his children are deprived of any means of entertainment by saying, "I don't know what will grow in their brains beside cactus". Cactus is a prickly and bitter plant with a base that stores water. In Arab culture, it represents patience and bitterness. The driver uses the word cactus to express his children's patience and struggles with not enjoying life. The translator uses literal translation here, which expresses the intended meaning and transfers the humorous effect of sarcasm.

Conclusion
The translation of humor is difficult and challenging; moreover, its execution depends on various factors. A translator is likely to face many difficulties when translating colloquial Egyptian humor into another language. The most significant problem is that a translator of humor must contend with cultural and linguistic differences, which makes it a challenge for a translator to translate word-based and culture-based humor. What is considered humorous in Arabic may not be considered humorous in English, and vice versa. Understanding colloquial language may be difficult for someone who does not belong to the area or country in which the language is spoken. Even, It may not be understood by non-Egyptian Arabic-speaking people. Many difficulties are faced by translators when translating colloquial Egyptian humor into any other language. It is difficult to decide whether to keep the humorous text or omit it; such texts may be of great importance in the source text, but the translator may not be aware of it. It is necessary to search

for creative solutions to transfer the humorous effect in the translated text if it is a main element in the text and not merely background information. The translator may use a combination of procedures to translate word-based or culture-based humor since he or she deals with more than just words. However, literal translation may frequently be used to translate universal humor which is considered the easiest type to translate.

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