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## Influence of Translator Training on the Perceptions of Translation as well as on the Role of the Translator: A Comparative Study

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**Dhyiaa Borresly**  
Qatar University  
Qatar

### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the extent to which translator training influences the perceptions of translation and shapes the role of the translator. The study explores the cohorts' perceptions of translation and of the role of the translator drawing from Tymoczko's call (2014) to look beyond Western conceptualisations of translation. A view that long benefited from the view of translation as an act of transfer or carrying across. Recent research suggested viewing translation as an act of re-contextualisation (House, 2018) or an act of re-narration (Baker, 2014). The study uses think-aloud protocols (TAPs) to monitor and understand the process of translation. Two groups of participants were selected for this research. One group comprises of ten trainee translators, who are MA Translation Studies students, and the second comprises of ten natural translators, who are bilinguals with no prior training in Translation. The natural participants perceived translation as a process of transfer in which the translator plays an active role. Trainee translators viewed translation as a communicative process, and the translator is at the heart of this process, creating links between cultures and increasing intercultural knowledge.

**Keywords:** *Bilingualism, Perceptions, Natural Translator, Trainee Translator, Think-Aloud Protocols*

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### 1. Introduction

This paper is an investigation into the perceptions of translation and the role of the translator in the context of bilingualism in the State of Kuwait. The research will address the proposed topics by observing the translation process and by adopting tools from the discipline of Translation Studies. The study also draws from Bilingualism Studies in understanding the complexity of the state of bilingualism and its manifestation. The paper relies on empirical research involving participants from two cohorts, i.e. bilingual translators, referred to as *natural* translators and MA Translation Studies students, who will be termed trainee translators in this research. There is a wide spread assumption that bilinguality equates the ability to translate, and this was one of the reasons behind this research: to investigate what the differences and similarities between the trained or trainee translator and the "natural" translator are. To observe and compare the process of translation the research employs two main research tools, think-aloud protocols and retrospective interviews. The main aim is to understand better participants' perceptions

of translation. The secondary set of aims includes examining how bilingualism and biculturalism influence the role of translator, and inform the strategies used in the translation task.

The following, more specific questions were asked in the course of the research:

1. How do *natural* translators perceive translation and the role of the translator in comparison to trainee translators?
2. Considering their bilinguality and biculturalism, do *natural* translators perceive themselves as translators? How do they view translation and translators?
3. How do their perceptions and self-perceptions compare to those of trainee translators?

This research employs two key terms; the first of them is *natural* translation/translator. The concept of *natural* translation is borrowed from Harris and Sherwood (1978), who use the term to mean translation performed by a child or an adult who has had no formal training in translation. I will also discuss briefly the different views on defining translation, in order to establish broadly how the term is used. Finally, I will discuss what is meant by



perceptions of translation and the metaphors of translation and the role of the translator.

The second key term in this research is bilingualism. A key criterion in identifying *natural* translators is the co-presence of bilingualism. As a result, a better understanding of the term was important for this research, particularly in order to be able to specify which of the various forms of bilingualism most closely corresponded to those exhibited by the participants, as well as to understand better the bilingual context in Kuwait. Hamers and Blanc (1989) explained bilingualism as the condition in which one linguistic community has two languages constantly in contact resulting in a situation where these two languages are used in the same interaction and where many individuals of this community are bilinguals. Generally speaking, there are two types of bilingualism, coordinate and compound. The key difference between them lies in how the linguistic codes are organised by the speaker and the manner in which the languages were acquired, i.e. in separate settings or in the same setting. A coordinate bilingual acquires the languages in two different settings, usually at home and in school. On the other hand, a compound bilingual acquires both languages in one setting e.g.: a child with parents who speak two languages would develop both languages simultaneously. Therefore, the words and phrases in a coordinate bilingual's mind are related to their unique concepts. On the other hand, a compound bilingual, who has learned both languages simultaneously and most likely in the same setting, would have the same semantic associations attached to the same word or phrase in two different languages. The participants in this research will be coordinate bilinguals. The participants learnt *ammiyya* Arabic at home, while fusha Arabic and English were learnt at school. Therefore, the participants in this research are not only bilingual, but also diglossia is a prominent feature of the linguistic landscape in Kuwait.

## 2. Theoretical Background

One of the earliest definitions of Translation was put forward by Catford (1965) who defined translation as “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)” (1965: 20). This broad definition of translation activity preceded many more recent attempts to define translation for the purpose of translation study and training. That

terminological diversity is acknowledged for example in Shuttleworth and Cowie's entry for “translation” in *Dictionary of Translation Studies*. In the previously mentioned dictionary translation is explained as, “Translation [is] an incredibly broad notion which can be understood in many different ways” (1997: 181). Munday (2008: 5) also argues that the term translation can refer to different meanings such as the general subject field, the product, i.e. “the reified output of translation activity”, or to the process itself: “the act of producing a translation” (2008: 5). The process of translation, according to Munday, involves “the translator changing an original written text (the source text), in the original verbal language (the source language) into a written text (the target text) in a different verbal language (the target language)” (2008: 7).

As has been often acknowledged in Translation Studies, this replacement of textual material from one language by textual material in another is not as simple as it sounds. Many factors come into play while forming decisions about what is the optimum choice in this process of substituting words and longer strings of language. Hatim and Munday, for example, talk about “the ambit of translation” (2004: 6), which comprises three stages, the first stage is the process of transferring a source language text to a target language text performed by a translator or a group of translators in a certain socio-cultural context. The second is the target text which resulted from the previous process and has a function in the socio-cultural context of the target language. The third and final part for Hatim and Munday are the linguistic, cultural, ideological, visual and cognitive phenomena that are an integral part of the first and second aspects.

Considering the previous discussion of what is translation it can be seen that there is no easy way to define translation, and neither does there exist a stable definition of the term unmodulated by chronological or situational context. The previous definitions are by no means the only approaches to defining translation. However, the discussion is meant to serve as an example of the complexity of defining the term. Many factors are to be taken into consideration when studying and analysing a translated text and the processes by which it comes into being. It is this complexity and the variety of considerations which need to

be taken into account when examining the term “translation” that further complicate the answer to the question: “Are all bilingual translators?”. It is however possible to assert that knowledge of languages is not enough to translate. In other words, bilingualism alone does not correspond with the ability to produce a good translation. Knowledge of source and target cultures, as well as the purpose of the translation are also highly important in a successful translation activity.

Despite the fact that linguistic competence on its own is not enough to translate, there are a number of translations done by bilinguals. However, do bilingual or “natural” translators perceive themselves as translators? If not, who do they perceive as a translator?

In light of this question, the second point of analysis in this article is the perceptions of translation and the role of the translator. Tymoczko (2014) highlighted the importance of moving beyond Western conceptualisations of translation. Western here refers to ideas and perspectives that originated in and are dominant in Europe, United States and Australia. Tymoczko argues that these views could benefit from different views of translation. Western views primarily regarded translation as an act of transfer, a carrying across. These views originated from the Latin term “*transfere*” or the Greek “*metapherein*”. Such views had constantly placed the translator between cultures. Therefore, the translator is a neutral agent, and could be regarded as alienated from the process of communication he or she is facilitating. Furthermore, as these concepts evolved historically, they were also influenced by a view of language and nation that privileged the view of uniting a nation under a single language, encouraging monolingualism. Thus implying sameness of the message as well as a passivity of translator. In line with these perceptions Chesterman (1997) argues that translation metaphors encapsulate concepts and ideas about translation itself. Metaphors such as: the translator as a builder which corresponds to the view of carrying across, the meanings inside the words and sentences. Therefore, these units are storehouses for meaning and are ultimately the building blocks out of which language is constructed. Another metaphor is the translator as a copier, therefore, he or she has no authority over the text. These views and metaphors of translation resulted in the view of the translated text as not only a copy but also as an inferior production. Furthermore, the

translator, in this view, is a messenger, bridge or builder. Thus implying that the translator is a passive agent, with no input or control over the text.

The last metaphor to be discussed is the view of the translator as an artist. It is an important view because contrary to the previous examples where the translator is simply a medium of transfer, has no authority over the text and a passive agent. The view of the translator as an artist stresses the function of the language as a vehicle of expression rather than a component in its own right, and secondly it emphasises the role that translation can play in enriching the target language and culture. A view that can be linked to Venuti’s *in/visibility* (1996). Venuti strongly advocated translations that introduce stylistic peculiarities and highlight the foreignness of the text. This approach clearly highlights the translator and his/her active role in the translation. More recently, Baker (2014) discussed viewing translation as re-narration that re-constructs, as opposed to represents, the events. Thus, translation re-narrates in another language. In Baker’s view the translator is also an active figure

Translators and interpreters do not mediate cultural encounters that exist outside the act of translation but rather participate in configuring these encounters: they are embedded in the narratives that circulate in the context in which they produce a translation and simultaneously contribute to the elaboration, mutation, transformation and dissemination of these narratives through their translation choices (Baker 2014: 159)

More recently, Baker argued that currently translation is part of the conflicts we live in. Baker insists that bridges are “blown up all the time, and translation bridge is no exception” (2019).

House speaks about the view of translation as an act of re-contextualisation. House explains the view of translation as a “stretch of contextually embedded language” (2018: 43). This view assumes that communication is possible between speakers of different languages as much as it is possible between speakers of the same language. Thus, communication is achievable through relating the text to the ‘context of situation’ (Malinowski 1935). In order to validate the view of translation as re-contextualisation, it has to fulfil three criteria regarding the relationship between the text and the context. First, it has to take into consideration that source text and



translation relate to different contexts; second, it has to be able to capture, describe and explain the changes necessary for the act of re-contextualisation; third, it has to relate features of the source text as well as features of the translation to one another and to their different contexts. The view of translation as re-contextualisation also points out to an active translator. In this view translation could be seen as a social interaction, and the translator is responsible for recreating the speaker's intention as well as his/her relationship with the reader as added features of meaning. Thus, the translator is involved in this process of analysis and reconstruction of the message.

To conclude this theoretical survey, it is important to discuss briefly the Arabic tradition in translation. Tymoczko (2014) explains that the term translation in Arabic "tarjama" means biography. On the other hand, Arab scholars, provided additional meanings of "translation". For example, Alzaban (1991) argues that Arabic scholars debated the origin of the word *tarjama* in Arabic. In Arabic, the most prominent views are that it may derive from *تفسير* /*tafseer*/ [to explain]. Al-Zabidi, author of the renowned *Taj al-Arus*, explains in this most cited Arabic dictionary that *tarjama* is, in my back translation, 'to explain what is said in another tongue'. On the other hand, An-Nawawi (1991) clarifies *tarjama* as *تعبير* /*ta'abeer*/ [expression]: the expression of one language by another language. Other scholars, such as Ibn Manzoor, state that *tarjama*, as explanation, can occur within the same language. Thus, *tarjama* can also be taken to mean *يلغ* [to communicate]. In light of these two views Al-Zaban (1991) argues that *tarjama* in Arabic has three pillars, the first is *المترجم* [the translator] who is described as the person who has the necessary knowledge of what the text means. The second is *المترجم له* [the text] and finally *المترجم به وهي الترجمة* /*tarjama*/ [the title that the translator uses to refer to the translated text]. *Tarjama*, in this paradigm, has two types, the first is the text, and the second is the interpretation of a text. Therefore, *tarjama* could be taken to mean to explain, or to express, as in expressing one language by means of another, and finally to communicate. The Arabic tradition puts the translator at the heart of the translation process; the translator is viewed as the one who is in possession of the knowledge. Therefore, the translator in this process is active as opposed to the passive

translator carrying meaning or transferring material. Thus, the Arabic tradition view of translation coincides with the recent views that were put forward by Baker (2014, 2019) and House (2018).

To sum up, as observed from this short account that "translation" in Arabic, more specifically in Classic Arabic, also resists a simple definition. Nonetheless, all these meanings involve an active translator. Not only that, but also the translator must possess a certain level of knowledge to be able to communicate the meaning intended. As such, the translator in the Arabic tradition is an active figure. Baker, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, explains that in the case of Arabic language, many of Arabic speakers were bilinguals. The languages spoken in Arabian Peninsula were Arabic in daily contexts in addition to other languages for trade and learning (2011: 328) (e.g. Syriac and Aramaic). It can be observed in the meaning of the word in Arabic how translation is linked to narrating, explaining and expression. Tymoczko explains that it could indicate that "the role of the translator is seen as related to that of a narrator. In turn this suggests the powerful potential of the translator's agency, because the translator is one who "tells" and hence frames the material being translated" (2010: 70).

### 3. Methodology

In order to understand how natural translators perceive translation and the role of translators in comparison to trainee translators the research used think aloud protocols and retrospective interviews. The participants for this research were recruited in Kuwait. A total of twenty participants, ten trainee translators who were completing the MA in Translation Studies at Kuwait University, and ten natural translators. The natural translators were chosen from different disciplines that are not related to language, literature and education. The participants were presented with five texts. They were instructed to choose one text, and translate it while thinking-out loud. They were given one hour to translate. This activity was followed immediately by a retrospective semi-structured interview. The verbalisations and interviews were audio-recorded for detailed analysis by the researcher. It was assumed that text choice would provide insight into the participants' views of translation, and possibly what motivated them as translators. The texts were of the same length approximately, each

pertaining to a different culture, topic and varying difficulty. Text one was a newspaper article about women's right activist Manal Al-Sharif. Text two was an extract from a tourism booklet describing Bath Christmas Market. Text three was an excerpt from Meredith Castile Drivers License. Text four was a news article about Noble peace prize winner Malala Yousafzai. Finally, text five was another newspaper article: "Death in East London: a critique of taxidermy". The participants were also granted access to all necessary resources to help them in the task.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The overarching questions in this research were: do bilingual natural translators perceive themselves as translators? If they do, how do they then perceive themselves in this role, and what do they consider it to entail? To elicit data that would answer these questions the participants were asked during the retrospective interviews to comment on what they think translation is and what they consider the role of the translator to be in a translation task. In order to understand and contextualize better these perceptions, it is worth comparing natural translators' views with those expressed by MA students, and to read them against the background of the relevant literature. The following section will discuss these perceptions and metaphors in light of the data from the retrospective interviews—where all participants were explicitly asked about their perceptions of translation and translators' roles—and, where relevant, from the TAPs data. In addition, I will tentatively discuss possible correlations between participants' views on translation, or the translator, and their translation choices and strategies, as observed in this study.

##### *4.1 Natural Translators' Perceptions of Translation and of the Role of the Translator*

To elicit data in response to the research questions outlined above, the participants were asked two questions. First, how would you describe translation? Second, what do you think the role of the translator is? The section will survey some of the answers and relate them to the concept of perception as detailed earlier.

Five out of the ten participants in the natural category described translation as a reflection of the original. The translation product for these participants has to reflect the content of the original, while the form does not have to be closely followed, unless

they were instructed to do so. For example, participant N6 explains:

I would say it's trying to find equivalent words in both languages, and I would say that this definition depends also on what I'm translating.[...] I was asked to translate something and make it sound nice in Arabic, so it didn't have to be very literal ... so that's one type of translation. Then there is this other time where I had to translate literally, where if you wanted to convert (the translation) to the original language it has to be the exact same sentence. So people would not mistake it with anything else.

N6 described two types of translation, a literal translation and a free translation. Furthermore, the participant explained the importance of the brief as well as the effect on the target reader. According to N6, in light of the text type, and the brief, the translation would differ from one context to the other. This view of the translation argues that the product should be equivalent to the source text and that the translator is free, nonetheless, to adjust the form. It may be asked if this relates to Tymoczko's point about the active dimension of the Arabic "narrator" figure. That image, in her view, "suggests the powerful potential of the translator's agency, because the translator is one who 'tells' and hence frames the material being translated" (2010: 70). This also resonates with Baker (2014) in viewing the translation as renarration. The sense-for-sense view in the Western Tradition could be read as an active one if it is detached from the image of carrying across. This view could also be linked to House (2018) view of translation as re-contextualisation. According to the participant "depends also on what I'm translating" the "what" could be interpreted as context in situation, as such, translation could be viewed as re-constructing the original.

These explanations provided by the participants generally implied the presence of an active translator. Although the translator has to abide by the brief, as N6 explained, the translator has the tools that would help him or her achieve the purpose. In N3's view another important factor is the effect on the target reader. To replicate the effect that the source text had on its original readers is for N3 an important aspect of translation. In the participant's own words:

A good translation is one that captures the essence and the meaning of what is being said. Not necessarily a word by word don't miss a single sentence translation, but



to capture the essence and portray it in a way that when the person reads it in Arabic or English gets the same feeling.

N3 generally advocated a sense-for-sense translation. Interestingly, the comment also evokes Nida's dynamic equivalence, when the translator seeks to produce in the reader of a translation an equivalent feeling or response to the one that would be produced by the original text.

This comment again reflects views shared by other participants in this category, namely, that translation is mainly delivering the same message regardless of the style. N2 also described translation as:

Transferring the ideas from A to B. The style has to be adjusted to fit the language you are translating to, but the essence of the text must remain intact, because sometimes you don't need to include everything from the original, your reader will understand it without you having to say it.

In the initial stages of this research I had hypothesised that natural translators would be inclined towards a literal approach to translation. It was expected that their lack of knowledge of translation theories and lack of experience might result in the participants not being as comfortable in translating on a sense-for-sense basis. The participants' perception of translation, as seen from the narrative above, revolves around equivalence but not a formal type of equivalence that would require a close mapping of linguistic elements.

Moreover, some of the translations completed by the participants for this research reflect to some extent the views they expressed in the interviews. For example, with respect to N3, quoted above, it can be seen how the participant attempted to transfer the cultural elements of the texts, in addition to the descriptive language. It is noteworthy at this point to mention that despite N3's description of an approach to translation that echoes Nida's theory of equivalence, in practice the participant only adapted the concept to elicit similar responses from the reader, but did not change the references in the text. The participant was aware that the text was written for tourism purposes. Moreover, s/he tried to maintain the persuasive language and the historical, cultural elements that the original provided. This can be observed in the participant's use of words such as "رائعة" [wonderful] and "فائقة الجمال" [exceedingly beautiful], as well as "تتواجد فرصة فريدة من"

"نوعها" [there exists a one of a kind chance] to describe the city of Bath and the opportunity to visit the Christmas market. N3 kept all the elements from the original in the translation but adapted the description slightly to achieve a similar effect to the one this marketing text would have had on the original audience.

The approach by N3 here also coincides with the metaphor of "the translator as a builder". In other words, what N3 stated can be rephrased as the idea that translation is to carry meaning across language barriers. Meaning as understood by N3 was not purely semantic; for him/her the translator also has to carry over the effect that the source caused and s/he wanted to bring this meaning to the target language. Thus, the words used were storehouses that contained persuasive adjectives and compelling elements, ultimately constituting the building blocks for the target text. This view extends beyond a strict semantic correspondence and the limitations of transfer of meaning across languages. It is noteworthy here that a very important aspect of a translation task is the quality of the product of translation. However, translation quality is not examined in this research. Nonetheless, it was observed through the think-aloud data that the notion of quality as a concept was a factor that the participants took into consideration. Overall, the natural translators seemed aware of their limitations and struggled, nevertheless, to achieve the best quality they could.

A similar understanding of translation to those evidenced in the previous statements was offered by participant N5, who described translation as "a collective of words that represent an idea and achieve a goal, and serve a communication purpose". In the participant's opinion, the purpose of the translation is determined by either the brief or the translator himself.

Some participants advocated a more active role for the translator, particularly in terms of being a writer and shaping the text, and to Baker's view of translation as re-narration. This can be observed in the translations of participants N5 and N6, who translated text 5 "Malala Yousafzai". These participants assumed for themselves roles similar to those adopted by the participants who translated Text one "Manal Al-Sharif". These texts have a journalistic tone and as such may lend themselves to a more active rewriting and renarrating. Two interesting trends stood out in the translations by N5

and N6. Firstly, both participants preferred to repeat Malala's name in their translations at points where the source text used a pronoun. Secondly, the target reader was also an important element in the translation. The participants considered how the text would be perceived by the target reader and adjusted the translation product accordingly and in light of this view. Furthermore, the participants, particularly N5, took into account the readability of the target text and adjusted the language accordingly, e.g. the participant would avoid repetition, eschewed the use of foreign syntax when Arabic syntax is possible, and instead N5 used collocations to achieve the best translation without losing the meaning of the original or the purpose in his/her view. N5 describes the role of translator as:

To deliver the message, with the most eloquent words, with a taste. Meaning if you translate from English to Arabic you need to realise the different cultural settings and the different scenarios of what language variety to use and when.

N5, as quoted previously, places emphasis on the active role of the translator. Furthermore, at the start of the task N5 asked me the following question: "Can I develop the text while I'm translating or do you want me to be faithful? Just write what is there?" to which I replied that it was the translator's choice. The question can be further interpreted as the participant wondering if there was room for him/her to play an active role in the translation. This idea of developing the text, especially when considering the text N5 was translating, resonates with the view of translation as re-narration where the translator participates in configuring the cultural encounters. It appears that the question of fidelity for the natural translators who took part in my study is linked to the Western conceptualisation of translation, as I previously set out. The translator is thus a neutral agent, separate from the process.

In light of my answer to the query N5 put to me, it can be seen that the participant adhered to the text, transferring all the key information. However, the participant took more liberties in restructuring the sentences, placing emphasis on different aspects than the original had done, in accordance with what s/he thought the reader would expect from the text. For example:

I will try to avoid repetition here. In the previous paragraphs, I have mentioned that she was shot in the head, so now my reader knows that she was indeed shot in the

head whenever I mention her being shot, so I will say عندما تلقت الرصاصه في أكتوبر ٢٠١٢ من مسلح طالباني, شهرتها في باكستان غنية عن التعريف [when she was got the bullet in October 2012 from a Taliban gunman, her fame in Pakistan was already beyond introduction]

I translated it this way because she is already well known in Pakistan, I don't think in Arabic we say she was initially known in Pakistan, no, I will say something similar to well-known in English because we do have a phrase [collocation] that means the same thing that well-known means in English. لكن هذا الحدث نقل شهرتها الى العالمية.

[But this incident transported her fame internationally]

This word العالمية [international] in Arabic is similar to fame in English, now she is internationally known, I can say it with one word in Arabic so I don't think I need to use two words like the English and say known internationally or internationally famous.

In terms of adapting the product to the target language syntax and structure, N5 explains:

Now I need to narrate the story, the sentence in English begins with 'she survived the dramatic assault in which a militant boarded her school bus.' But I will turn the sentence around in Arabic, and start with 'the militant boarding her school bus' [... ] I will actually turn around the entire sentence order in English, and begin with the location, 'in north-western swat valley, a militant boarded a bus and it was where two of her school friends were hurt and she survived'. I will rearrange the sentence because I don't feel that in Arabic it would work the same, in English they were building momentum, I, on the other hand will start with what happened and then move on to say what were the results of the incident.

This excerpt from N5's TAP shows the approach the participant followed throughout the translation task. It is noteworthy that the participant also used the word "narrate" and elaborated further that for the Arabic narration s/he would need to re-order the paragraph in a way that would sound more natural in Arabic. The previous statements by N5 depict the participant's natural understanding of translation as re-narration.

Furthermore, the approach illustrates that for the participant the translator is an active agent who shapes the material of the source text to fit the target language. Where an approach of this sort prevails, the



translator shapes the language of the source text to fit the target text. Moreover, this view can be linked to Venuti's "invisibility". In Venuti's opinion, the invisibility condition is a result of a fluent translation that creates an illusion of transparency in order to produce an idiomatic target text. As a result, the translation product is deemed acceptable if it reads fluently and does not possess any foreign stylistic peculiarities. Furthermore, Bassnett explains that the role of the translator can be reassessed in terms of analysing the intervention of the translator in the process of linguistic transfer (1996: 22). The participants in this cohort were, as seen from the verbalisations above, advocating invisibility. However, in their descriptions, for the translator to be able to achieve this "invisible" condition, s/he must be active and reshape the text to fit the target culture and the target language.

Two participants, N4 and N9, described translation from a different perspective. N4 explains: "translation to me is to try to explain something, simplify and relay a message across from one language to another". Similarly, N9 explained translation as: "I think translation is when you explain what is said by someone else in a foreign language in another language". The prominent feature in both descriptions is that the participants described translation as "an explanation". These descriptions resonate with a description of *tarjama*: The ancient Arabic tradition of viewing translation as an explanation or *تفسير/tafseer/*. The definition was provided by Al-Zabidi, in *Taj al-Arus*, and it suggests that translation is explaining what is being said in another tongue. As such, these descriptions of translation imply an active role for the translator. The translator is also regarded as the person who possesses the knowledge that enables him/her to explain the message. N4 and N9 also indicated that the translator must not influence the message. N4 states: "the translator is like a custodian"; while N9 stated that "the translator's role should be limited to the message at hand, no influence from him". These views of the role of the translator correlate with the translation approach that these two participants followed in the exercise, that is, relaying the source text in the target language. An example can be drawn from N9's translation of the following sentence from Text one:

"...and in it she says in Arabic: 'we are ignorant and illiterate when it comes to driving'..."

وقالت بالعربية: "نحن جهلة وأميين عند موضوع القيادة"

[and she said in Arabic: "we suffer from ignorance and illiteracy when it comes to driving]

As can be seen from the translation above, N9 did not interfere in the translation.

Similarly, the TAPs did not show any attempt from the participant to interfere in the task.

Finally, another interesting perception of translation in this category was put forward by N1.

The participant explained translation as follows:

Translation is a critical job[...] For example, if we're watching a movie and I need to translate a conversation that has swearing or something like that, I need to somehow edit what is being said. I can't just say whatever is being said. Translation must bear in mind the reader or hearer, his belief, values and so on.

This explanation from N1 correlates with the participant's approach to text choice as well as translation strategy. For example, N1 stated during the TAPs that there are elements in the source text that s/he does not feel should be transferred to the target reader. N1 was conflicted in the translation between a sense of loyalty to the source text and duty towards the target reader. In this regard, for example, it is worth repeating N1's comment on translation of "Bath Abbey":

As an Arab and a Muslim, I don't feel comfortable using all these adjectives to describe a church for my reader, I don't think they would be happy about it as well, but I also want to deliver that it is an important part of Bath's history and worth a visit... I will just say Bath's church. It says here it's legendary but I don't want to use that either so I'll just use *تاريخية* historical.

This statement shows how the participant's own beliefs interfered with the task of translation. The participant wanted to convey the importance of Bath Abbey, yet at the same time N1 was considerate of what s/he presumed the reader might expect from the text. Another interesting statement by the same participant is

If we're translating to Arabic, it's going to be read mainly by Muslims and they don't use or make use of wine or cider. Cider seems to be *عصير تفاح* [apple juice] this might work, but mulled... I don't know... I'll see the rest of the sentence and see how it works. But if I'm translating for Kuwaitis



I would definitely remove that sentence, it says here treat yourself to a cup of cheer as you browse the lovely lanes. See browse the lovely lanes sounds nice, but they say to do that while you are drinking, which isn't something we would do, so I wouldn't translate these two.

As can be seen from this statement by N1, the translator's role here corresponds to the metaphor of gatekeeping. The participant manipulates the text, even rewrites parts of it. N1, in his/her definition of translation, as well as in the approach followed in the task, was trying to be on the side of the reader. The translator here, contrary to previous perceptions, is not in between cultures.

It can be inferred from the narrative above that translation for this cohort is, generally, what Bassnett describes as a process of negotiation between cultures mediated by the figure of the translator (2002:6). For example, N4 described the role of the translator as a "custodian", while N5 used his/her own metaphor to describe the translator:

The translator is a safe keeper. The translator has to keep what's in the safe. Keep the content of the message safe and deliver it from one person to another. Or you could see the translator as a chef, he has the ingredients and it's up to him how to cook and to put those ingredients together in a way that is presentable and edible for his customer.

The previous view from Bassnett suggests that the translator is an active agent in this process. The importance of these findings resides in the type of respondents that I recruited for my research. The natural translators in this research are coordinate bilinguals, and the condition of bilingualism implies a state of biculturalism. It was expected that the participants' dominant culture would influence the decision making process, and reveal a tendency towards a target text oriented approach to translation. However, as can be observed from the excerpts cited above, the majority of the participants' practice revealed instead a tendency towards cultural reconciliation.

#### *4.2 Trainee Translators Perceptions of Translation and of the Role of the Translator*

This section will compare the views expressed by individuals in the natural cohort with those of trainee translators' participants. It bears repeating here that while *both* groups are coordinate bilinguals, the distinguishing factor is that the MA group is composed of bilingual participants who studied translation at undergraduate

level and who were studying MA in Translation Studies at Kuwait University when they took part in my research. Initially, it was expected that this group would explain translation and the role of translator in a way consistent with some of the approaches they learnt in their translator training classes.

In line with my initial expectations, the trainee translator participants had a range of views about translation. For the purpose of analysis, some of these views will be grouped together in the following discussion. Firstly, participants M1 and M6 described translation as having multiple aspects, with varying degrees of importance. The importance of one aspect over the other is determined by the translation brief. In the participants' opinion, translation is not created in a void: it has to perform a function, cause an effect, deliver a piece of information, and so on. For example, M1 discusses translation thus:

I think translation has different aspects and the most important one I believe is the cultural one. [...] like when we talk about strategies you see domestication, foreignization, I think a huge part is on the translator, and a big part of the translator's responsibility is to educate people on new cultures[...]it's part of the translator's job to entice the reader [...] translation is not only transfer of meaning, the cultural aspect is very important, the educational aspect is also very important. [...]we are giving the reader something new, teaching the reader.

By contrast, M6 describes the study of translation as:

Something very difficult and very still[...] Translation is full of humanity and feeling and sense. Your personal taste, experience and your personality are what constitute a translation and not this lifeless thing they want to teach us.

These descriptions of translation by participants M1 and M6 depict translation as more than a mere textual transfer or a bridge between cultures. It is a multifaceted activity. Therefore, the translator here is not only a communicator but also an artist and an educator. This view echoes the view of the translator as a creative writer, or a "force for good" (Bassnett 2002: 4). The translator is an intercultural mediator who ensures the survival of the translated text through time. This view regards the translator as an important asset to the diffusion of culture. To fulfil the tasks that correspond with this mediatory metaphor of translation, moreover, the role of the translator would



vary according to the purpose of translation. Consequently, the role the Trainee translators played in the translation task was, in their opinion, predetermined by the brief I explained prior to the task.

Three out of ten participants viewed translation as a transfer. Participant M2 explains: “I believe it’s transferring meaning from one language to another. Taking everything from one language and carrying it to the target language”. The view of translation as a transfer of meaning and “carrying across”, which has a long-standing tradition in Western conceptualisations of translation, can be observed here in M2’s description. As discussed earlier, the perception implies that what is being carried across is the meanings inside the words and sentences. As such, the units are storehouses for meaning, and are ultimately the building blocks out of which language is constructed. Therefore, the translator would deconstruct the original structure, the source text structure, and reconstructs the meaning in the target text structure.

M2’s description was echoed in M3’s thoughts about translation. The participant explained translation as “an activity of changing one text into another text according to the norms, according to the grammatical rules of the other language”. This description resonates with the metaphor of the translator as a mediator. The translator is seen as in between the source text and the target text, with duties and obligations towards the writer and the reader. Similarly, M5 describes translation as follows: “It’s basically transferring of the meaning from x to y language”. These three views of translation imply that the translator is a passive agent, whereas the views expressed by M1 and M6, imply an active translator and purposeful translating.

The last two descriptions that will be discussed in this section are the views expressed by M4, M8, and M7. M8 described translation thus:

Translation is like an art. You’re trying to give information in a different language. It’s an important tool to express ideas in another language. And the translator has an important role in it. The translator is mediating between languages. He or she bridges the gaps and communicates the meaning.

This description provided by M8 could be perceived as contradictory. The participant considers *translation* as an art. However, the role of the translator is that of

a mediator, the one who fills in the gaps. Thus, while translation is seen as a free, artistic expression, the translator seems to be restricted, and in between the writer and the reader. Similarly, M4 describes translation as:

A language in itself. You communicate through it. It’s like making a bridge between two people, two cultures. Sometimes you feel like you reach a dead-end then someone translates or interprets and it’s like a door has opened. He’s the bridging agent, he’s the link, the key when doors are closed.

M7 stated:

I believe translation is all about transmitting a message and connecting cultures. The translators’ role is to mend the gaps between cultures through the translation[...]the translator is someone who is well informed about the languages and the cultures he’s working with.

Once again, inconsistencies between the description of translation and the role of the translator appear here. While translation is regarded by M4 as a language in its own right, the translator is described as a bridging agent, or a mediator. M7 and M8 also describe translation as process of transfer. In this transfer process, while the translator is in between, and must possess a certain degree of knowledge, s/he must not interfere with the message. Neutrality appears to be important for the translator in the view of these participants.

The selected views presented above are representative of the MA cohort. As stated earlier in the section, it was expected that trainee translators would represent a wider range of views in light of their studies and practical knowledge of translation. The Trainee translators, during their theoretical classes, had covered a range of theories and theorists as well as the professional code of conduct. The expectation was borne out during the interviews and in the observations I made through the think-aloud exercise.

The major difference that was observed between the dominant views in the two groups is this: natural translators tended to describe a translation process in which primacy is afforded to the target text reader rather than to the author of the text. Also, the natural translators in their description of translation used words that evoked the idea of narrating and explaining, notions that are etymologically at the root of the Arabic

word for translation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, for the natural translator in this research, the translator seems to be more of an active agent, to the point of modifying and even censoring the content to fit with the perceived sensitivities of the target culture. N1 was a prominent example of such tendency. For many trainee translators, on the other hand, the translator's role is more about overcoming differences or bridging the gaps, in light of the brief, but there were also other views that suggested the translator is an educator who entices the reader, as was seen in the example of M1. The MA students suggested that the translator must not interfere with the source text: for example, M6 and M5, suggested that the translator's role is deliver the meaning without prejudice, while some natural participants implied that a degree of interference is part of the translator's job.

To further illustrate these contrasting views, I offer below two quotes that may be considered representative of the predominant views on the general question of translator intervention held by the two cohorts. M5 says in relation to the role of the translator:

There are cultural gaps[...]Or let's say open cultures and the Arabic which is more conservative. If you put yourself (the translator) within the circle and you don't get out of this circle then you're stuck. Like the one I was translating, sometime I had to go a little bit more explicit, and sometimes you preserve the tone and tone things down a bit...let's say the translator is a very religious person, and translating some content or text that is a little explicit, his job as a translator is to translate anyway [...]either leave it or translate it, give the text its right.

N1, on the other hand, states:

Traditionally, if we're translating to Arabic, it's going to be read mainly by Muslims, and they don't use or make use of wine or cider. Cider seems to be عصير تفاح [apple juice] this might work. But mulled[...]if I'm translating for Kuwaitis I would definitely remove that sentence.

As can be seen from the excerpts above, the views about the role of the translator are different between the cohorts. M5 argued that a translator must be neutral, and his/her interference with the text must be minimal. On the other hand, N1 described

a translator who reshapes the text's content to fit with the assumed readership. It is noteworthy that N1's overall views stood out as more extreme within the natural translators' cohort. Evidently, there were other views that favoured a degree of intervention, but those were for different reasons and are less extreme than those mentioned by N1. These differences were expected. However, it was expected that natural translators would conceive of the translator's role as a passive one, based on their lack of experience. They were expected to be literal, and adhere to the source text syntax, structure and content. However, natural translators in this research were active and interventionist.

## 5. Conclusion

The major differences that I observed between the dominant views in the two groups is that natural translators tend to describe a translation process in which primacy is afforded to the target text reader rather than the author of the text. Also in their description of translation the words they used were words that evoked the idea of narrating and explaining, notions that are etymologically in the root of the Arabic word for translation. It seems that the translator for this cohort is an active agent with a duty and responsibility towards the reader and target culture, to the point of modifying, reconstructing and even censoring the content to fit with the perceived sensitivities of the target culture. For many trainee translators on the other hand the translator's role is more about bridging gaps, overcoming differences, and some suggested that the translator has a duty to educate and enlighten the reader. Views that echoed the previously discussed perceptions and metaphors. Trainees also suggested that translator must not interfere with the text and deliver the meaning without prejudice.

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<sup>1</sup> The interviews were conducted in English. Therefore, the perceptions and descriptions that the participant provided were also expressed in English.



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