

Context, Field and Landscape of Audiovisual Translation in the Arab World

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Abstract: Translation, as a cultural mediation, builds bridges between the Arab world and the outside world, particularly the west and continues to occupy a pivotal place in Arab society. Over the past two centuries, and since the establishment of the school of translation in Cairo in 1835, translation has been viewed as a vehicle of *Nahda* (progress) and *Tanweer* (enlightenment). Over the past two decades, however, translation in the Arab world has been radically transformed both at the practice and policy levels. The turn of the new millennium has brought about changes that have shaken the state of affairs and challenged old thinking and the ways of doing things. First, digital technology has changed the way things are done from work, play and study to the ways we socialise, shop and entertain ourselves. Second, a report on human development in the Arab world published in 2002 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), revealed the unhealthy state of translation in most Arab countries. The paper examines the state of audiovisual study in Arabic and invites scholars to focus a lot more on their own local environment. It argues that a quarter of a century after the conference that launched the concept of AVT in Europe in 1995, the time has come for Arab academia to start developing its (own) theoretical frameworks for the localisation of audiovisual translation studies with the view of making translation studies not only relevant to society but also to play the role it was envisaged two centuries earlier.

Keywords: Arabic, audiovisual culture, AHDR 2002, digital humanities, edutainment, multimedia translation, Covid-19

Contexte, domaine et paysage de la traduction audiovisuelle dans le monde arabe

Résumé : La traduction, en tant que médiation culturelle, construit des ponts entre le monde arabe et le monde extérieur, en particulier l'Occident, et continue d'occuper une place centrale dans la société arabe. Au cours des deux derniers siècles, et depuis la création de l'école de traduction au Caire en 1835, la traduction a été considérée comme un véhicule de *Nahda* (le progrès) et de *Tanweer* (les lumières).

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Au cours des deux dernières décennies, cependant, la traduction dans le monde arabe a été radicalement transformée, tant au niveau de la pratique que de la politique. Le tournant du nouveau millénaire a entraîné des changements qui ont ébranlé la situation et remis en question les vieilles idées et les façons de faire. Tout d'abord, la technologie numérique a changé la façon de faire les choses, du travail, du jeu et de l'étude à la façon dont nous nous socialisons, faisons nos courses et nous divertissons. Deuxièmement, un rapport sur le développement humain dans le monde arabe publié en 2002 par le PNUD (Programme des Nations unies pour le développement) a révélé l'état malsain de la traduction dans la plupart des pays arabes. L'article examine l'état de l'étude audiovisuelle en arabe et invite les chercheurs à se concentrer davantage sur leur propre environnement local. Il soutient qu'un quart de siècle après la conférence qui a lancé le concept de la traduction audiovisuelle en Europe en 1995, le temps est venu pour les universités arabes de commencer à développer leurs (propres) cadres théoriques pour la localisation des études de traduction audiovisuelle afin de rendre les études de traduction non seulement pertinentes pour la société mais aussi pour jouer le rôle qu'elles étaient envisagées deux siècles plus tôt.

Mots-clés : arabe, culture audiovisuelle, AHDR 2002, humanités numériques, multimédia, Covid-19

Introduction

Translation in the Arab world is closely linked to development and progress. However, rather than transfer ideas and transplant models to the local environment, most efforts were not only imported *en masse* but also seen through a western lens. Furthermore, globalisation is increasingly seen as a form of Americanisation, which has had a destabilising effect on culture ranging from national confidence to the national language. Despite its obvious role and significance, translation studies has not been successfully localised in Arabic - as a discipline that interacts with society and offers solutions and innovations that meet its needs and the aspirations of its youth. Academic translation programmes seem to contend with foreign models, copied rather than locally re-designed and developed, and therefore are unable to creatively contribute to the local and regional culture.

Audiovisual translation studies is one good example that reflects the state of translation in the Arab world today. A quarter of a century after its launch as an academic specialisation in western Europe, audiovisual translation remains a vogue in Arab academia unable to take its rightful position as a catalyst for change and reform in Arab society. Rather than localise the concept of audiovisual translation and modernise the traditional translation department, Arab academia continues to disregard multimedia technology thus missing out on joining the digital age of translation. There are numerous reasons why audiovisual translation studies lag behind despite the obvious relevance and benefits of the new concept to culture and to society at large (Gamal, 2019). In order to address this question, I argue, that a

better appreciation of the context, field and landscape of audiovisual translation in the Arab world is essential. To this end, I examine the current state of translation, as it is practiced today, and also offer a historical résumé of the development of audiovisual culture in the Arab region. To my knowledge, such historical résumé of the audiovisual culture has not been attempted previously. Its main aim is to help reconcile the aspirations of the current, albeit traditional, translation initiatives with the powerful and fast-changing digital technology. This paper, part of an ongoing research in Arabic audiovisual translation (Gamal, 1996), comes after examining the context of audiovisual translation in several Arab countries and a series of in-depth research papers on various aspects of the current practice of audiovisual translation in the digital age (<https://independent.academia.edu/MuhammadGamal1>).

Historically and culturally-speaking, translation in the Arab world has a long, proud and eventful history. The contributions Arab translators and the Arabic language made to world civilisation, and particularly western knowledge, is undeniable (Barnes, 1965). For five centuries Arabic was not only an international language but was the *lingua franca* of science and scholarly publications (Galal, 1977). This is a clear reference to Baghdad of the 9th to the 13th centuries where translation was not only viewed as a state policy but was seen as a professional and scholarly pursuit where dynasties of translators flourished. The rewards offered by the state were generous and the privileges received by the top translators were immeasurable. Never in the history of humankind did translators feel the significance of passing knowledge and expertise from father to son as did the great dynasties of translators in Baghdad (Hunke, 1960). During the Dark Ages in Europe, the world of science, mathematics, medicine and chemistry spoke in Arabic. The great medieval scholars Muslims, Christians and Jews all spoke and published in Arabic and some of the canonical works were still read and relevant till the seventeenth century. Some of the finest examples to illustrate this point are perhaps the Jewish philosopher Maimonides who authored his famous work *The Guidebook of the Perplexed* in Arabic and published it in Cairo (Arkoun, 1986). The other example is that of the illustrious Persian poet *Omar Khayyam* whose poetry in his native Farsi was synonymous with gold. Yet, when he wanted to publish his treatise on mathematics he could only publish it in Arabic, the international language of science, mathematics and scholarly literature (Ranelagh, 1979). This introduction is a sobering reminder at a time when local languages and cultures, in an increasingly globalised world, feel the pressure of a new form of technology and also the unsurpassed influence of the English language.

1. Arabic Translation in the Twenty First Century

In 2002, the United Nations Development Programme launched its first report on Human Development in the Arab world. The document, titled Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) and subtitled “Creating opportunities for future generations” is authored by Arab specialists and thinkers for the United Nations

(UNDP, 2002). The reception of this report was both wide and wild: it touched on sensitive issues related to *Nahda and Tanweer* in a manner that was seen as confronting, cold and even challenging. Essentially, it deals with governance, accessibility to digital technology, gender equality and freedom. Yet, the most striking feature in the report that was picked up by the media is its focus on the state of translation in the Arab world. The report states that, in 2002, the entire Arab world translates only 330 books per annum which is one fifth of what Greece translates per year. The report goes even further and claims that “the cumulative total of translated books since the Caliph *Al-Ma'mon's* time (the 9th century) is about 100.000 books, almost the average that Spain translates in one year” (UNDP, 2002, p. 78). The report with its unflattering statements and statistics was widely examined in the Arab media and the section on translation received special and critical attention (Amin, 2002; Douri, 2004; Selim, 2009; Didaoui, 2016; Salama-Carr, 2019).

It is important to note that the figure of 100,000 books turned out to be a huge typographical error that was corrected to 10,000 in the 2003 report. Also, the statistics were attributed to an earlier study by Shawqi Galal (1999) in what appears to be a compelling study. His book *Translation in the Arab world: Reality and the challenge* is actually subtitled “In light of a clear-cut comparative statistical study”. The UNDP report was criticised for its foreign focus that does not pay attention neither to the Arab context nor to the values held by the subjects of the report: the locals. For example, Egyptian economics professor Galal Amin criticises the report for its questionable statistical approach which does not explain the results from a local point of view. For instance, Amin argues that while the report laments the sad state of translation into Arabic, it does not mention anything about the pressure on Arabic, as a native tongue, and the lack of online content in the native language (2002, 62-66). Likewise, World Bank economist Mahmoud Mohieldin explains that measuring development vis-à-vis other nations “is akin to driving a car. The capable driver must keep an eye on the dashboard to read, check and understand the readings of all meters. However, a single reading from one meter does not mean anything to the journey of development as it is the sum of all readings that matter” (Mohieldin, 2019). Likewise, in the 2003 edition of the UNDP programme titled “Building a knowledge society”, the same focus on the state of translation in the Arab world was continued with even more revealing statistics. The 2003 Report mentions the average number of books published in the Arab world in the 1980s was 4.4 per one million citizens while in Hungary the figure was 519 and, again, in Spain 920 per one million citizens (UNDP, 2003). Statistics aside, the state of translation in the Arab world in 2003 was not a happy one. The two reports shook the Arab cultural establishment in a way not seen previously and there was a persistent call for action in more than one Arab country. For almost a century, translation effort in the Arab world was constantly subject to the pressures of distance, cost, effort and time. These four obstacles have hindered cooperation, planning, dissemination and the production of translation resulting in translators working individually, in isolation of others and without government support.

Yet, in the age of digital technology, the Internet and smart phones several initiatives sprang up almost simultaneously as if a new translation movement was about to be born. This was seen in several Arab countries and particularly in Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt and in almost all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members which includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Thus, the new millennium saw translation being foregrounded and sponsored by direct government patronage in the shape of initiatives, institutions, conferences and awards. This new reality opened doors for cooperation, participation and publication at numerous levels: individual, professional, academic, governmental and also by foreign entities.

2. Audiovisual Culture and Technology in the Arab world

In *Midaq Alley*, one of Naguib Mahfouz's most popular novels (1947) dramatized into film in 1963, there is a scene showing the arrival of a new technology: Radio. The scene takes place at a café in a small Cairo alley where people used to congregate every evening and listen to a singer playing his lute. As people jubilantly welcome the new invention, the café owner tells the singer that his services were no longer required as there is now a radio that broadcasts the same songs all day long and for free. The singer, worried about the loss of his only livelihood, pleads with the owner and puts his case: "It's a machine! I am the real thing and people can see me, listen to me and interact with me". However, the café owner is adamant and kicks the singer out. The scene ends with the café guests arguing the virtues and consequences of new technology.

Mahfouz has been examined from several angles (El Gemaei, 1992; Gamal, 2015a). However to further appreciate this powerful Mahfouzian new technology scene, it is perhaps significant to go back to the early years of the twentieth century in order to identify the context, field and landscape of audiovisual culture in Egypt: a microcosm of the entire Arab world. While the centre and peripheries of traditional Arab culture have shifted throughout the ages (Frangieh, 2018), Cairo still holds a central position in contemporary Arab culture due to her long history, population, audiovisual industry and the easily recognizable dialect of Egyptian Arabic (Gouida, 1993). This flashback also serves to show how audiovisual culture changed through most of the twentieth century and its direct impact on education, reading, Arabic, social mobility, wealth, urbanisation, development and the overall social character of contemporary Egyptians. For the purpose of clarity, and economy, the flashback will seek to divide audiovisual culture into four major periods: early, middle, modern and digital. The suggested periods are indicative of major technological developments and the impact they have had on society, and particularly the habit of reading as the population increases. The division therefore is arbitrary and overlapping. However, it will prove helpful not only in appreciating audiovisual culture but also in understanding the landscape of audiovisual translation in the current climate.

The Early Period. By the turn of the twentieth century, Egypt was ready for a new age (Hussein, 1938). As electricity was gradually being introduced throughout the country, the print media was going through a prosperous time with cultural, literary and illustrated magazines numbering “well over a hundred in 1920” (Lopez, 2005, p. 379). Music, theatre and singing became the backbone of the emerging industry of dramatic arts that would carry Egyptian culture beyond its natural borders. The period was politically tense both before the First World War and particularly after the Conference at Versailles (1919). Most importantly, illiteracy was rampant and education was expensive and widely regarded as an elitist pursuit. Public readings of newspaper at cafés was a regular exercise. The British occupation of Egypt (1882) made matters worse as schools were gradually closed and English was imposed as the language of education which prompted poet Hafiz Ibrahim to write a poem in praise of Arabic in 1903. This period was actually verbo-visual in essence as it relied heavily on the print medium and its technology. Commercial journalism could be said to have started in 1876 with the founding of the daily Al-Ahram newspaper, the brainchild of Lebanese migrants who popularised the concept of mass print media in Syria, Egypt and Morocco in the latter part of the nineteenth century. That was also the period where universities (1908), higher specialist schools and local cinemas (1907) were being established. The twenties were bright, witnessing electricity becoming widespread in Alexandria, Cairo and major Egyptian cities and also the early attempts at silent films which culminated in 1927 with *Laila* being the first silent film. *Children of the Rich*, the first Egyptian sound film was released in 1932. Soon after, Egypt firmly established its cinematic industry through private investments in its film studio (1934) and the Institute of Dramatic Arts in 1944. Also, the first attempts at broadcasting were made in 1925, by amateurs and private owners. Although some stations were named after members of the royal family such as Radio Farouk and Radio Fouad, they and others such as Radio Sabo and Radio Heliopolis, broke social rules and violated Egyptian mores. In a bid to organise the audio scene, regulations were later introduced and ultimately all private licences withdrawn. In May 1934, the Egyptian Radio Service was established and with it the early audiovisual era was in full swing. Egyptian radio and cinema popularised Egyptian culture and dialect in the entire region well before the mass movement of professionals and semi-professional workers to almost all Arab countries in the fifties and sixties. It is insightful to observe that foreign cinema brought about subtitling or “film translation” as it is commonly known in Arabic (Gamal, 2008). For this, several private companies began offering the services, but one company based in Cairo called *Anis Ebaid and later Anis Ebaid & Sons Company* was able to monopolise the market and for forty years to impose its artistic and literary styles on Arab viewers from the Ocean to the Gulf (Gamal, 2018). This pattern, of the early audiovisual era, was repeated in other Arab capitals, at various dates, with the notable exception that in all cases the radio had preceded cinema.

The Middle Period. The arrival of television ushers in the middle audiovisual era which was first launched in Baghdad in 1956 followed by Cairo/Damascus simultaneously in July 1960 (Boyd, 1999). Saudi Arabia, in the early fifties, had actually established a mobile TV station within its oil fields in the eastern part of the Kingdom (with subtitled programmes into Arabic) however the Royal Broadcasting Service was officially established a decade later. This period witnessed the development of mass media in the Arab world and went through its own development milestones: from black and white technology to adopting the French broadcasting system and with one or two national channels running for a limited number of hours per day. As technology develops the audiovisual sector develops and visibly impacts the social, educational and cultural contexts. It is noticed that the jump into television was contemporaneous with decolonisation which also witnessed accelerating national programs towards independence and mass education (mostly to eradicate illiteracy). Egyptian literary figure Taha Hussein lamented the fact that many young people do not read enough and watch too much television: “In advanced countries, people watch television and go to the cinema but they still read books. Not in France, England or Italy do people give up books for films. But here, intellectuals do prefer going to cinema than reading a book” (Mohamed, 1966:5). Insightfully, it is this generation of Taha Hussein, that grew up in the verbo-visual period, that contributed to the magnificent fifties and sixties in the Arab world, a period many authors and journalists nostalgically miss and fondly refer to as *El Zaman el Gameel* (La Belle Époque). This period ends with a massive technological development that ushered in satellite TV where dishes replaced antennas. Today, Arab viewers have access to hundreds of channels available around the clock and are mostly free-to-air. A new term evolved *Open Skies* which means that from now on viewers will be spoilt for choice, no government will have a monopoly on its citizens’ attention which for all intents and purposes will be, for ever, distracted. It is significant that almost thirty years after Taha Hussein’s comments another study was conducted in 1995 which wonders “Why youth do not read: In the age of open skies will reading lose its position as the main source of knowledge?” (Nasr, Zaafan & Zaitun, 1995). Two significant technical developments mark this period. The first was the role CNN played in covering the second Gulf War in January 1991 when, in the early years of satellite television, only major hotels were able to offer this service. In the wake of the CNN coverage (clearly from an American point of view) the news bulletin received a fundamental change: it is now a show to watch. Gone are the monotonous reading of the news as correspondents now go out to the field, interviewing real persons with foreign speakers dubbed or subtitled and added the news bar at the bottom of the screen. Within five years, in November 1996, Arab TV viewers had their own CNN in the form of Aljazeera TV channel. Al-Asad reviews the development of broadcasting in the age of satellite technology and points out that despite the several hundred Arabic channels available, “some have actually distinguished themselves in a way that changed the shape and content of television in the region” (2012: 87). This period also witnessed a new development and a change in the Arab viewer’s taste in watching foreign television drama. For

sixty years, the modus operandi of presenting foreign television drama was subtitling until a Lebanese company decided to offer dubbed *telenovelas* from Colombia and other Latin American countries. Widely known as the 'Mexican dubbed drama' (some were actually from Mexico), the experience was artistically flawed for two reasons: the first was due to the employment of the higher Variety of Arabic which looked very odd to the context of a foreign drama. The second was due to the style of translation which was too rigid and not communicative (reflecting a huge gap between text and image). This early dubbing experience lasted for a number of years and was broadcast in several countries and despite the poor artistic quality of the dubbing it paved the way for the second wave of dubbed (Turkish) drama which would take the Arab world by storm in the new millennium. This period saw the birth of the concept of multimedia and edutainment. It also witnessed a new invention that would fundamentally reshape the future of subtitling: the digital versatile disc - commonly known as the DVD (Gamal, 2017).

The Modern Period. The commercialisation of the Internet in the mid-to-late nineteen nineties arrived in most Arab countries at the same time but with varying degrees of penetration (Abdulla, 2007). The 2003 Arab Human Development Report shows that the infrastructure was one of the biggest hurdles to its effective use despite the wide acceptance by the (bilingual) literate sectors of the community (UNDP, 2003). The modern period of audiovisual culture in the Arab world was fraught with challenges as the Internet did not speak Arabic in the early days, a fact that hampered participation and led to the invention of a new style of writing *Arablsh*: where Arabic is written in the Latin alphabet with numbers used to replace phonemes that do not exist in English. This practice continued as increasing numbers of (young) people were discovering email. When mobile phones (particularly Nokia with a large screen) arrived with the ability to send text messages it was the vogue of the early years of the twenty-first century. This period was characterised by vast and fast developments which made computing accessible, portable, affordable and most importantly enjoyable. With Microsoft's Windows 95 operating system and Apple computers starting to acquire a sizeable share of the education market, targeting young people and the teaching profession, computers became part of every household. New terms emerged such as interactive, online content, knowledge society and the information superhighway. The term interactive digital technology became so popular referring to a new way of doing things online. Accessed and completed on computers, mobile phones, tablets, digital cameras, game consoles, CD Roms, DVDs all powered by the new concept of Multimedia which, for the first time, allowed for text, pictures, colour, animation, video and sound to be seen as elements that work together not separately. This opened the door for the concept of *Edutainment* and its variation of *Infotainment* (Gamal, 2013). Increasingly, as Arabic was being introduced as one of the many working languages of the Internet, the participation level increased as more and more institutions and individuals began to explore the world wide web. Yet, the greatest impact the Internet had was perhaps through the speed of publishing and sharing. This modern audiovisual period witnessed numerous communication developments in many Arab

countries, chiefly among them is the launch of International TV Channels whereby each country dedicates a satellite channel to broadcast its image abroad. This relied on the news being read in two or three languages (as in Syria), a large number of programs subtitled into a number of foreign languages and talk shows with (live) subtitling (Egypt).

An important feature in this period was the sudden rise in the popularity of dubbing foreign programs into Arabic, a choice not previously favoured by officials and stakeholders in the Egyptian and Arab film industry. Technology also made the business of subtitling and dubbing a lot easier which led to the mushrooming of media companies offering the service. Another welcome feature was the increasing visibility of sign language interpreting on Arabic television channels in the region; a feature, and indeed an accessibility service, not seen previously. Yemeni scholar Arif Alatom (2012) examines the use of sign language-interpreted programs on several Arab channels and points out that poor quality interpreting undermines the service. By 2010, there was over a thousand TV channels some with thematic focus varying from soccer to cooking, drama, education, religion and online shopping. By then, Taha Hussein would have been dismayed not only at the sheer number of television channels but also at the superficial and even harmful content of many channels. Clearly, there is now no time for reading books or newspapers for that matter. For a while, however, Arab viewers appeared to be mere consumers of audiovisual material: some locally made in Arabic, others subtitled or dubbed foreign programmes or trans-adapted programs. The latter refers to popular foreign television programmes copied and their concept translated and adapted to local context such as: *Who wants to be a Millionaire*, *Good Morning America*, *Britain Got Talent*, *The Voice*, *Saturday Night Live* and other talk shows, stand-up comedy and sitcoms. However, the introduction of smart phones, Facebook, YouTube and other social media platforms quickly attracted the attention of television viewers in a way that was pro-active, confident and creative as exhibited in the Arab Spring and particularly in Egypt in 2011.

The Digital Period. The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed the golden age of DVD subtitling and an enormous interest in studying this type of audio-visual translation ensued as can be seen from the number of publications produced mainly in Europe (Karamitroglou, 2000; Gambier & Gottlieb 2001; Gambier, 2003; Bogucki, 2004; Caimi, 2006; Gambier, 2007; Cavalieri, 2008; Gamal, 2009, Diaz-Cintas et al., 2010). However, it was Apple's iPhone in January of 2007 that popularised the idea of digital life by placing the Internet in everyone's hands, all the time and anywhere they happen to be (Chuilli, 2018). Smart phones have made multi-modal communication a lot easier, simpler and faster as can be seen in MMS (multimodal messaging service). An advert by Apple in 2008 said the "iPhone has placed the world in one's hands and a computer in one's pocket" (Macworld, 2008). It could be said that the smart phone screen is now the fourth screen we live by after those of cinema, television and the computer. Arabic became available on the Internet and smart phones supported Arabic language although the

degree of accuracy is not as high as that for Roman-based languages particularly when it comes to auto-correct, a problem that is also shared by the spell-checker in Microsoft Word. However, the earlier tradition of *Arabliish* continued albeit for more creative and anecdotal messages or by those who are not fluent in English. Yet, the impact smart phone technology and social media had on the Arabic language has been immense and Shouhsa even says “devastating” (Shouhsa, 2004, p. 58). By now, fewer people read books on trains and almost no one could be seen reading a newspaper! Smart phones ushered in the era of Apps! Today, there are more than two million Apps available and the statement “there is an App for that” is now an understatement given the speed by which new Apps appear. With 4G technology necessitated by smart phones and the newly introduced tablets and the power hungry Apps, games and programmes: the rate of innovation became faster than governments’ legislation and society’s ability to cope with the new invention and the consequences from information abundance to computer viruses, phubbing to scamming, phishing, cyber bullying and fake news. When Apple celebrated the tenth anniversary of its iPhone in 2017, it launched iPhone X which is almost 200 times more powerful than its flagship desktop computer of two decades earlier and with only 178 grams, it fits neatly into one’s back pocket! Today, the powerful iPhone11 allows its user to do almost everything one usually does on the desktop. Smart phones, of all kinds, come with multimedia capabilities that allow individuals to be more informed, more productive and indeed more creative. When the Arab Spring first broke out in 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria; youth had resorted to cyber space to express their disappointment with the current state of affairs. It has been argued that the Arab Spring was organised online and not underground as resistance movements used to be organised and called in the pre-Internet times. Governments resorted to switching off the Internet entirely in a desperate move to stifle protest and to hamper organisation of mass gatherings. The same measure was witnessed again during the second wave of the Arab Spring that took place in Algeria, Sudan and Iraq in the first half of 2019. The Internet and smart phones, and despite the lack of a robust digital infrastructure in the majority of Arab countries, with the exception of the Gulf states, have actually achieved a higher penetration steadily since the mass introduction of the technology in the new millennium. However, digital transformation particularly in the government, media and education sectors remain slow and lag behind other private and larger business entities. This imbalance may explain the noticeable digital divide in Arab societies where illiteracy remains high and among the university educated; good command of Arabic is lacking. The paradox is created by an education system that on the one hand insists on free mass education and on the other allows for the teaching of science and technology to be conducted in English or French. Furthermore, the mushrooming number of foreign universities in Arab countries where all disciplines, even the humanities, are taught in foreign languages undermines the national language. The Internet came in the era of Globalisation where English became the undisputed *lingua franca* (Crystal, 1993) and this has had a direct impact on the Arabs’ native tongue. Today, online content in Arabic is not representative neither

of the importance of the language spoken by almost 438 million people (BBC.co.uk) nor of its significance to almost two billion Muslims (Wikipedia).

The preceding review of audiovisual culture in the Arab world is highly relevant not only for the understanding of the significant role translation plays in the region but more so for the appreciation of the future role of multimodal translation. One of the most salient observations is that the reasons for the traditional aversion to reading among Arab youth is not economic but technological. In other words, technology needs to be eased into society with an attempt at understanding its impact and consequences *a priori*. When cinema arrived, it imposed a social pursuit on illiterate classes as there were not many schools, universities or mass education programs allowed under the British occupation. Radio and Cinema in Egypt saw a generation of university educated people whose children grew up with television and grandchildren grew up with satellite dishes/game consoles and did not have enough time for reading. Likewise, their great-grandchildren are now playing games on their iPads and smart phones and do not know what's a newspaper for if everything is on the Net! The so-called generation Z never bought a newspaper, wrote a letter or sent a postcard for each one of these erstwhile verbo-visual rituals is now accomplished electronically and audio-visually on the smart phone. While the above observation may be seen as simplistic, it is nonetheless evident in wide sectors of society. As illiteracy remains high in agricultural communities (particularly in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Iraq and Yemen) as opposed to oil-based economies, there is also a science deficit in all Arab states which is attributed to the poor policies of education and low investment in research and development.

Although audiovisual translation is traditionally associated with cinema and television and the two major formats of translating audiovisual material are subtitling and dubbing, the digital age has created a much larger scope for the term "audiovisual translation". In an age where youth make up a significant segment in the population in the Arab world and where almost each one has a smart phone, the purpose of translation studies as a discipline and audiovisual translation as a specialisation must be realigned to better meet the challenges and needs of society (Gamal, forthcoming). It is perhaps an often-repeated cliché that university programs need to be socially responsive to community needs and yet translation schools defy the fact. There is a clear disconnect between the translation school and the current issues and trends in Arab societies (Faiq, 2000). Translation departments do not engage with the media to discuss translation issues or with other departments such as science or information technology. This is evident in the published literature: it is devoid of examples, case studies or incidents that take place in real life. Researchers do not read or follow what other thinkers or writers do in Arabic and the references are almost entirely foreign. Despite the investment in imported models, the quality of graduates is not seen as adequate or acceptable even by the translation professors themselves. The current translation pedagogy at some of the schools need to be repurposed and the futile practice of relying on published

research as a prerequisite for academic promotion needs to be reconsidered for it is false economy at best.

In the digital age translation schools need to go fully digital. Naturally, this is an infrastructure issue that is beyond the power of academia, but it needs not be a huge obstacle. Since every student has a smart phone, an iPad or a laptop; a revolution in teaching translation could be achieved. The only prerequisite is an experienced instructor, and this is another obstacle that academia, both in the Arab world and elsewhere, has some difficulty coming to terms with. Professional digital skills are either learned at Information Technology institutions or acquired through everyday practice: they are not innate. So senior faculty must choose wisely: either an experienced staff with formal qualifications in digital technology or a translation professor who is digital media-shy. The second option is unlikely to be fruitful. To be precise, translation schools need to seek an alliance with information technology and build newer and stronger links through joint research, interdisciplinary subjects, double degrees, mutual training with the long-term objective of seeking industry investment in audiovisual translation. Only then could a translation department offer audiovisual translation in an innovative, creative and socially responsive fashion.

3. The Context of Translation in the Twenty-first Century

One of the direct results of the 2002 AHDR was the response Arab governments mounted to the unflattering statistics on the number of books translated in the Arab world annually (Jacquemond, 2009). It is perhaps insightful to remember that translation plays a significant part in Arab society and that the bridges with the outside world have always been open with traffic constant in both directions. Traffic is carried alongside lanes dedicated to travelling, technology transfer, cinema, importation of goods or translation among other things. As to which lane is fastest on the east-west bridge, the translation lane, is not always considered the fastest albeit the heaviest. To explain the metaphor in more detail one has to examine the context of professional translation work more closely. Over the past forty years, three different settings of translation can be easily identified: the official, unofficial and the indirect. This is largely based on the context of actual translation output, again in Egypt, and therefore there is a degree of arbitrariness and overlapping. However, it will prove helpful in understanding the overall context in which translators operate in the Arab world.

The first and perhaps the most noticeable, although not necessarily the largest, is the official context produced by public, private and academic institutions, and covers almost all fields. The volume of translated work is necessitated by political, commercial or educational needs underpinning the decision to carry out the translation. Quite often, the people who produce this volume of work are professional translators with training and qualifications in the field of translation. They mostly work as in-house or contract translators in the contexts of tourism, government departments, the official media outlets, export-import business, foreign

trade, archaeology, foreign affairs and any other specialist field (that requires a translation). Although the output is large, the translator remuneration is inadequate and the opportunities for development are miniscule.

The second is the unofficial context of translation which includes translation in a wide range of settings such as the private media outlets, fashion, film festivals, football and translation during international events, competitions and tournaments (for example the world's largest annual gathering in Mecca). This volume of work is "institutional" in the sense that each institution decides to carry out its own translation for the purpose of its own business. Compared to the official context, this unofficial volume of translation, is certainly more visible albeit irregular, seasonal and therefore largely unregulated. Professional translators are not always engaged in this volume due to low remuneration, instability of employment and lack of professional scope. The translators tend to be either media personalities or officials with foreign language skills. In large-scale events, be it a film festival, a sports championship or even during the annual Haj season in Saudi Arabia volunteers (mostly university students with language skills) are engaged.

The third is the indirect context of translation which takes place at a higher and more technical level. This includes industries and technical settings, where English or French are primarily used as the main language of communication, such as in the information technology, aviation industry, foreign trade, the financial sector, the diplomatic field, military cooperation (including talks, joint manoeuvres and training), foreign exhibitions and trade shows. Though English (and other languages) are mainly used, it is considered as indirect translation due to the fact that it happens in Arab society and the feedback is often carried out in Arabic. In other words, information (whether essential or peripheral) is translated back to the professional community during meetings with officials, briefing in group sessions with staff or when reporting in the local media. The discourse of these feedback translations and briefings is characterised by the heavy use of foreign terminology, broken Arabic syntax and a strong sense of foreignization of the topic and an unavoidable feeling of alienation. The people who carry out this type of indirect translations are the graduates of foreign universities who completed their degrees in their chosen disciplines and fields entirely in foreign languages. These foreign universities are not necessarily abroad as a good number of foreign universities have opened up local branches in an increasing number of Arab cities. This type of translation/interpreting, is perhaps, the least examined in Arabic translation studies.

The Arab governments' response to the 2002 UN report appeared judicious and also generous (Brown, 2010; Goodin, 2010). For example, in 2004, the Arab League-sponsored Higher Institute of Translation was inaugurated in Algiers after several years of political debate over the venue, budget and mandate of the institute. Also, in Cairo, the national translation project established in 1996 became a statutory authority and relaunched as the National Centre for Translation in 2006. By the same year, the Centre had translated 1000 titles in various fields but mostly in the humanities. Likewise, in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates, a

more ambitious translation initiative, called *Kalima* (word), was launched in 2007. In Tunisia, the National Translation Centre was refurbished, relocated and relaunched in 2008 to mark the National Year of Translation. In 2012, a new Translation and Interpreting Institute was opened at the newly established Hamad bin Khalifa University in Qatar. These major initiatives represent part of the initial official Arab response. In addition to this, translation awards were announced in Riyadh, Dubai, Sharjah, Cairo and, later in 2015, in Doha. Some of these awards are very generous and acknowledge a single work or comes as a recognition of lifetime achievement in the field of translation (like the award given to Moroccan scholar Mohamed Diadou in 2017). Finally, and more significantly, translation conferences received a boost and became a regular event organised by translation bodies, academic institutions or even by other institutions supporting the activity such as the Qatar Foundation (the conference moved to the Hamad Bin Khalifa University after the third edition in 2014). Equally significant are the conferences organised by Emirates Airlines (literary translation) in Dubai, the Tourism and Heritage Department in Abu Dhabi (young translator training), the Book Fair Organisation in Sharjah (Translation and publishing), and also the Translation Conference organised by the Arab International Relations Forum in Doha launched in 2014.

However, the response, though admirable, multifaceted and indeed generous, lacked a significant feature: digital technology. In most cases, the decision makers have relied on policies and advice dating back to the print-based twentieth century and their response was formulated alongside the indicators of book publishing, distribution, physical events and on-site conferences. It is peculiar that most programmes opted for increasing the number of translated books (and foreign magazines) but did not consider the poor reading levels or even the new reading habits of its target readers. It failed to recognise that the population has got younger, about 50% are under the age of 24 (UNICEF, 2019), and that digital technology permeates their life and is now shaping their interests, moods and the way they do things. They no longer read newspapers, watch television or listen to the radio. They do not read or write in their own language and although they do not play with trains or dolls, anymore, each one of them has his or her own smart phone which is like *a computer in their pocket*. Children, and young people, have a myriad of electronic games and Apps, accessible via tablets and smart phones, things their parents never had and their grandparents never dreamed of. And yet, they are also open to a new digital culture characterised by social isolation, poor communication skills and selfishness. The digital age has come with wonderful opportunities, but the cost could be equally heavy starting with distraction, mediocrity, superficial knowledge, low athleticism to socially-distant attitudes.

Today, the overall context of translation has completely changed: translation is mostly created and accessed online, available anytime and anywhere, with numerous multilingual sources, translatable via Apps, affordable, uploadable and downloadable instantaneously, and most importantly, created in a multimedia format that is both informative and interesting. Digital translation means that all translated

material can now be accessed via a screen and utilises a different set of skills and media not known a generation ago. For example, the localisation of software programmes and web site translation, whether government or commercial, is increasing in popularity and complexity. It is because of these changes that traditional translation initiatives or programmes that sprang up in the early years of the twenty-first century may not be the best response or solution in today's world. Youth, the greatest asset of any nation, need to be addressed in today's language and that is the language of multimedia and alongside the principles of edutainment. To insist otherwise is to risk being seen as archaic, obsolete or indeed irrelevant.

As can be seen, the context of translation in the Arab world remains disjointed. This is reflected in the academic programmes offered at most translation schools where most of the ideas, theories and themes seem outlandish: borrowed or framed according to western topics, themes or agendas. This can be clearly seen not only in the topics of postgraduate research but also through the theoretical frameworks used in the research. Foreign ideas are not critically debated or examined with the view of applying them to the local context: they are examined, or rather cited, as an end in themselves. What makes the situation worse, is that most researchers do not read in their own language and believe the only literature worth-reading on the subject is foreign; a notion deepened by their professors (very few Arabic references in reading lists). Not surprisingly, translation is no longer viewed as a catalyst for change and reform in the local context. One of the best examples to illustrate the chasm between academia and society is the word *Secularism*. The term was first translated in the early nineteenth century and is so problematic that it is not only misunderstood by many, it is also mispronounced by most. The Arabic equivalent of the term secularism is so controversial that it has a negative connotation in Arabic culture and secularists are immediately marginalised and ostracized. After two hundred years, the controversial term remains unexamined by translators, thinkers and translation professors. Although *secularism* is not the only problematic term in Arabic, there are several other isms, that have not been correctly and accurately translated into Arabic such as liberalism, neo-liberalism, imperialism, structuralism, post-structuralism, impressionism, etc. This is an area that translation schools need to take up and to engage with society contributing innovatively to the context of translation; its cultural trends and intellectual debates.

4. The Field of Translation in the Twenty-first Century

One of the main criticisms levelled at the 2002 and 2003 UN Arab Human Development Reports was their terms of reference. In one of the earliest critiques, Amin argues that the Reports, prepared by Arab scholars but originally published *in English*, were pandering to a foreign agenda that did not pay enough attention to local values, issues and frameworks. For instance, he raises the point that the report does not view the increasing pressure Arabic was coming under, in the age of globalisation, as a serious challenge. Amin, and others in several Arab countries,

have pointed out the danger of marginalising the native tongue in favour of English or French. In many parts of the Arab world, tertiary education is conducted in either English or French, a matter which is “dangerous and divisive” as the Algerian head of the Arab Higher Institute of Translation Inam Bioud puts it (Mathews, 2014). The increasing number of foreign universities in Arab cities has contributed to the marginalisation of Arabic in the education sector with a noticeable impact on the spoken language of youth. The vernacularisation of Arabic, that is the use of the lower variety of Arabic, in writing has become widespread even in publications once held in high esteem for their content and linguistic style. This has forced some Arab governments to enact laws and legislations designed to safeguard the Arabic language as seen in Jordan in 2015, Qatar in 2019, and although Egypt has put forward a draft law in 2017, it has not passed yet. Thus, the digital age witnessed English rising to such supremacy that it actually threatens native languages and cultures in their own backyards. An issue that received primary attention and occupied the front cover of TIME magazine in 1997 (Geary, 1997). Against this background, as seen above, translation both as a policy and pedagogy finds itself at crossroads with several unprecedented challenges at the same time.

In the digital age, the field of translation in the Arab world, is faced with a need to develop a new way of thinking. The key word here is online content. There is a huge deficit in online content in the Arabic language which is not representative neither of the significance of Arabic as a language nor of the number of speakers both as native (Arab) speakers and non-native (Muslim) speakers. So far, very few government departments or organisations are actually engaged in enriching the online content in the Arabic language. The current, online presence of a wide spectrum of institutions and (individual) initiatives does not reflect a cultural model. This means that information is not processed in a way that amounts to a content deemed appropriate to the average user. It appears that most content is placed on the Internet without sufficient regard to the medium and sometimes without regard to the concept of multimedia. A great deal of content is also labelled “interactive” without any tools to make it inter-active! While no single style or model is advocated for all web sites and online pages in Arabic, a theoretical model, however, is in order. Such model, would ensure a *modus operandi* that serves the local culture (and with special regard to the young users) thus observing: use of good Arabic, standard online terminology, wide variety of rich cultural content, simplification of science, creation of documentaries that employ the principles of interactive media, clear instructions on using and surfing the Internet, promoting Arab cultural values, use of locally-sourced ClipArt, and underscoring the principles of enriching the online content particularly in areas, subjects and matters that are of immediate concern to Arab youth. The Internet is a huge tool, but it has also given birth to mediocrity and superficial knowledge that regrettably are created by the same tools that make the Internet, perhaps, the greatest technical invention. Online culture, in emerging economies, assumes a critical importance that can, if left unchecked, undermine all the good work done by traditional media, education and

family in bringing young people to become critical, law-abiding and tolerant good citizens.

Smartphone technology has had a dramatic impact on how the majority of Arab population (youth) access information, socialise, live their life and entertain themselves. It is not an exaggeration to say they are now glued to the screens of their mobiles even in the company of those closest and dearest to them. This fourth screen, after cinema, television and computers has opened a new field for translation studies: online content creation. The virtual world needs to be enriched with information that is relevant, reliable and most significantly produced in a manner that is informative and interesting to the average, and particularly, young user. Digital technology has brought about some features that could be utilised to address some of the shortcomings of the print age, chief among them, low reading rates, low enrolments in science & technology and low levels of community participation. Although a few studies and translation conferences have paid attention to the link between translation studies and online content, there is now a wide scope for cooperation, interdisciplinary research and field work in this area. Naturally, the scope of this cooperation is too huge to be examined by translation studies alone and therefore requires a new form of partnership: consolidated efforts that bring together academia, government, information technology, science and the humanities. Understanding the field where translation is created and consumed is vital for better policy design and course development. Political, economic, demographic and cultural factors have a direct bearing on the end result. The field of translation in the Arab world, as has been the case over the past two hundred years, offers a massive scope for applied research, joint projects and interdisciplinary studies. However, it requires professors, scholars and researchers to turn their sights to the local environment where translation is created and consumed before an attempt is made to combine the act of translation with the new tools offered by digital technology.

In this light, the field of translation studies becomes wider than before: it is now designed to be accessed online, in modern communicative Arabic and created in multimedia that endorses the principles of edutainment. This in turn has implications for both policy and pedagogy. Government and other institutions need to appreciate that multilingual translation does not mean only English and French and that multilingual production is possible, a lot cheaper and a lot more efficient compared to pre-digital times (printing, shipping, distribution costs, etc.). Likewise, translation pedagogy needs a huge boost to turn its attention to digital translation and to streamline programmes and courses to include content creation, localisation, multimedia application, interactive media, audio description, versioning, documentaries, data analytics, data visualisation, web site design and audiovisual translation. The digital transformation is now an existential requirement and not a matter of choice. New translation curricula would ensure that translators are also able to work with various institutions on translating their online content. This means that translation schools will have to look into offering new courses such as Translation for Specific Purposes and particularly in science and information

technology. In the digital age, unlike in the print times, translators can now see their work published, viewed and reviewed by consumers and are able to gauge the level of acceptance, success and popularity of their work. There are several encouraging signs, both at the institutional and individual levels, where translation is actually designed to be accessed online. This can readily be seen in the fields of tourism and broadcasting where bilingual and multilingual translations form part of the features of the online service. In addition, individual blogs, webpages, Facebook accounts and YouTube channels reflect emerging tendency among individuals (mostly young people) who are keen to search for an opportunity to express themselves. It is particularly insightful to examine the innumerable ways young people use the Internet creatively to contribute content or to share and make knowledge accessible to a wider sector of the community. This energy needs to be harnessed and channelled into government-sponsored programmes.

At the institutional level, the call in 2017 by the Mohamed bin Rashid Foundation in Dubai to translate 11 million words in the fields of science and math in one year was dubbed “The Translation Challenge”. It enlisted the talent and efforts of thousands of volunteers who turned the translations into 5000 videos of instruction in Arabic and is available to 50 million Arab school children online (www.madrasa.org), and for free. This translation initiative, relying on crowdsourcing, is unique in the history of translation and more so in the history of online culture in the Arab world. It is unique because ten years earlier on the 07/07/2007, governments’ view of online culture and particularly crowdsourcing was rather undeveloped as seen in the then popular referendum on the New Seven Wonders of the World (<https://world.new7wonders.com>). Government officials, particularly in Egypt, dismissed the entire experiment as unofficial and therefore irrelevant. Later, on the 11/11/2011, with another online referendum on the New Seven Wonders of Nature, the governments in Jordan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates belatedly tried to promote the idea of online voting when their own sites became finalists in the online competition (<https://nature.new7wonders.com>).

Globalisation has had a direct impact on culture, identity, language and education in many parts of the world and has made economic indicators the primary yardstick (Foucart, 2020). Today it is not unusual to speak of a digital divide in the Arab world. While (most) individuals may possess a (smart) phone, their ability to access reliable information is hampered by several factors including education, digital skills as well as the availability of information in their native tongue in a manner that is correct, accurate and up-to-date. Naturally, the factors of digital infrastructure, political and academic freedom, censorship, governmental control, affordable prices and the robustness of the Internet service are equally important. While official translation policies, in many parts of the Arab world, continue to sponsor the translations of printed material such as books, encyclopaedias and technical magazines, the reality is that youth are far less attracted to the old technology of ink and paper in favour of digital screens with multimedia technology. Given that children in several Arab settings have had their education disrupted by

foreign military interventions, political upheavals or even civil war, the field of translation in the third decade of the twenty-first century must *a posteriori* adopt a different approach to deal with the current demands and challenges. Although the experiment of the *Translation Challenge* in Dubai has not been fully examined yet, it creates a lot of scope for research by (digital) translation studies. Understanding the various forces present in the field of translation is a task that translation departments, both academic and professional, are invited to examine as technology is fast changing and outpacing the outcomes of government policies and academic programmes. As translation studies becomes more applied, it turns its sights to the context in which it serves and therefore becomes able to better understand the field it operates in. Only then it develops the confidence and the ability to identify opportunities and remedies that already exist in the local landscape.

5. The Landscape of Translation in the Twenty-first Century

Today, digital technology and particularly the Internet have given a totally different meaning to the term *global village*. Indeed, the world is vastly different from the time when Canadian mass media specialist Marshall McLuhan first coined the term in the early sixties (1962). It is insightful that the enlightened thinkers and reformers in Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia have all endorsed translation as a catalyst for change and progress. Although translation schools are now established in all major Arab universities there is still a missing element: the trigger to spark the process Riffa Al-Tahtawee, Boutros Al-Bustani and Khairuldin Al-Tunsi have called for, along with numerous others, from the early nineteenth century till today.

The spark can be found in the examination of the translation traditions in Arabic. There is a long history that gives depth to the translation landscape in the Arab world that extends almost fifteen centuries and covers the vast geographical area from Casablanca to Kuwait. Although translation schools and conferences examine the many aspects of translation from theory to process and product, very little attention has been dedicated to the study of Arabic translation history and its traditions (Salam-Carr, 2019). Apart from the celebratory reference to the old golden age of translation in Baghdad in the 9th century, very little effort is actually exerted to turn that knowledge into relevant, applicable and useful information for the teaching, research or examination of the current status of translation in Arab society. It is peculiar that none of the numerous schools of Al-Ahsan in Egypt examines the life and experience of Al-Tahtawee and particularly his book authored upon his return from Paris (Emara 1988). In his book, Al-Tahtawee reviews and sums up his journey to Paris where he spent five years as an Imam providing religious guidance to students sent to learn the modern ways of France. The trip proved to be a turning point as it changed not only the life of the Imam in Paris but also the future of Egypt and with it the entire Arab world (Newman, 2002).

In many ways, the examination of the history and traditions of Arabic translation would inform both translation pedagogy as well as public policy and help make

translation, as an academic discipline, more responsible to the local needs and requirements. For instance, most publicly funded translations of foreign titles cater only for the elite (who read, purchase books and create most of the demand for translations) but not for the masses who are in dire need of information, skills development and enlightenment. This is indeed a dilemma for many public programmes where funds are scarce and there is always the requirement to show how taxes are spent. Understandably, it is easier to cater for a select sector in society that is seen to be keen on the product and has both the interest and the money to pay for it. Likewise, in Arab academia, foreign translation theories are popular to the point where the foreign literature they appear in is often translated into Arabic. The translation of foreign literature on translation studies, particularly works on translation theory, is not unusual per se, but in the bigger picture it reflects a prevailing uncritical Eurocentric attitude (Asfour, 2001; Rose 2000; Doorslaer, 2012) which outshines relevant work already done by Arab scholars from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt. It is peculiar that theoretical and philosophical works by Arab scholars particularly Moroccan Taha Abdulrahman (1995, 2006) and Tunisian Abu Yarub Al-Marzouki (2012, 2020) are neither taught nor debated in the Arabic translation literature or even examined at translation schools. Abdulrahman, for instance, discusses three models of translation: “interpretative, communicative and generative” (1995:404). This theoretical model is intellectually rich as it is based on his work in the translation of ancient and medieval philosophical works and can provide sound intellectual and epistemological frameworks for the examination of translation and the training of translators and interpreters. Gamal points out that “most published research at the postgraduate level at major translation schools in the Arab world shows an over fascination with foreign literature and particularly European authors and is quite often written in foreign languages not in Arabic” (2019 : 210). This is clearly a cultural issue that needs to be addressed by translation scholars which reflects a serious flaw in the current state of translation studies in the Arab world. By ignoring the theoretical work carried out in their own cultural setting, and by looking far afield for imported models and borrowed frameworks, Arab scholars will only be able to see their reality through foreign lenses unable to identify opportunities that are available in their own backyard. There is a noticeable void between academia and society and translation scholars seem to be living in an ivory tower unable, or perhaps unwilling, to look at the reality of translation and how it is carried out. For example, the 2010 fifty-Riyal banknote in the Sultanate of Oman bears a sentence on the obverse that says in Arabic “The Glorious 40th National Day”. However, the translation into English, on the reverse of the banknote, does not include the word *glorious*. The incomplete (and therefore incorrect) translation does not seem to be a mistake as it appeared five years earlier on the commemorative note that marked the “Glorious 35th National Day”. This real-life observation is significant not because it is an official translation on a banknote but because it sums up the theory, practice, pragmatics of translation and other interdisciplinary factors which Didaoui refers to as “beyond translation” (2016 : 68). For translation studies to be effective, in a

society that relies on translating everything (Bioud, 2008), such an observation should be made and debated at all levels from undergraduate lectures to doctoral dissertations.

To appreciate the landscape of translation in Arabic today there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the history and traditions of translation at various historical points. This does not mean that the history of translation is examined in a linear or chronological fashion. It is perhaps best when examined as case studies that focuses on particular issues such as: selection of topics and works to be translated, terminology management, nurturing experience, the rights of translators and their position in society, translator training and mentoring, poor translations, institutional translation expertise, technology and translation, new forms of translation, translation theory and techniques, translating difficult and sensitive works, translation from an intermediary language, translation in technical fields, and of course translation from Arabic. The history of Arabic translation provides ample opportunities to examine some very successful, influential and inspiring examples from various parts of the ancient world as well as the contemporary Arab world. Young and emerging translators, in their formative years, could be inspired by these great examples, particularly when the national language and identity come under attack due to the sweeping effects of globalization. Likewise, translation scholars and early-career researchers will have a treasure trove of theoretical models and frameworks that could be applied to present-day issues with the ability to find either pragmatically appropriate solutions to current problems or, at least, a reasonable and relevant approach to an ongoing issue. The landscape of translation in the Arab world is so rich, deep and multi-layered that it offers a bottomless well of ideas for teaching, training, policymaking and research. Dimitri Gutas (1998) explores the work of translators during the Abbasid period in Baghdad and points out that it was the well-established culture of translation in Arab society that led to progress. It is this framework that is needed in training and research today. Despite the apparent variations in the cultural topography noticeable among the individual states in the Arab world, the sum of all parts offers a unique mosaic for translation studies; and it is readily available in the same common language! It is this awareness that is regarded as essential for appreciating the landscape of translation that enables the researcher to recognise challenges, identify causes and to see opportunities that are relevant, suitable and possible to take root in the local environment. Yet, the history of translation needs to be tackled not by a history professor but by a translation scholar who has the ability to understand the history of translation, in its proper context, and is aware of the other factors that shaped the period and is capable of appreciating the present-day situation with all its concomitant aspects. In other words, academics are expected to have the ability to present translation studies as an applied discipline focused on examining current and ongoing challenges and having the means to study, analyse and to innovatively suggest solutions. Not to do so risks translation studies becoming superficial and socially irresponsible.

The landscape of translation in the Arab world, and despite various political, economic, demographic, and ethnic factors, is greatly shaped by the same culture as Moroccan philosopher Al-Jabry puts it “Culture is one of the basic ingredients, if not the most fundamental, in the Arab world”(1992 : 167). Today, the cultural challenges facing people in the remotest hamlets in Sudan are not too different from those experienced in the most affluent cities in the Gulf. *Nahda* and *Tanweer* in Arab societies have been closely intertwined with the ability to translate western knowledge and know-how into everyday practice. It is peculiar, that when the Arab world, and particularly Egypt, opened up to the west they looked at science and medicine before they paid attention to the arts and the humanities. Egyptian critic Ali Shalash, questions “the policies that have seen the opposite take place: the arts and literature are now the fields where most innovation takes place and not the sciences” (1992 : 146). Likewise, Tunisian philosopher Al-Marzouki asks “by what magic wand has the situation been reversed” (2012: 61). It is imperative, therefore, for translation scholars to develop a theoretical framework that is informed by the local landscape as seen through local, and not foreign lens. Put simply, translation studies in the Arab world need to return to its roots in order to be able to explore its terrain and to appreciate its environment. Importing (and adopting) foreign agendas, whether through theories, frameworks, research priorities, conference themes or even accreditation does not efficiently or productively serve the local needs. The academic translation output over the past fifty years does not reflect the immediate needs of society. For instance, translation does not play a part in any of the *National 2030 Vision* policies announced in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iraq as most translation schools are unable to produce the technical translator required by the national programmes for development and progress. Furthermore, most successful, prolific and accomplished translators did not graduate from translation schools as is the case with five remarkable Palestinian translators Adel Zeiter (1895-1957), Jabra I. Jabra (1919-1994), Amal Mansour (1950-2018), Saleh Alwan (1946-2019) and Salma Khadra Jayyusi. The professional experience of each is a source of profound inspiration worth examining and further academic research. It is peculiar that the phenomenon of the talented-but-unschooled translator in the Arab world has not received any academic attention despite its common occurrence in several Arab communities. Experience matters, and by its very nature is incremental, and this is why universities should become incubators of experience as well as talent. However, this requires, understandably, a major paradigm shift in what universities do. It is far more profitable for society if academia was able to attract professionals and practitioners with real experience and not just PhDs. To take it further, translation schools may wish to seek active partnership with the national digital initiatives such as the one announced in the United Arab Emirates in 2017 (and in Jordan in 2019) to train one million Arab coders. Again, universities in the Arab world need to give up the obsolete ivory tower image and to get involved in what really matters in society for social media, alone, is capable of changing reality a lot faster than academic policies and programmes.

Today, there is no shortage of translation events and activities varying from competitions to academic conferences, awards, national days and festivities, and yet the overall impact such activities have on the local culture of translation is miniscule. This is due in no small part to the fact that such events lack the affinity to the local context and field. Tulips, and no matter how beautiful, will not grow in the distant, foreign and warm climate of the desert.

6. The Promise of Audiovisual Translation for the Arab world

Since the meeting in Strasbourg in June 1995 that launched the academic examination of linguistic transfer in audiovisual communication (Jäckel, 1995), the specialisation reached different parts of the world at different points in time. In the Arab world, early attempts to examine audiovisual translation were made in Egypt as early as 1995 when the School of Continuing Education at the American University in Cairo launched its pioneering Screen Translation programme (Gamal, 2009). Yemeni scholar Al-Asad points to the need for such inaugural course “as the number of free-to-air channels increased; suddenly there was an obvious need to subtitle (and dub) imported programmes in order to fill the broadcasting hours” (Al-Asad, 2012, p. 84). Subtitling became a popular form of linguistic transfer and the available technology made it possible for translation companies and even individual translators to perform the task independently. Despite the emerging need, Arab academia was slow to recognize the impact of the new technology (Gamal, 2019).

A quarter of a century later, audiovisual translation studies at most translation schools in the Arab world is focused solely on subtitling and dubbing. Despite impressive developments in the digital world that changed the way translations are created and made accessible, translation studies remain distant from the digital reality. There are many reasons for this state of affairs, some of which are beyond the control of academic institutions such as inadequate digital infrastructure nationwide, increased number of students and the quality of students entering translation schools. This is also coupled with the lack of interest in audiovisual translation among the teaching staff. These factors affect the design and delivery of audiovisual translation programmes. There is also a generation gap where on the one hand, most students are digital native and so familiar with mobile phone technology, social media and the myriad of Apps and online sites, and on the other; academic staff who have earned their doctorates in different (non-digital) fields and are averse to digital media. This explains the reluctance of some academics to teach on the audiovisual translation programme or to be involved in its design and development. When audiovisual translation is actually offered it does not move away from subtitling (and to a lesser degree dubbing) and the examination is almost entirely focused on subtitling foreign programs *into* Arabic. With the notable exception of the postgraduate programme offered at Hamad bin Khalifa University in Qatar, most examination of audiovisual translation amounts to no more than an examination of the written translation of the film dialogue (Gamal, 2019). And yet

the subtitling of Arabic-language material into foreign languages is a totally different matter as it deals with spoken (vernacular) Arabic with its regional dialects and exposes several pedagogic issues such as the linguistic and cultural command in (Arabic regional dialects) as well as in the foreign language(s).

To-date, most translation conferences shy away from the examination of audiovisual translation and there has not been a full conference dedicated to audiovisual translation in the Arab world (a local attempt was made at the University of Algiers 2 in October 2019). It is insightful to observe that most of the current examination of audiovisual translation issues is focused on the examination of already subtitled material and not on the creative (and technical) process of producing subtitles. A review of the published dissertations on audiovisual translation reveals a high degree of repetition in the topics and themes reflecting a narrow appreciation of the landscape of audiovisual translation in Arabic. Another perturbing note is that most academic research is not only framed alongside foreign (mostly European) theoretical frameworks and literature but is also written in either English or French (Gamal, 2019). A pedagogic decision that unwittingly enforces its foreignness in the Arab environment and denies the community the opportunity to benefit from the effort already made. This means that students majoring in, say, Russian-Arabic translation will not benefit from the research their own colleagues in the English or French departments have carried out. In many countries translators discuss their research in their native tongue and explain examples in two languages and publish in their first language. Publishing in foreign languages, and particularly in English, is a means and not an end in itself and notwithstanding other academic requirements for instance international ranking. Publishing in international languages, and particularly in English, should not be at the expense of the native language and needs to be governed by certain rules and indicators. One of the rules is to include an extended abstract in the native language particularly for outstanding research. By not paying attention to the context, field and landscape of translation in one's own backyard, translation research output is likely to remain foreign, outlandish and deemed not relevant to the present reality. Translation scholars in the Arab world are invited to accelerate digital transformation and to view translation studies from the Arab lens of digital humanities. By focusing only on subtitling, audio-description and dubbing, the field of audiovisual translation will not grow although it has the potential to transform Arab society and speed up efforts in education, social participation, community information, online training, lifelong learning, infotainment and employment.

The first two decades of the twenty-first century have witnessed unprecedented developments in digital technology. This has impacted the way translation studies is viewed, taught and examined. Indeed, artificial intelligence has improved to a point where it already impacts the way translators and interpreters work. In the Arab world, a full appreciation of the history of audiovisual culture is highly relevant to the design and development of a theoretical model upon which the teaching, research, training, production and professional practice of audiovisual translation is

conducted. There is no doubt that audiovisual translation is the future of translation studies, or at least it should be (and more so in the Arab world), as it can be made not only relevant but useful to the local needs of *Nahda* and *Tanweer*. It must be remembered that most of the efforts, plans and strategies of translation as a tool of progress and enlightenment have been often hampered by high costs, long time, vast distance and disjointed efforts; factors that can now be overcome through the application of online technology.

Today, digital technology in its numerous manifestations forces decision-makers and takers to learn not only to adopt its tools and programmes but also to be engaged in its development and application. There is a huge science deficit in Arab societies as well as a dangerous level of aversion to reading (Gamal, 2020) which can be traced to the fact that the community does not engage with the emerging patterns of technology. There is now an obvious need to espouse digital technology and not merely import and consume it. This can be done through an alliance with the information technology sector, science departments, government authorities and the traditional translation school. Arabic online content is the answer to the failure to make translation a catalyst for progress and enlightenment. It is low cost, surpasses distance, instantaneous and conducive to collaborative effort: a panacea for all pre-digital challenges. Given that population in the Arab world is youthful and education is one of the most underfunded sectors, *edutainment* appears to be the “magic wand” required to raise its standards. As young people are growing up with iPads, game consoles, social media and smart phone technology, the ability to meet their needs through created and translated content is paramount. This is one area that translation schools will have to consider as the world is fast moving from print technology to online content. Although the terms *edutainment* and its variant *infotainment*, are not new, they have not been successfully translated into Arabic and remain transliterated. The appropriate translation of the term will only be possible once the concept is fully localised and seen through the context, field and landscape of creating content that is high on information but presented through multimedia in a way that is simple, fun and attractive. There is no shortage of talent in the Arab world as can be seen through a good number of web sites, start-ups and initiatives in a broad spectrum of interests and fields such as the Syrian Researchers Network (www.syr-res.com), the Jordanian online encyclopaedia Mawdoo3 (www.mawdoo3.com), the Libyan Science Club (www.science.org.ly), the Iraqi Translation Project (www.baytalhikma2.org) and numerous other individual channels available on YouTube. Equally interesting, is the area of Apps and games development in Arabic; an emerging specialisation that is currently in short supply. While there is an encouraging number of initiatives they remain individual attempts compared to the huge number of English-language Apps and games in use. It is not an exaggeration that a great number of Apps as well as games are attractively designed but they are not conducive to knowledge creation and educational designers are required to step in to create Apps, games and content that is fun and educational. Academia and government need to rethink translation in the digital age for one simple reason: most innovations come not from institutions but from

individuals such as Google, Facebook, Ebay, Instagram and many others. A concerted effort, through a central audiovisual authority (Gamal 2015b) to sponsor and recognize innovative achievers is perhaps required to ensure the establishment of a sound infrastructure and the creation of a local digital culture. Such authority can also ensure that the prevailing online content will not negatively impact the overall culture as technological advances have previously contributed to an aversion of reading, turning away from science and mathematics, poor writing and a huge lack of self-confidence in an increasingly globalised and competitive world.

However, one of the most striking features of the Arab world today is its youthful population and digital technology is primarily designed for this sector. The terms plug and play, social media, multimedia, mobile technology, Apps, infotainment and interactive technology should be the focus of audiovisual translation in almost every aspect of translation teaching, research and training (Gamal, 2007). The traditional translation department will have to undergo a digital transformation, too, to bring itself to the twenty-first century. This is necessitated by the fact that translation departments are already welcoming digital native undergraduates born in the third millennium. While linguistics and literature are two essential pillars of any translation school, digital technology will determine the vitality, and indeed viability, of the entire school. The advances Google is making in artificial intelligence, and the impact its tools have on translating and interpreting, give rise to a sobering question: what will the future hold for the traditional translation school? Since the Arab world translates, and needs to translate a great deal of material, it would be sensible to espouse the interactive technology of multimedia and examine ways to enrich the Arabic content online. There are good reasons for this: educational programmes in Arabic are urgently needed for the millions of children displaced due to unrest in their home country as can be seen in Syria, Libya Yemen and also in Somalia, Iraq and Sudan. Equally important is the deficit in science and maths that is needed to be addressed and creatively presented online to alleviate the problem of over-crowded classrooms. Scientific and technical translators able to create interactive online material is likely to be the specialisation of the future (Gamal, 2020). Likewise, the Indian idea of same language subtitling (SLS), may offer an affordable and innovative solution to poor reading levels and deteriorating writing skills among children and young adults. To my knowledge, the idea of SLS has not been tackled in the literature produced by Arab researchers, and I would argue that the primary reason for its obscurity is largely due to the fact it did not come from Europe! This is a fine example to illustrate the shortcomings of Eurocentrism in translation studies and the lack of diversification in reading, translating and examining ideas and literature in languages other than English and French (Faiq, 2000). Given the disparity between rural and urban areas, the ensuing cultural divide could be mitigated through a strong online reservoir of resources that is designed for specific social, cultural or economic sectors in the country. There is also the digital divide created, perhaps inadvertently, through recent educational policies and particularly through the introduction of foreign universities in many Arab countries. The promise of audiovisual translation can be initially materialised through the

digitisation of basic tasks from homework and assignments. For example; the application of multimedia in the composition class (text, colour and image), mastering PowerPoint (image, text and video), acquiring animation skills, examining visual literacy in society (from visual metaphors to visual semantics), developing better writing skills in modern Arabic, voice training and narration skills, and more importantly exploring how translation is actually carried out in society, and promoting interdisciplinary projects. In March 2020, an ambitious and long-overdue conference on Applied Translation Studies was planned at the Faculty of Al-Asun (Translation) in Cairo. This is so significant as there is no limit to how translation can combine with other disciplines to produce an informative video presentation, on YouTube, that conforms to edutainment! The Cairo conference promised a breakthrough in translation studies and would benefit a great deal from a closer examination of the context, field and landscape of translation within Egyptian culture. The field of applied translation studies is indeed vast and can include everything from children literature to public health awareness campaigns (eg, Covid-19). Research in audiovisual translation will continue to rely on foreign sources and ideas, but it would be a great help to young researchers to show how their research can benefit society rather than merely satisfying academic requirements. There is a great deal to learn from the medieval Arab translator who internalised what he read and was able to contribute not only useful but original knowledge to society and to the world.

As the world moved into lockdown in the early months of 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic almost everyone turned to the Internet. Governments, businesses, universities and schools relied on online content and services to continue their work, stay in business, be entertained and to go on with their education. In many parts of the world, online education though accessible to some was not ready for such scenario: total reliance on the Internet. It must be remembered that while *this research paper* is accessible online to a large number of people, there are millions who do not have electricity, live in active war zones, over-crowded refugee camps or in wretched detention centres (even in Australia). In the Arab world, and indeed in several parts of the advanced world, many have realised that placing *teaching* resources online does not make it ready for *learning*. Moreover, placing any material online, and even if it is accessed several thousand times, does not make it *interactive*. This simply points to the obvious need to seek better training, invest in multimedia technology and to encourage a partnership between content creators, writers, translators and digital media specialists in a fashion that inspires confidence and innovation.

Audiovisual translation in the Arab world is a means and not an end in itself and must grow out of the cocoon of subtitling and dubbing. With full appreciation of the landscape of translation in Arab society, audiovisual translation scholars can address the immediate needs of progress and enlightenment. Simply put, any translation that is placed online needs to be multi-medially created. This means that the audiovisual translator needs to be capable using text, images, video and sound together; and not

just a producer of written (subtitled or dubbed) translation. Translation pedagogy would benefit from a new school of thought that would redesign translation pedagogy to produce an audiovisual translator who is trained in the principles of edutainment, visual literacy, online content creation and interactive multimedia. Only then, the context, field and landscape of translation in the Arab world could be appreciated and used to place translation studies on the right track to confidently, correctly and creatively serve the needs of the local community.

Conclusion

For many decades, universities in the Arab world, have opted to teach science and technical disciplines in English or French. Increasingly, translation studies have been following the same pattern. The paper argues that such trend is neither wise nor helpful as it risks making translation studies an end and not a means: studying *about* translation and not learning *to do* translation. For example, western translation theories are studied as an end in themselves and not as tools to change or improve translation output in Arab societies. Traditionally, translation has been envisaged as a tool for change and not merely as an academic area of study. It is insightful that the Arab pioneers who championed reform in the 19th century had focused on technical and industrial translation and not the arts or the humanities. The achievements of Lebanese Boutros Al-Bustani, for example, are an indication of that vision as he worked on the production of the first encyclopaedia in Arabic in modern history. Likewise, Rifaa Al-Tahtawee, the founder and first dean of the School of Al-Asun in Cairo produced technical and scientific translations. Al-Tahtawee's school translated 2000 technical and legal books in fifteen years in an age that did not have electricity, air-conditioning or the Internet: a record no modern Arab translation initiative has surpassed let alone come close to. Similarly, Tunisian reformer Khairuldin Al-Tunsi relied on translation for better education and management. Today, translation is viewed more as a window to know about other peoples and places rather than as a bridge to actually obtain more knowledge about how things are done. While the two images are interchangeably used in Arabic, there is a subtle difference in the meaning.

Audiovisual translation is a growing and promising field and while it is becoming increasingly technical, it encompasses many applications in almost every field imaginable. However, it could be argued that audiovisual translation is leaning towards media studies due to its informative and entertaining features as well as its digital means of mass accessibility. However, translation departments may wish to invest in the wider concept of multimedia translation, an investment in their own future, to ensure that technological developments will not turn them redundant. Given the current widespread pattern of screens being the most used, and preferred, medium to access information, it would appear that translation, as an academic discipline, will soon be recognised and indeed only known as Audiovisual

Translation. It is for this reason, that translation studies is more likely to be examined under digital humanities and not as a discipline *sui generis*.

Scholars in the Arab world have a long and proud tradition of translation that provides a suitable and sufficient background to draw theoretical models that are useful for the current needs of a youthful population. Perhaps one of the most immediate tasks is to engage with digital technology and to make it an applicable tool to many. The scene in *Midaq Alley*, where locals welcomed an invention that changed their lives but without having control over it needs to be revisited. Digital technology is different! It is democratizing as it enables wide engagement, interactivity and accessibility on levels never seen previously. It is user-friendly, interdisciplinary, applied, attractive and fun. By examining the context, field and landscape of translation in any particular Arabic community, translation researchers can draw guiding principles for making all types of translation accessible, interactive and entertaining. The onus now is on academia to accept that times have changed (particularly in the wake of Covid-19) and there is a new age where multimedia rules and professional values are now measured according to a different, and new, yardstick. Accessible, interactive, edutainment are today the main features of a popular, and therefore a successful translation that is available, not in print, but online and is created by multimedia and is sourced from languages other than English and French. Likewise, translation from Arabic into foreign languages needs to be accessible into a lot more than just two foreign languages.

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