Unmotivated Shifts in Literary Translation: Ghasan Kanafani’s *The Little One Goes to the Camp* as a Case Study*

Ula Al-Dabbagh
Petra University

Abstract

This paper provides a comparative reading of Ghasan Kanafani’s novella in Arabic *As-Sagir Yadhhabu ila Al-Mukhayami* and its English translation *The Little One Goes to the Camp*. The argument of this paper departs from the premise that when translating between two languages that are linguistically and culturally very distant, like Arabic and English, translation shifts are unavoidable. Translation shifts can be obligatory or optional, and are not considered ‘errors’, if they are advocated to produce texts that do not read like a translation. This article, however, is merely concerned with the unmotivated shifts, that are considered unnecessary, and professional translators make in the act of rendering some textual and pragmatic features of a literary text from Arabic into English. It also examines the implications these shifts have on the communicative force of the message transmitted to the target text readers.

The paper shows that the translators could have avoided such unmotivated shifts, and failure to do so, has altered the message originally expressed in the source language text and has affected the literary quality of the translated text. This result also reveals the importance of incorporating translation theory in the syllabi taught to undergraduate translation trainees at Arab universities to help these would-be-professionals avoid such shifts that distort the message expressed in the source language text.