Globally Not Yours …The Master Discourse of Transcultural Mediation

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Abstract
Intercultural encounters, particularly between civilizationally and power-unequally related cultures, demonstrate the complexity inherent in the process of interlingual communication across cultures. This complexity stems from the carrying-over of specific cultural products (as texts) to and recuperated by receivers that have at their disposal an established system of representation and mediation with its own norms for the production and consumption of meanings (texts). This system ultimately evolves into a *master discourse* through which identity, belonging, similarity and difference are negotiated (mediated). Drawing primarily on textual import (through translation as intercultural communication) from Arabic, the purpose here is to explore how a culturally defined *master discourse*, with its pressures affects the act of knowledge mediation: How do constraints and disciplinary demands of a socio-culturally defined *master discourse* animate mediation, leading along the way to the construction of certain systems of representation communicated to certain audiences? In a rapidly globalized world, a *master discourse* emerges as the all-powerful in its hegemonic discursive norms, resulting naturally in the emergence of desperate and often violent measures from 'other' equally self-perceived *master discourses*.

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Introduction

ACCS 4, held in Osaka in May/June 2014, was an intellectually ravishing event that brought together researchers with common interests in Asian cultural affairs. Under the macro theme of borders and crossings, the various conference activities covered topics that addressed some of the most pressing cultural and intercultural issues facing Asian societies, such as literature, arts, music, minorities, imported wives, liberal arts, etc. The themes and associated problems can easily apply across global cultures. An interesting observation here is that the conference showed how most of us still zoom-in-on aspects of culture that are mostly material or invoke some old images of exoticism. For example, the beautifully designed covers of the conference program provide representations of the culture of Japan, but are what the covers show the Japan most people know today? It is not the Japan of electronic games for children (games and consoles, etc., that keep changing almost every few weeks and cost parents, like myself, small fortunes)? It is not the Japan where all the cars around the world originate from (we have had 3 Toyotas in 6 years). Isn't this Japan? This example is similar to what most TV channels show when addressing culture - CNN, for example, shows flamingo dancing when referring to culture in Spain. This is all fine, but is this culture that people are ready to fight and die for?

Within this context, it is a truism to say that different cultures have historically represented each other in ways that have reflected the type of existing power relationships between them. Over the past four decades or so, intercultural, post-colonial and translation studies, in particular, have contributed a great deal to the issues of the formation of cultural identities and/or representation of foreign cultures, what the late André Lefevere (1999: p. 75) named 'composing the other'.

The literature of mediation, (inter)cultural, (post)colonial, and translation studies is replete with calls for an ethical accommodation of cultural diversity and otherness. Still, practices within these disciplines and allied others indicate that *mono-isms* have reigned supreme over *multi-isms*.

Intercultural mediation breathes through communication and its many media. Likewise, globalization lives through communication. Axiomatically, globalization invokes the existence of something else —not so global, that is something local. Axiomatically still, globalization usually has local roots; one local that becomes global, and that both the global and the local produce discourses that compete for power and influence. Although, representations of weak cultures by powerful ones in negative terms have been part of the scheme of history, no culture has been misrepresented and deformed like the Arab/Islamic one, particularly by the West.

Taking translation as intercultural mediation *par excellence*, this article examines the constraints and pressures of the discourse through which translation is carried out, demonstrating the complexity inherent in the process of interlingual communication. This complexity stems from the carrying-over of specific cultural products (texts) to receivers who have at their disposal an established system of representation with its own norms for the production and consumption of texts, including translations. This system ultimately evolves into a *master discourse* (MD) through which similarity and difference are identified, negotiated, accepted and/or resisted.

Drawing primarily on textual import (through translation as intercultural mediation), the purpose here is to explore how a culturally defined MD with its pressures affects the act of knowledge mediation: How do constraints and disciplinary demands of a socio-culturally defined MD animate mediation, leading along the way to the construction of certain systems of representation communicated to certain audiences? In a rapidly globalized world, a MD emerges as the all-powerful in its hegemonic discursive norms, resulting naturally in the emergence of desperate and often violent measures from 'other' equally self-perceived MDs.

The Master Discourse of Intercultural Mediation

Mediation (between two or more parties or across cultures) requires knowledge of the biases that predate the mediation process itself. In order for intercultural mediation to succeed, mediators need to be aware of issues that relate to identity ((self, us, we) and (other, them, they)), representation enterprise (patronage, agencies), and the cultural system of representation (master discourse). As a go-between process, mediation covers a number of media, including translation, and its two fundamental components are culture and language. Because it brings the two together, translation is by necessity a multi-faceted, multi-problematic process with different manifestations, realizations and ramifications. In general terms, culture can be defined as shared knowledge: what the members of a particular community ought to know to act and react in specific almost preformatted ways and interpret their experience, including contact with other cultures, but in distinctive ways.

Based on religion, social structures, beliefs, values, and history, culture involves the totality of attitudes towards the world, towards events, other cultures and peoples and the manner in which the attitudes are mediated (Fairclough, 1995). In other words, culture refers to a systems tacitly assumed to be collectively shared by a particular social group and to the positions taken by producers and receivers of texts, including translations, during the mediation process facilitated by language: the system that offers its users the tools to realize their culture. One may coin *culguage* out of culture and language to capture the intrinsic relationship between the two; two sides of the same coin whereby a coin is rejected as legal tender if one side comes with no inscriptions - blank.

The norms of producing, classifying, interpreting, and circulating texts within the contexts of one *culguage* tend to remain in force when approaching texts transplanted through translation from other *culguage* contexts. As with native texts, the reception process of translated texts is determined more by the shared knowledge of the translating community than by what the translated texts themselves contain, i.e., the MD.

While languages are generally prone to change over time (phonologically, morphologically, syntactically and semantically) cultures do not change fast. Overall, cultures remain by and large attached to and determined by a past or pasts. Edward Said (1993: p. 1) succinctly argues:

> Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues,

> albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions - about influence, about blame and judgement, about present actualities and future priorities.

When cultures cross and mingle, pasts clash and a struggle for power and influence becomes inevitable. Old formulations and modes of mediation appear on the surface and their realization is made possible by language: the data bank of discursive options. The use of language as discourse is invested with ideologies in the production, circulation and/or challenging of stereotypes and/or power relationships between translated and translating communities (different *culguages*).

In intercultural encounters, the issue of source and target ushers in fundamental theoretical and practical implications for translation whereby as Apter (2005: p. 160) aptly writes:

> … the identity of what a translation *is* is tested; for if a translation is not a form of textual predicate, indexically pointing to a primary text, then what is it? Can a literary technology of reproduction that has sublated its origin still be considered a translation? Or should it be considered the premier illustration of translational ontology, insofar as it reveals the extent to which all translations are unreliable transmitters of the original, a regime, that is, of extreme untruth?

In this context, the status of the source text, its relation to its presumed translation (target text), the responsibilities of the translators and readers, and the ethics of translation, and patronage and publishers all throw translation studies into an epistemological no-man's-land for points of reference when dealing with the state and status of source texts and their respective targets (translations as mediations).

Through adherence to the requirements and constraints of a MD, self and other (source and target) become situated into ways of representation ingrained in the shared experience and institutional norms of the self (the translating *culguage*). Otherness is measured according to a scale of possibilities within the MD: when the other is feared, the discursive strategies (language choices) one expects are those that realize hierarchy, subordination and dominance. Otherness can and often does lead to the establishment of stereotypes, which usually come accompanied by existing representations that reinforce the ideas behind them.

The representation of others through translation is a powerful strategy of exclusion used by a self as normal and moral (Said, 1995). Not surprising, this exclusion is also accompanied by an inclusion process of some accepted members from the other as long as the *acceptees* adopt and adapt to the underlying MD and its associated representational system and ideology of the accepting self, *acceptors* (Faiq, 2006). Such a situation may lead the production of targets that do not relate to their presumed sources, but rather establish transcreated realities - almost virtual texts that serve particular purposes, inviting thus issues of appropriation, subversion, and manipulation.

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In his discussion of human interaction, Barber (1992: p. 53) posits two futures for the human race. One future is dictated by the forces of globalisation through

> … the onrush of economic and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize the world with fast music, fast computers, and fast food – with MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald's, pressing nations into one commercially homogeneous global network: one McWorld tied together by technology, ecology, communications and commerce.

The other future is driven by what he calls 'tribalism' and is seen as the complete extreme opposite of the former. This future represents

> … a retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed: a threatened Lebanonization of national states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe – a Jihad in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and civic mutuality (p. 53)

Barber's choice of the words *Jihad* and *tribe* to describe the dangerous future for humanity immediately conjures up images of Arabs and Islam as the main causes of destructive nationalisms (tribalisms) that threaten the ways of life of the 'civilized' West.

Since translations are representations of cultures as understood and interpreted by translators, there is always an ideological dimension, albeit often camouflaged through source-attribution. So, source texts and their associated peoples are transformed from certain specific signs into signs that translators and others involved in the translation enterprise claim to know. As the antonym of the self (the translating *culguage*), the other (them, the translated *culguage*) is used to refer to all that the self perceives as mildly or radically different. The following are cases in point.

UNESCO and Intercultural Understanding?

In our global context, translation, aided by the media and its technologies, yields "enormous power in constructing representations of foreign cultures" (Venuti, 1998: p. 97). An example of such practices is given by Mason (1994) and used by Venuti (1998) to represent the negative consequences of translation. Mason refers to the April 1990 monthly magazine, *Courier,* published by the UNESCO to promote intercultural understanding. In this issue, an article appeared in both the Spanish and English editions of the magazine. The article deals with the history of the Mexican peoples. For Mason and Venuti, the problem lies in the English translation, which represents pre-Culumbus Mexicans as inferior, for example, 'antiguos mexicanos' (ancient Mexicans) became 'Indians' in English.

Accordingly, for both Mason and Venuti such a translation represents an 'ideological slanting' against a particular people. I would personally posit that the translator or translators may not have been that aware of any ideological slanting, but worked rather, perhaps unwittingly, within the demands of the MD they were brought up with and which formed their frame of reference when dealing with other cultures, in this case the ancient Mexicans. In other words, the constraints and norms of the MD

seemed to have guided the translation and the resulting representation of the source *culguage*.

Translation from Arabic

Encounters between Arab culture and the West through translation have been characterized by strategies of manipulation, subversion and appropriation, leading to transcreated representations and images that fit the MD of the translating *culgugaes*. Such strategies have become nastier and dangerously *topoied* since the events of September 2001. The different media have played a major role in the rapid diffusion of subverted translations and coverage of this world – suffocating the diversity and heterogeneity of Arab culture, and portraying it instead as a monolith and a homogeneous entity. This situation not only distorts original texts but also leads to the influencing of target readers through transcreated realities that meet the expectations of the target audiences and their MDs. Carbonell (1996), for example, reports that in his comments on Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights*, Byron Farwell (1963/1990: 366) wrote:

> The great charm of Burton's translation, viewed as literature, lies in the veil of romance and exoticism he cast over the entire work. He tried hard to retain the flavour of oriental quaintness and naivete of the medieval Arab by writing as the Arab would have written in English. (cited in Carbonell, 1996: p. 80)

Such views of translation and by extension of readers, lead to translations that imply the production of subverted texts at all levels, "not only the source text, but also the target context experience the alteration infused by the translation process when their deeper implications are thus revealed" (ibid.: p. 93). This alteration ultimately leads to manipulations of the target text, thus, regulating and/or satisfying and agreeing with the expected response of and/or sought from the receivers of the translations within the pressures of the MD through which Arab culture is perceived prior to the translation activity itself.

Reporting on personal experience of translating contemporary Arabic literature into English, Peter Clark (1997: p. 109) writes:

> I wanted ... to translate a volume of contemporary Syrian literature. I ... thought the work of 'Abd al-Salam al-'Ujaili was very good and well worth putting into English. 'Ujaili is a doctor in his seventies who has written poetry, criticism, novels and short stories. In particular his short stories are outstanding. Many are located in the Euphrates valley and depict the tensions of individuals coping with politicisation and the omnipotent state. .... I proposed to my British publisher a volume of 'Ujaili's short stories. The editor said, "There are three things wrong with the idea. He's male. He's old and he writes short stories. Can you find a young female novelist?" Well, I looked into women's literature and did translate a novel by a woman writer even though she was and is in her eighties.

This account shows how translation from Arabic into mainstream European *culguages* is essentially seen as an exotic voyage carried out through a weighty component of representation in the target culture, in which the objective knowledge of the source culture is substantially altered by a dialectic of attraction and repulsion. The *Arabian*

Nights (a title preferred for its exotic and salacious resonance to the original *A Thousand and One Nights*), for instance, is more famous in the West than in the Arab East. The focus on producing transcreated realities through exotic and distorted translations have resulted in very little knowledge about the Arab World getting through translation to Western readers. Despite interesting junctures and despite excellent literary works and a Nobel Prize in literature (awarded to the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz in 1988), there seems to be what Edward Said calls an "embargo" (1995: p. 99). Said aptly remarks:

> For all the major world literatures, Arabic remains relatively unknown and unread in the West, for reasons that are unique, even remarkable, at a time when tastes here for the non-European are more developed than ever before and, even more compelling, contemporary Arabic literature is at a particularly interesting juncture. (1995: p. 97)

This in turn ultimately leads to the conclusion that translation becomes the site of conflictual relationships of power and struggle between the cultures being translated and those doing the translating, with potentially dire consequences and accusations and counter accusations of misrepresentation and subversion. Events of the first fourteen years, so far, of this century, attest to this. These years have seen an unprecedented use and abuse of stereotypes of Arabs. The same old story has been repeated over and over again, often with damaging consequences, injecting the pressures of the existing MD with more potency, often deadly. But this has also led to the rise of counter (anti-) discourses in the translated culture and counter mediations of cultural realities in the Arab World about the West, in general.

A further examples relates to André Miquel's translation of Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Yawma qutila z-za'iim* (The Day the Leader was Killed/Assassinated) into French, where he explains in the foreword that he kept footnotes to the very minimum. Yet, Jacquemond (1992) counted 54 footnotes in a translation of 77 pages. What transpires is that the translator-cum-orientalist expert assumes total ignorance on the part of readers, and proceeds to guide them through assumed authoritative knowledge of an unfathomable world where backwardness and the assassination of peace-makers are the norms. But this would be acceptable compared with Edward Fitzgerald's infamous comment on the liberties he had allowed himself to take with his version of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam*, "really need a little art to shape them" (Bassnett, 1998: p. 68

Media:
A further example concerns representational norms of Arabs/Islam in the Western media, which remain major carriers of representations (as mediations and translations). Karim (1997), for example, provides striking examples of headlines in American magazines and newspapers across the political spectrum. The examples demonstrate adherence to a MD on Arabs and Islam that also animates translation. Only basic semantics is required to infer the ultimate aim of the headlines.

- an angry faith
- dark side of Islam
- the Vatican's dark marriage to Islam
- The Crescent of Crisis

- Algerian Muslims Seek Power
- Islamic death threat
- Islamic suicide mission

These headlines provide representations of cultural realities as readily accepted transcultural images regulated as 'fixed texts' within the MD of cultural encounters between the two worlds. In this respect, translators, transcreators, editors, and patrons appear as authorities to familiar, but foreign realities: Arab culture - an exotic, yet violent and blood thirsty East (Faiq, 2001). In general terms, translation from Arabic into Western *culguages* has followed representational strategies within a system of intercultural mediation very much akin to Barber's cultural dualism for the globe (see above). While seemingly both the West and the Arab/Islamic Worlds have decided to block themselves in their own towers, press and other media coverage has created more reasons of cultural misunderstandings. Representations –translations from- of Arabic and its associated cultures and Islam are carried out through lenses that fall within what Sayyed (1997: p. 1) describes as,

> Ghosts are the remains of the dead. They are echoes of former times and former lives: those who have died but still remain, hovering between erasure of the past and the indelibility of the present - creatures out of time. Muslims [including Arab societies] too, it seems, are often thought to be out of time: throwbacks to medieval civilizations who are caught in the grind and glow of 'our' modern culture. It is sometimes said that Muslims belong to cultures and societies that are moribund and have no vitality - no life of their own. Like ghosts they remain with us, haunting the present.

The caricatures depicting Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper, George W. Bush's use of 'shit' to describe the July 2007 war in the Middle East, the many mis-translations (misrepresentations) of concepts such as *jihad* and *fatwa* into fixed meanings and references that deform their native meanings and references, are examples of authoritarian relationships between a culture (Western) and how it represents —translates, communicates— the Arab/Islamic source culture (although not translations as such, transliterations represent powerful strategies of fixing and popularizing in the target *culguage* particular connotations that sustain cultural conflicts).

Conclusion

Within the semiotics of communication, the status of something being a text is conditioned by the shared and/or assumed knowledge that the author(s) and the reader(s) each position(s) themselves through a process of projecting onto the text their absent counterpart(s). Both author and reader (producer and receiver) can only occupy one position vis-à-vis a particular text. For translation and mediation the same positions do not change dramatically.

Notwithstanding the complexities of intercultural communication, the ethics of translation, in theory, postulates that it should lead to a rapprochement between the *au-delà* (Bhabha, 1994: p. 1), the Arab World, for example, as this *au-delà*. But this is easy said than done. The cultural dimension of translation and the MD that underlies such intercultural encounters generally lead to the reconstruction of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs, and representations that pre-exist

translation in the target culture, whereby, as Venuti (1996: p. 196) writes, the purpose of translation "is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar."

In this context and given the uniqueness of the current politics and effects of globalization and what it entails in terms of the state and status of the concepts of nation, language, and cultural identity, translation and mediation today play the crucial role in forming and/or deforming cultural identities. In terms of power relationships, translation as intercultural mediation has mostly done the latter, deforming minorities and cultures for their audiences. If not rectified for better intercultural encounters and a celebration of cultural differences, this global world, as Bermann (2005: p. 7) writes, will "be less hospitable; in fact, it could founder." Perhaps, the answer lies in a reassessment of the MDs that govern the translation and mediation of cultures.

In our age and more urgently than ever before, the ethics of translation postulates that its aim should be intercultural communication between different *culguages* with a view to bringing both globalization (the *culguage* of the multinationals – often equated with the *culguage* of the United States of America and Western Europe) and localization (individual *culguages* – often equated with the rest of the World) together to celebrate differences. That is the aim should perhaps be *glocalization* (bringing the hegemonic global and the not-so-hegemonic local together in peaceful encounters)!

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