Arabic Proverbs in Fiction Translation: 
*Girls of Riyadh* as an Example

Mohammed Farghal
Mashael Al-Hamly
Department of English, Kuwait University

Received on: 16-9-2014
Accepted on: 19-1-2015

Abstract
This study aims to examine the semiotic/pragmatic value of employing proverbs in Arabic fiction and the way translators deal with such proverbs when encountering them in discourse. The study presents a typology of the translation procedures employed by the translators, and examines how appropriate/effective these procedures are in capturing the semiotic value of the proverb in question. The corpus consists of 24 proverbs/proverbial expressions extracted from the Arabic novel *(banaat al-riyaadh)* and then they are compared with their renderings in the English translated version *(Girls of Riyadh)*. The data is analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, focusing on a critical evaluation of the procedures detected in the English translation. The quantitative analysis indicates that omission is the most used procedure, followed by literal translation and functional translation. For its part, the qualitative analysis furnishes a critical discussion on the rendering of sample proverbs from each translation procedure and assesses the translators' awareness and treatment of such proverbs.

Keywords: Translation Studies, Multi-word Units, Proverbs, Semiotic Sign, Fiction.

1. Introduction
In terms of language production and meaning making in communication, proverbs, like idiomatic expressions, are a paradigm example of multi-word units (for more on multi-word units, see Alexander 1978; Cowie 1981; Strassler 1982; Benson 1987; Sinclair 1991; Farghal and Obeidat 1995, among others). They are readily recognized as having unitary meaning whose production follows the *idiom principle* rather than the *open principle* (where meaning is made compositionally through the stringing of individual lexemes) in human communication (Sinclair 1991). However, proverbs function differently from idiomatic expressions in communication. While proverbs mainly perform a social function involving the transmission of human wisdom from one generation to another, idiomatic expressions largely function as a culturally-informed linguistic resource for the expression of meaning. Contrast, for example, the idiomatic expressions *to add insult to injury* and بِلَةٍ ﻣِنَ ﺗِﻭَن (lit. to make mud wetter/see Appendix 1 for a complete list of Arabic phonetic symbols) with the proverbs *Even Homer sometimes nods* and لَﻚْﻞ ﺟَوْﺍﺩٍ ﻣَﻭْﺩَ (lit. For every horse, there must be a fault). Whereas the former express linguistic meaning idiomatically by falling back on the relevant culture, the latter transmit an element of human wisdom/experience, viz. the message that ‘perfection is impossible’.
In the introduction to his collection of English proverbs, Simpson (1982) talks about three types of proverbs: truthful proverbs expressing general truths, observational proverbs offering generalizations about everyday human experience, and traditional wisdom and folklore proverbs conveying maxims in various areas. In terms of interpretation, he states that proverbs can be understood either literally or metaphorically. However, Norrick (1985) rightly argues that proverbs have lost their literal meanings in favor of wider metaphorical application, which involves a standard interpretation assigned by the proverb’s speech community (Ntshinga 1999). For example, while the metaphoricity of the English proverb ‘Forbidden fruit is sweetest’ is quite obvious in the metaphorical lexicalization of the proverb, the literal lexicalization of the Arabic proverb \( \text{kullu mamnuu'in mr} \equiv \text{lit. Every forbidden [thing] desired} \) still achieves a comparable metaphorical application. In this way, the literalness of some proverbs inheres a unitary metaphorical capability just like their clearly metaphorized counterparts, that is, the interpretation of the apparently literal proverb cannot be based on the sum of meanings of its individual words (for more on this, see Baker 1992).

In terms of productivity, proverbs, which have an extremely fixed form, may be used as input for the creation of proverbial expressions (Norrick 1985) or what Farghal and Al-Hamly (2005) call ‘remodelings’, whose legitimacy derives from their parent proverbs. For example, the English remodelings ‘A smile a day keeps misery away’ (twitter) and ‘A laugh a day keeps the doctor away’ (Daily Strength/Cyndi Sarnoff-Ross, Oct. 21, 2011) derive their communicative power from the parent proverb ‘An apple a day keeps the doctor away’ by flouting the maxim of Manner, i.e. shocking the receiver’s expectations on how something is said for a communicative purpose (Grice 1975; Levinson 1983; Thomas 1995). Hence, such remodelings achieve their acceptability intertextually by investing the theme of an existing proverb. Likewise, the Arabic remodeled newspaper commentary titles \( \text{kull-u-ṭṭuruqi fii 'iraana tu'addii 'ilaa ... Qum' (Al-Watan/Kuwait, 2005)} \) and \( \text{'in lam tastaḥi faṣna} \equiv \text{'maa ši'ta} \text{mā fāṣna} \equiv \text{If you are not decent ...'} \) (Al-Watan, 2005) derive their communicative power from the Arabic proverbs \( \text{kull-u-ṭṭuruqi tu'addii 'ilaa roomaa} \equiv \text{All the roads lead to Rome} \) and \( \text{'in lam tastaḥi faṣna} \equiv \text{'maa ši'ta} \text{mā fāṣna} \equiv \text{If you are not decent enough, do what you please'} \), respectively. Without the reader’s falling back on the parent expressions, these newspaper commentary titles would make little sense, if any at all.

Within the sphere of social life, proverbs are considered the mirror through which different cultures can be viewed and judged; they represent the cumulative wisdom of a nation (Simpson 1982; Norrick 1985; Meider, 1992, 1995; Honeck 1997; Mollanazar 2001). Proverbs have both a literary value that contributes to the aesthetics of discourse as well as a practical value which touches directly on people's day-to-day undertakings and which helps them conduct their affairs more smoothly and effectively (Honeck 1997; Moosavi 2000; Meider 2004).

The lexicalization of proverbs across languages seems to have both an intercultural and an intracultural parameter. On the one hand, the similar lexicalization of proverbs like ‘Birds of a feather flock together’/\( \text{aṭṭuuru} \equiv \text{alaa liškaalihaa taqa} \text{theoporo ūnšakalihaa taqa} \) (lit. Similar birds fall on each other) and ‘All roads lead to Rome’/\( \text{kullu-ṭṭuruqi tu'addii 'ilaa roomaa} \equiv \text{All the roads lead to Rome} \) (All the roads lead
to Rome) in English and Arabic, among many other languages, points to an intercultural aspect of proverbs whereby the same proverb may be traced to a common origin. For example, the historical fact that Rome (the capital of the ancient Roman Empire) was once considered the centre of the globe where all roads led to accounts for the presence of the proverb dwelling on this theme in most European languages and in some languages as remote from each other as English and Arabic. However, this originally literal expression has become an established proverb enjoying a wide metaphorical interpretation in many languages.

On the other hand, the fact that languages also possess culture-bound features and images gives special significance to the intracultural parameter when lexicalizing proverbs. Apart from proverbs that have gained some universal status, proverbs may inhere culture-bound features, e.g. ‘Every Jack must have a Jill’ and laa yuftaa wa-maaliku fi-l-madiinah (lit. No fatwa [a religious judgment] and Malik [one of the chief Muslim Imams] in town, i.e. Nobody else can pass a fatwa when Malik is in town) or differently lexicalize universal themes, e.g. the English proverb ‘One man’s meat is another man’s poison’ and the Arabic proverb maṣaa’ibu qawmin ‘inda qawmin fawaa’idu مصائب قوم عند قوم فوائد (One group’s miseries are another group’s benefits) convey a similar message by employing different metaphorical images.

The topic of proverbs in translation has been mainly approached from an out-of-context perspective by discussing and listing proverbs and their equivalents in different pairs of languages without considering their actual occurrences in discourse (Newmark 1988; Baker 1992; Farghal 1995, 2012; Gorjian and Molonia 1999; Mollanazar 2001). This approach basically offers three procedures when rendering proverbs, viz. formal/literal translation, functional/pragmatic translation, and ideational/periphrastic translation. These procedures represent different degrees on the semantic-communicative translation scale (Newmark 1982) or the adequacy-acceptability scale (Toury 1980). Whereas literal translation is source culture oriented by focusing on the form of the proverb (in terms of lexicalization, structure and image), pragmatic translation is target culture oriented by emphasizing the function of the proverb independently of the form. In this way, the former semanticizes the proverb’s import, while the latter communicatizes its import. As for periphrastic translation, it renders the proverb’s import ideationally (i.e. the simple idea/message in the proverb), paying little or no attention to literality and proverbiality.

To give an illustrative example, the following mini text ‘We shouldn't blame Jane for failing one of her courses - even homer sometimes nods’, which involves an English proverb may potentially be rendered formally/literally as ينعيي آلا نلوم جين على إخفاقها في أحد مقرراتها، فحتى هومر (الشاعر الإغريقي الشهير) معرض للفشل في بعض الأحيان، functionally/pragmatically as وجاد أن نلوم جين على إخفاقها في أحد مقرراتها الدراسية، فكلنا معروضون للفشل في بعض الأحيان, or ideationally/periphrastically as كقوة بعض الأحيان. As can be seen, the three procedures render the same message differently. One might argue, however, that the functional translation fares better that the other two (for more on this, see Farghal 2012).
While the out-of-context approach has both a linguistic, cultural, and anthropological value, it may fall short of showing what translators do when they encounter proverbs in discourse and whether what sounds as an appropriate and valid translation out of context can be so within a given context in actual discourse.

2. Objectives of Study
This study has three main objectives:
1. To investigate the semiotic value of the employment of proverbs in Arabic fiction.
2. To explore the procedures which translators use when encountering proverbs in Arabic fiction and show how appropriate and effective these procedures are.
3. To examine the role of context in translating proverbs and see whether out-of-context correspondence can be used as a basis for in-context translation.

3. Significance of Study
This study is significant because it addresses itself to the importance of employing proverbs in Arabic fiction and how they are treated in translation. The main question is to see whether the translator is aware of the semiotic value of such proverbs and whether an effort is made to transfer this value in English translation. In this respect, the within-the-text proverb is viewed as a sign whose main function is to supplement, explicate or conclude a message and, consequently, it is considered as part and parcel of a larger semiotic sign (cf. Hatim and Mason 1990, 1997). The incorporation of context as a discoursal parameter when rendering proverbs will certainly enrich the translatability of proverbs which are often regarded as self-contained entities that can be rendered independently of the contexts in which they occur. Such an approach to the translation of proverbs will enhance the theoretical as well as applied spectra of applied linguistics issues. In addition, this orientation has some pedagogical implications in translation classes where students should be alerted to the importance of proverbs in discourse as well as the key role context plays in the rendering of proverbs.

4. Research Methodology
This is a case study of the Arabic novel *banaatu-r-riyadh* by RajaaAlsanea (Beirut: Al-Saaqi 2005/2006) and its English translation *Girls of Riyadh* by RajaaAlsanea (the author) and Marilyn Booth (London: Penguin Books 2008). The novel is presented in the form of a series of e-mails written by the narrator (a Saudi girl) and the responses she receives from her readers. The content mainly deals with a group of upper class Riyadh girls and their private daily dealings, especially their relationships with Saudi males. The data consists of all the proverbs (24 proverbs/see Appendix 2) which are extracted from the text and then compared with their English translations. The translation procedures are discussed and a quantitative as well as a qualitative analysis is furnished.

Among other things (e.g. the fact that Saudi culture is central rather than peripheral in the context of Arab heritage including the use of proverbs and is conservative rather than liberal more generally), the
main motivation behind the choice of the novel under investigation is the fact that it was jointly translated by the author (a Saudi native speaker of Arabic) and a translator (an American native speaker of English), as well as the fact that its translation was a bestseller. In this case, one would assume that the Arab author and translator would insist on rendering the cultural and discoursal values of the proverbs due to their pragmatic and semiotic significance, which is one of the main concerns of this study.

5. Semiotic Value of Proverbs

De Saussure (1916/1983) views languages as systems of signs, which establish their own meaning through relationships with each other. The overall meaning of a sign is primarily determined by its function within the language system as well as by its relationship with other signs inside or outside the system. Having a unitary meaning, proverbs, just like lexemes, semiotically function as signs connecting the signifier to the signified. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is mediated by the interpretant which enables us to make sense of the sign. One should note that while the signifier and the signified enjoy a considerable degree of constancy within a semiotic system, the interpretant may change over time. For example, the interpretant of the Arabic proverb ‘iðaa ḥdara-l-maa’u baṭula-l-tayamum إذا حضر الماء بطل التيم (lit. If water is present, making ablutions with earth is nullified), which started as a religious rule, now enjoys a wide metaphorical application and only infrequently employed in its original religious sense.

To reconcile the semiotic differences between the signifying systems of languages involved in translation, translators often follow certain procedures in order to transfer the semiotic entity that needs special treatment under certain conditions. Hatim and Mason (1990: 105-106) suggest four stages for this purpose (see also, Ponzio 1990; Petrilli 1992; Schäffner and Adab 2000):

1. 'Identification', in which the translator pinpoints the ST semiotic entity that needs special treatment;
2. 'Information', in which the translator selects an appropriate TL 'denotational equivalent' for the ST sign;
3. 'Explication', in which the translator evaluates the denotational equivalent chosen in stage two to see whether it is 'self-sufficient' or not. If not, the translator should “seek to explicate by means of synonymy, expansion, paraphrase, etc.”; and
4. 'Transformation', in which the translator identifies “what is missing in terms of intentionality and status as a sign”.

As a semiotic element, a proverb in natural discourse functions as a micro sign that contributes to a macro sign, say a statement or an argument, by explicating, emphasizing, rebutting, or concluding it (see Hatim 1997 for more details on semiotic signs). Thus, proverbs in discourse are not merely decorative; rather, they embody semiotic significance that is part and parcel of the macro sign in question. Hence, translators need to give them special attention in translation.

By way of illustration, AlSanea (the author of the novel under investigation) employs the colloquial Arabic proverb yiḏrab-il-ḥab šuu biṭil (lit. Damn love’s humiliating power, i.e. Damn love: how humiliating it can be!, p. 12) within an episode that lengthily quotes the well-known
Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani (popularly nicknamed the Woman's Poet) from a poem in which he laments the status of Arab women. AlSanea's purpose of citing this proverb is to emphasize the power of love (which led Qabbani's sister [when he was a teenager] to commit suicide because she was forbidden to marry the man she loved) and to argue that Qabbani's positive attitude towards women was not a genetic leap in Arab psychology but rather an accidental consequence of a painful, personal experience (i.e. the tragic death of his sister). In this way, the proverb may be semiotically construed as a micro sign to consolidate and enhance a macro sign (women's suppressed status in Arab societies).

Examining the translation of this episode (pp. 3-4), one can generally trace the macro sign regarding Arab women's status but, unfortunately, the translation (which has opted for omitting the proverb) fails to bring out two significant sub-themes: the humiliating power of love (as envisaged proverbially by Arab culture) and the personalization of Qabbani's attitude towards women. In other words, the deletion of the micro sign (the proverb) has seriously damaged the message intended by the ST. Due to the omission of the proverb, which has semiotic functions, the target reader will not be able to follow the thread of argumentation in the original. S/he is only presented with a semiotically impoverished picture of a culturally-oriented state of affairs.

Another example where the semiotic significance of a proverb is obliterated in translation involves reference to a strained question-answer episode between mother and son regarding the genealogy of the girl he loves and intends to marry. In response to the question 'who are her maternal uncles?', the son (Faisal) is keen to tell his mother that the girl's mother is American, thinking this would work to his advantage. Here, the narrator employs the popular Arabic proverb أراد ﻓﻌﻤﺎهﺎ ﻋﻜﺤّﻠﻬﺎ أن يﻜﺤّﻠﻬﺎ (lit. He wanted to kuhl her (beautify her eyes by applying kuhl to them) but he blinded her instead, i.e. 'What he said fired back'). While the English translation succeeds in communicating the importance of the bride's genealogy (both from father and mother's sides) when discussing marriage in Saudi society, it fails to bring out the contesting views of son and mother toward 'maternal uncles' as signaled by the Arabic proverb. That is, the proverb communicates the semiotic element that what one thinks is advantageous in a particular context might end up 'adding insult to injury', which is exactly what happened to Faisal when he enthusiastically told his mother that his girl's mother was American. This semiotic element in the Arab culture is completely missed out in the translation.

In some cases, however, the translators have succeeded in communicating the micro sign embodied by the proverb. Talking about people who feel insecure and consequently try to hide their failures by having aggressive, loud personalities (p. 82), the narrator strengthens this message by citing the familiar Arabic proverb يعﻤﻠﻮن ﻣﻦ ﺷﺐاء ﻗﺒﺔ يعﻤﻠﻮن ﻣﻦ ﺷﺐاء ﻗﺒﺔ (lit. They make from a grain a dome, i.e. They exaggerate things). Being aware of the semiotic value of the proverb, the translators successfully conclude the insecurity theme (p. 78) with They make mountains out of molehills, or, as we say "a dome out of a seed". Interestingly, the rendition embodies two procedures. The first communicatizes the proverb's semiotic value by calling up an equivalent sign - an English proverb that performs a similar function (Making mountains out of molehills), while the second semanticizes the proverb's semiotic value by choosing a literal translation, viz. 'Making a dome out of a seed'. One should
note that, in this context, either procedure could do the job successfully; the two options differ only in their orientation in the treatment of the proverb.

Another example where the translators capture the semiotic value of a proverb involves discussing the importance of upbringing in the formation of people's future behavior. To conclude the argument, the narrator cites the Classical Arabic proverb (p. 83) *man šabba ſalaa šay’in šaaba ſalayhi* (He who grows up doing something will grow old doing it). The rendition *And as we say in these parts: "He who grows doing something, grows old doing it"* successfully brings out the proverb's semiotic message and consequently heightens the force of the weight of upbringing. The translators' choice of a literal translation here does the job perfectly although a similar sign is available in English, viz. "Old habits die hard", which can perform a similar function in this context.

6. Procedures of Translating Proverbs

The extracted data consists of 19 proverbs and 5 proverbial expressions (remodeled proverbs). We can detect four procedures the translators have followed in treating proverbs/proverbial expressions, viz. literal/formal translation, periphrastic/ideational translation, functional/pragmatic translation (i.e. the use of English proverbs), functional plus formal translation, and omission. Table 1 below shows the distribution of these procedures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideational</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional + Formal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

6.1 Omission

Despite the semiotic importance of proverbs in literary discourse, the translators of the novel under investigation have decided to omit almost half of the proverbs in the novel (11/45.83%). This is surprising given the fact that the author (a native speaker of Saudi Arabic) is the first translator and is expected to be aware of the significance of proverbs in translation. Apparently, the second translator Marilyn Booth (a native speaker of American English) has exercised more influence during the translation process when it comes to dealing with proverbs.

Examining some omitted proverbs, one can readily observe the damage done to the theme being communicated, which usually culminates in citing a proverb to strengthen the force of the message. By way of illustration, the narrator cites the proverb *al-‘awaʃ wala-l-qatfi‘ah* (lit. Any compensation instead of nothing/i.e. Half a loaf is better than nothing, p. 55). The proverb is cited in the context of the narrator's argument that there is a relationship between a girl's disagreeable personality and her high social class. However, the narrator concedes that this is not a total loss because upper class girls
(like herself) are beautiful, a fact that slightly mitigates the loss. At this point, the proverb is cited to emphasize the concession. Unfortunately, not only is the proverb lost but, surprisingly, the whole concession disappears in the translation. Quoted below is the relevant English translation:

Is there an inverse relationship between one's social class and economic status, on the one hand, and good humor and a merry personality, on the other? In the way that some people believe in the existence of an invariable relationship between being fat and being funny? Personally, I believe in such things. Being disagreeable, dull, constitutionally insufferable or truly odious - these are widespread diseases among the rich. Look at the degree of dullness among blond females, especially upper-class blondies, and you'll know exactly what I mean! (p. 51)

The Arabic text runs as follows:

هل هناك علاقة عكسية ما بين المركز الاجتماعي والاجتماعي وبين خفة الدم والشخصية المرحة؟ ماذا يؤمن البعض بوجود علاقة طردية بين الدمية وخفية الدم؟ أنا شخصياً أومن بذلك "الملونة" أو "الملونة"، داء متفشّ في الأوساط الراقية. ويعتبر أن نسبة الملونة بين الإناث تفوق بكثير نسبتها لدى الذكور، ولأن التماسح لافتقير أخف نما من السحالي، (خصوصاً السحالي الجميلة مثلاً)، فإنا أنعم بكل أسى نفسى وصديقتي، ولكن الحمد لله على كل حال، فكما يقول المثل الشعبي: العوض ولا القطعة؟

To appreciate the loss incurred by the omission of the proverb, below is a suggested translation of the relevant part:

... Given that the degree of dullness or disagreeability is much higher among girls than among males, and because crocodiles are, unfortunately, funnier than lizards (especially beautiful lizards like us), I truly lament myself and my girlfriends. Thank God, however. As the popular proverb says 'Half a loaf is better than nothing!'

One should note that the translators' reference to blond girls above is completely inappropriate given the Saudi context where blondness is a far-fetched attribute of girls. Added to this, of course, the serious damage resulting from the omission of the concession and its related proverb in the above context.

Let's look at another example where the narrator cites the proverb šaḥadah w-titšarrat (A beggar and a chooser) in the context of flippancy criticizing herself for asking her readers for offers but once some made she starts asking for specific ones. Quoted below is the relevant translation:

I am most grateful to you, brother, for your kind offer and generous cooperation. But I don’t know any more about designing Web sites than I do about stewing okra! And I can’t possibly put such a burden on your shoulders, Ibrahim. So I will continue on in my own style, as outdated as it is, of sending weekly e-mails while waiting for a more tempting offer. A weekly newspaper column, maybe, or a radio or TV program all to myself, or any other proposition which your ingenious intellects can inundate me with, readers! (p. 181)

The Arabic text reads:
It is unfortunate that the Arabic proverb has disappeared from the translation above. To capture the shared proverbial insight between the two cultures that 'Beggars cannot be choosers', the translators could have capped the narrator's exposition with something like 'Well, look at me. A beggar, yet a chooser!' This would have rendered the text more literary and the tone more appropriate. In this way, the interculturally-shared semiotic sign would enhance the text and offer a more adequate translation.

6.2 Literal Translation

Literal translation is the second most frequent procedure that can be detected in the translators' renderings of proverbs (8/33.33%). In this type of rendering, the translators give a literal translation of the Arabic proverb which may sound proverbial though it does not enjoy the status of a proverb in English. In this way, the proverb's message is semanticized in English. For example, the proverb *man raqqaba-n-*naasa maata hamman* (He who keeps watching people will die of exhaustion/anxiety) is cited when the narrator is referring to Gamrah and her mother. Quoted below is the English translation:

Gamrah believed her mother trusted her but was too concerned with what other people thought. Her mother had never learned the truth of the old adage that anyone who tries to watch all the people all the time will die of exhaustion. (p. 139)

Following is the Arabic text:

As can be seen, the translators have successfully rendered the message by explicitly referring to a proverbial expression in Arabic. One can argue that the employment of the familiar English proverbial structure 'He who ...' would render the text more literary and the translation more proverbial. This kind of cross-cultural literariness and proverbiality is highly evident in the literal rendition of the Arabic proverb *man šabba ‘alaa šay’in šaaba ‘alayhi* as 'He who grows up doing something will grow old doing it' (see section 5 above).

Successful literal translation is also evident in the translation of some Arabic proverbial expressions (remodeled proverbs). One interesting example is *kul fataah šay‘ah ḫattaa taḫut bara‘uhaa* p. 83 (Every girl is loose until proven innocent), which remodels the Arabic proverb *kul mutaham bari‘ii ḫattaa taḫut ‘idaanatuh* (Every accused is innocent until proven guilty). The English rendering 'Every girl is guilty until proven innocent' (p. 80) sounds both literary and proverbial although it renders the lexicalization of the message more general, viz.
the translators have opted for the general 'guilty' rather than the specific 'loose'. Note that the former may apply to all sorts of misdeeds while the latter only applies to moral ones.

Sometimes literal translation may need to be supported by paraphrase in order to get the message across. The elliptical proverbial remodeling _allaâdii laa yu’jibuhu-l-‘ajab_ (p. 59) is used as the topic of Chapter 8 and literally translates into 'He who does not marvel at the marvelous'. The proverbial expression remodels the familiar Arabic proverb _allaâdii laa yu’jibuhu-l-‘ajab wa-la-ṣoom b-rajab_ (He who does not marvel at the marvelous, nor fasting in Rajab [seventh month of Islamic calendar]), which is used to describe fussy people who are too hard to please. While the English rendering of the Chapter title 'On Those Who Do Not Marvel at the Marvelous' succeeds in offering a literal translation, it may semiotically fall short of communicating the intended message. To capture the semiotic sign, therefore, the literal translation needs to be supported by paraphrase, viz. 'On the Fussy - Those Who Do Not Marvel at the Marvelous'. In this way, the proverbial message is communicatized as well as semanticized.

Notably, explication by means of a footnote is employed only once to support a literal translation of a proverbial expression. The Arabic proverb _ðill raajil wa-la ðill ḥeeṭah_ (lit. The shadow of a man and not the shadow of a wall, i.e. Better the shadow of a man than the shadow of a wall) communicates the message that 'it is better for a woman to have a husband than stay unprotected at her folks' home'. When talking about her girlfriends, the narrator falls back on this proverb and twists or remodels it in order to ridicule the idea that 'men/husbands provide protection for women'. The translators have given a literal rendering, viz. '... and because every one of them lives huddled in the shadow of a man, or a wall, or a man who is a wall (in Arabic raajil ḥeeṭah [a man wall]) ...' supported by a footnote which cites the Arabic proverb as input for the proverbial expression. This seems necessary in order to make the clause 'a man who is a wall' acceptable. The conversational implicature here is that such a man is 'senseless' or 'unfeeling' just like a 'wall'. In this way, the translators have done well by opting for literal translation accompanied by explication in a footnote.

6.3 Periphrastic Translation

Periphrastic translation, which involves rendering the proverb's message independently of the SL wording and the TL proverbiality, is attempted four times (16.66%) in the corpus. Talking about a category of Saudi girls who unwittingly go with the vogue, the narrator supports her exposition with the familiar Arabic proverb (p. 84) _ma’-il-xeel ya šaqra_ (lit. With the horses, O blondie), which describes a person who imitates trends blindly. The translators have succeeded in relaying the proverb periphrastically, viz. (... she [a Saudi girl] will do it and "go with the flow", p. 81). The context clearly shows that these girls do this by way of unwitting/blind emulation. It is obvious that a literal translation would not make sense in dealing with this culture-specific proverb; therefore, a periphrastic translation is a workable decision. However, the translators could have fallen back on the target culture's stock of idiomatic expressions by offering something like "..., she unwittingly jumps on the bandwagon", which
communicates the same message but in a more proverbial and literary style. Also, they could have invested metaphorical language by describing such girls as 'slaves to fashion'.

Another attempt at periphrastic, though not as successful as the previous one, is manifest in the rendering of the Arab Gulf colloquial proverb (p. 182) "igdaab greedak laa yijiik 'illi 'aquad minuh" (lit. Hold on to your monkey lest you get something monkey-er, i.e. Hold on to what you have got lest you get something worse). The rendering "As the proverb says, hold on to whatever you've got, otherwise you will get a lot worse" offered by the translators slightly changes the message of the proverb, viz. the clause 'you will get a lot worse' refers to the person rather than 'the thing he will get' and the conditional marker 'otherwise' does not exactly reflect the meaning of the intended marker 'lest'. Despite these discrepancies, one could claim that the proverbial message is generally conveyed, albeit in a commonplace style. It would be much more effective in terms of literariness and proverbiality to invest a modified version which partly resembles the familiar English proverbial frame 'Better x than y', viz. 'Better hold on to what you've got lest you get something worse'. Despite the fact that than is replaced with lest in the suggested rendering, the tone still sounds aesthetic and proverbial rather than flat. Interestingly enough, there is a structurally and thematically similar familiar proverb in the Levant (Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon), viz. 'ittarta ḥuusak laa yijiik 'an ḥas minnuh (lit. Clutch to your omen lest you get something more ominous', as well as another proverb which views the same state of affairs positively rather than negatively by just changing the connective between the two clauses (which are lexicalized differently), viz. 'il ab a-limgaṣṣa taatayyar (lit. Play with the bird whose wings have been trimmed [can't fly] till you get one with full wings [can fly], i.e. Hold on to what you've got till you get something better). A good English rendering of this proverb would be 'Better hold on to what you've got till you get something better'.

6.4 Functional Translation

There is only one instance in which an English proverb is used in rendering an Arabic proverb in the novel under investigation. The translators have employed it in combination with literal translation (p. 78), viz. They make mountains out of molehills, or, as we say "a dome out of a seed". It really comes as a surprise that this strategy has not been one of the main options for the translators although it furnishes the English translation with naturalness and acceptability, in addition to literariness and proverbiality. One should note that proverbs function as semiotic signs within their respective cultures and, given their universal presence in different human languages, may in several cases dwell on the same themes and, subsequently, perform similar functions although they may be lexicalized differently. Translators need to be aware of this fact and should invest this possibility whenever it comes around whether alone or in combination with other procedures.

If we examine some of the proverbs in the data, we can readily see that the translators have failed to make use of this important procedure. By way of illustration, the narrator has employed in different places in the text the two proverbs man šabba ʿalaa sayʿin šaba ʿalayhi (He who
grows up doing something will grow old doing it) and 'abu-ṭbii maa ya'ayyir ṭab uh (lit. One used to a habit won't change that habit) to communicate the message that 'If a habit is part of a person's nature, s/he won't be able to get rid of it'. Although the proverbial message is relayed literally in one case and periphrastically in the other, one should note that the translators have failed to call up the familiar English proverb 'Old habits die hard', which semiotically fits both contexts. Thus, the initial assumption that a proverb in language A may functionally correspond to a proverb in language B needs first to be exhaustively explored before other options are taken into consideration.

Let us examine another classical Arabic proverb (p. 65) kaḍaba-l-munajjimuuna wa law ṣadaqa (Foretellers do lie though sometimes what they say comes true), which is paraphrased flatly as "These things are a bunch of lies, even if some of them turn out to be true" (p. 62). The proverb is cited in the context of discussing horoscopes and fortune telling, which are very attractive topics to women in general and girls in particular. The purpose of citing the proverb is to downplay the excessive reliance of females on such myths. The paraphrase procedure has jeopardized the literariness and the proverbiality of the text. The translators could have furnished their text with such nuances had they invested more literalness and aesthetics in their rendering as in "Foretellers do tell lies even when they are right - lies have short legs indeed". This rendering communicates the message by following both literal and functional procedures and relatively succeeds in rendering a comparable effective tone.

7. Out-of-context vs. In-context Proverb Translations

The question that arises here is: Will an out-of-context translation of a proverb where a functional translation in the TL exists fit blindly in variable contexts? The corpus instantiates only one case where an out-of-context English equivalent (... they make mountains out of molehills) fits appropriately the context of the Arabic proverb ya’maluuun mn-il-ḥabbah qubbah (see discussion in section 5 above).

Examining other cases where out-of-context functional translations are available, one comes to the conclusion that, in the hands of a competent translator, a functional translation may be incorporated into the context of the SL proverb. By way of illustration, the translators have opted to omit the Arabic proverb al-awaḍ wa-la-l-qatībi ah (lit. Any compensation better than nothing, i.e. Better any compensation than nothing) in a context where the English proverb 'Half a loaf is better than nothing' can do the job perfectly. Compare the two translations below:

... Being disagreeable, dull, constitutionally insufferable or truly odious - these are widespread diseases among the rich. Look at the degree of dullness among females, especially upper-class blondies, and you'll know exactly what I mean! (p. 51, see the Arabic text in section 6.1 above)

... Being disagreeable, dull, constitutionally insufferable or truly odious - these are widespread diseases among the rich. Considering that the degree of disagreeability among females far exceeds that among males, and because crocodiles, unfortunately, are more humorous than lizards (especially pretty lizards like us) I sadly lament myself and my girlfriends. Thank
God, anyway. As the popular proverb says 'Half a loaf is better than nothing!' [our suggested translation]

Apart from the great discrepancy between the two translations in terms of content and style (see section 6.1 above), one can readily see that the out-of-context English proverb can be effectively employed in this context to reflect the semiotic significance of the Arabic proverb.

In some cases, an Arabic proverb may trigger an English idiomatic expression rather than a proverb proper. One should note that idiomatic expressions, just like proverbs, enhance the literariness, emotiveness, and culture of the text. Talking about e-mails guessing her true identity and the accusations resulting from that, the narrator cites the colloquial proverb *tiijik-it-tahaayim wint naayim* (Accusations come to you while asleep). This proverb, which the translators have omitted, adds a cultural element to the text which seriously affects the tone of discourse. While it may not be possible to capture the metaphorical image in the Arabic proverb literally (viz. It's true that accusations come to one while asleep) or functionally (in the absence of a corresponding English proverb), the translator needs to relay the tone triggered by the proverb communicatively within the translation. Compare the two translations below:

Am I one of the four girls I am writing in these e-mails? So far, most of the guesses have veered between Gamrah and Sadeem. Only one guy thinks I'm likely to be Michelle, but he said he wasn't sure since Michelle's English is better than mine. (p. 41)

Am I one of the four girls I am writing in these e-mails? So far, most of the guesses have veered between Gamrah and Sadeem. Only one guy thinks I'm likely to be Michelle, but he said he wasn't sure since Michelle's English is better than mine. Did I speak English in the first place? It's true that accusations often come to one just like that! [Our suggested translation]

The Arabic text reads:

حتى الآن أن تتحضر أغلب التوقعات ما بين فرحة وسدرين، واحد فقط يرحب كوني ميتشيل، لكنه يستدرك قائلا إن إنكليزية ميتشيل أفضل من إنكليزتي ... هل تكلمت إنكليزية أصلا؟ صحيح تثبيك النهاية وانت نائم!

As can be seen, the flat tone in the first translation is effectively replaced with a lively tone in the second one, thanks to communicatizing the import of the Arabic proverb by the idiomaticity of the English expression 'just like that'.

8. Conclusions

Despite the obvious semiotic significance of proverbs in literary discourse, almost half of the proverbs in the study novel have been omitted by the translators. This has seriously affected the literariness and proverbiality of the English translation. Apparently, the author of the novel (who is also the first translator) has played a negligible role in pointing out the importance of proverbs in her work. The omission of the proverbs may have been the decision of the second translator (the English native speaker). This study has shown that the excessive use of the omission procedure has often obliterated the
function of the proverb as a micro sign that contributes significantly to the macro sign at hand. In fact, the proverb usually presents itself as part and parcel of an exposition or an argument, without which something would be felt missing.

It comes as a surprise also that the employment of English proverbs as semiotic signs that can travel cross-culturally when translating Arabic proverbs is invested only once alongside literal translation. One should note that proverbs, just like other language units, may trigger proverbs that perform similar functions within the target culture’s sign system. The translator’s awareness and investment of the stock of proverbs and idiomatic expressions in the TL would definitely contribute to the acceptability and naturalness of the translation along with furnishing it with a tinge of aesthetics and proverbiality. This study has shown that out-of-context correspondence between proverbs would often lend itself to successful investment within various contexts in the hands of competent translators. In some cases, the translator may access a TL idiomatic expression rather than a proverb proper. To facilitate the work of translators in this area, one would call for the introduction of theme-based, alongside existing alphabetically ordered, collections of proverbs both intralingually and interlingually. In this way, proverbs would cluster around familiar themes such as love, education, habits, money, etc. and, consequently, similar proverbs between languages would be easier to look up.

Besides, this study shows that the translators of the novel have made good use of literal translation when rendering proverbs. One should note that this procedure works quite well when the proverbial message can be worked out based on universal principles and, conversely, may mystify it when the proverbial image is too difficult to interpret. One should also note that when literal translation is possible, the issue of proverbiality remains a key factor. This can usually be achieved by accessing TL familiar proverbial frames when literally lexicalizing the SL proverbial message. In addition to enhancing the dynamics and effectiveness of the text, this approach would encourage proverbial borrowing between languages and improvise richer cross-cultural communication.

Finally, paraphrasing proverbs, which is used on a small scale in the English translation, usually deprives the discourse of its emotive tone. Therefore, translators need to exhaust the procedures of literal and functional translation before settling for paraphrase. And even when paraphrase is the only possible option, translators need to lexicalize the message in such a way that the tone of the SL text is maintained.

To conclude, this paper, which is only a case study, is hoped to provoke more research on the translation of proverbs in literary discourse between different pairs of languages. More studies are needed in this area which may examine this topic from the perspectives of gender of the translator, status of the translator (practitioner vs. academic translator), direction of translation (e.g. Arabic into English vs. English into Arabic), native speaker vs. non-native speaker translator, etc. Such studies would offer more insights into the ordering of priorities and the kind of procedures translators adopt when approaching proverbs in literary discourse.
Acknowledgments
The present research project titled Arabic Proverbs in Fiction Translation: Girls of Riyadh as an Example could not have been possible without the generous support of Kuwait University, under Project Number: AE01/13

الالتزامات العربية في ترجمة الأدب المتخيل: نساء الرياض (بناية)
محمد فرغل
مشاعل الحملي
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة الكويت

المملصق
هذيف هذا البحث إلى دراسة القيم التدالية والإشارية للامثال التي يتم توظيفها في الأدب العربي المتخيل وكيفية تعامل المترجمين معها عند مصادفتها في الخطاب. وتقدم الدراسة تصنيفًا للطرق الترجمية التي استخدمها المترجمون في ضوء الترجمة الحرفية والوظيفية والفكرية والحرفية والإضافية، وتفحص مدى مناسبة وتاثيرها في نقل القيمة التدالية والإشارية لهذه الأمثال. وتتكون بيانات الدراسة من 24 مثال تم استخراجها من رواية عربية حديثة (بنات الرياض) ومن ما قابلها في ترجمتها الإنجليزية (Girls of Riyadh) وتقدم الدراسة تحليلًا كميًا ونوعيًا لهذه البيانات من خلال عرض نقي للطرق التي استعملها المترجمون. فمن جهة، يشير التحليل الكمي إلى أن الحفظ الاستراتيجية الأكثر استخدامًا في التعامل مع الأمثال، يتبعه الترجمة الحرفية، ومن ثم الترجمة الفكرية. ومن جهة أخرى، يقدم التحليل النوعي عرضًا نقيًا حول نقل نماذج مختارة من الأمثال التي توظف طرقًا مختلفة للوقوف على مدى وعي المترجمين بأهمية هذه الأمثال ومدى قدرتهم على معالجتها بشكل مناسب.
References


Appendix 1
List of Arabic Phonetic Symbols

/b/ voiced bilabial stop
/m/ bilabial nasal
/f/ voiceless labio-dental fricative
/θ/ voiced interdental fricative
/ð/ voiced interdental emphatic fricative
/θ/ voiceless interdental fricative
/d/ voiced alveolar stop
/t/ voiceless alveolar stop
/q/ voiced alveolar emphatic stop
/τ/ voiceless alveolar emphatic stop
/z/ voiced alveolar fricative
/s/ voiceless alveolar fricative
/ṣ/ voiceless alveolar emphatic fricative
/n/ alveolar nasal stop
/r/ alveolar rhotic liquid
/l/ alveolar lateral liquid
/sh/ voiceless alveo-palatal fricative
/j/ voiced alveo-palatal affricate
/y/ palatal glide
/w/ labio-velar glide
/g/ voiced velar stop
/k/ voiceless velar stop
/q/ voiced uvular/post-velar fricative
/x/ voiceless uvular/post-velar fricative
/q/ voiceless uvular stop
/ / voiced pharyngeal fricative
/h/ voiceless pharyngeal fricative
/ʔ/ glottal stop
/h/ voiceless laryngeal fricative
/i/ high front short vowel
/u/ high back short vowel
/a/ low half-open front-to-centralized short vowel
/i/ high front long vowel
/u/ high back long vowel
/a/ low open front-to-centralized long vowel
/e/ mid front long vowel
/o/ mid back long vowel
### Appendix 2

**List of Arabic Proverbs and their English Translations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page #</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Page #</th>
<th>Arabic Proverbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Huddled in the shadow of a man, or a wall, or a man who is a wall.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>ولأن كل منهن تعني حالا تحت ظل “رجل” أو “حيمة” أو “رجل حيمة” أو “رُوَاء الشمس.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>No translation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>ويضرب الحب شوب ين</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>No translation</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>من أجل عين تكرم مدينة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>No translation</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>تجيك التهاب وانت نام</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>On those who do not marvel at the marvelous</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>الذي لا يعجبه العجب</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>These things are a bunch of lies, even if some of them turn out to be true.</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>كل أنف المجنون ولو صدقوا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>And as we all say in these parts: ”he who grows up doing something, grows old doing it.”</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>روز الهيل على المجانين</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>She will do it and go with the flow</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>مع الخيل يا شقرا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Every girl is guilty until proven innocent</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>كل فتاة مبالية حتى تثبت برائتها</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>They make mountains out of molehills, or, as we say, “a dome out of seed.”</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>يعملون من الحبة قبة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>139</td>
<td>Her mother had never learned the truth of the old adage that anyone who tries to watch all the people all the time will die of exhaustion.</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>من رقاب الناس سما هما</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179</td>
<td>As the proverb says, hold on to whatever you’ve got, otherwise you will get a lot worse.</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>القطب قريك لا يجيك اللي أفرد منه</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187</td>
<td>As the Egyptians say: why compare flip-flops to wooden clogs! (a saying used when you compare two things that are both worthless)</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>شحادة وتشتهرت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190</td>
<td></td>
<td>190</td>
<td>ايش جاب لجاب بين الشيشاب والقيقاب</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199</td>
<td>No translation</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>جبت عنصر عن لي فروع</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td>“A guy’s nature doesn’t change”</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>أبو طبيع ما يغير طبيعه</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>205</td>
<td>Thereby proving the truth of the proverb: anyone who lives with a people becomes one of them.</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>من عاش القرم صار منهم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>239</td>
<td>Patience is the key of marriage</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>الصبر مفتاح الزواج</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>278</td>
<td>No translation</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>ياما حبا يا رباركا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>314</td>
<td>No translation</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>آنا و بس و الباقى خمس؟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>No translation</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>ما فعيش حد أحسن من حد</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>