

# The Strategies of Translating Cultural-Bound Expressions in Mourid Barghouti's Autobiography "*I Was Born There, I Was Born Here*"

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## Abstract

*I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* is an autobiography of Mourid Barghouti, an honest and patriot Palestinian poet and writer, considered a classical memoir; it takes up the story of Barghouti's return to Palestine with his son, Tamim. On the other hand, it takes up some interesting stories about his Homeland and his small village. Barghouti also deals with many issues related to corruption in Arab regimes, including Palestinian Authorities. Humphrey Davis a British translator of Arabic fiction translated the book in 2011 his sensitive translation is full of life and humor. This paper investigates and analyzes the translation of this book with specific reference to cultural-bound terms and concepts since the translator is a foreign one. It highlights the strategies of translating such expressions and the types of equivalence used to translate them. The researcher uses qualitative, analyzing and descriptive methodology to find out the obstacles of translating an Arabic text by a foreign translator and how does he deal with the cultural terms and concepts. The findings of this research reveal that translating autobiographical text is problematic and challenging. On the one hand, the researcher finds that the translator mainly uses three strategies: cultural borrowing, semantic translation, communicative translation in translating most of the figurative expressions. On the other hand, the translator uses communicative, modulation, literal and cultural substitution to translate some terms that don't have an equivalence in the target language.

## Keywords

Translation Strategies, Cultural-Bound Expressions, Type of Equivalence, Target Language, Source Language, Culture, Translation Problems

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## 1. Introduction

“*I Was Born There, I Was Born Here*” is a literary genre representing the obstacles and problems that face him and his son during his journey to Palestine. The book is considered a precious treasure of Palestinian literature in which Mourid manifests many cultural, national, and political issues. His narration was powerful and touching, and the point reaches every reader’s heart when he talks about Palestinian heritage, coffee, and olive oil trees. The story of Mourid’s son’s displacement from Egypt to Palestine, meanwhile he wasn’t allowed to enter Palestine, is the most aching incident in the book. All the previous things make the book powerful and rich in cultural-bound material, which motivates the researcher to tackle such a study.

### Translation and cultural-bound expressions

What matters more in translation is to find the exact, correct, and close equivalence for the concepts and expressions in the source-language text. [Mona Baker \(1992\)](#), in her book, in other words, defines different types of correspondence, and she says that there are a variety of cultural and linguistic factors that affect equivalence.

Translating cultural-bound concepts is the most challenging thing and problematic for translators since they are considered non-equivalent words. The cultural-specific concepts may express well-known concepts in the target language, but they are not lexicalized. Cultural-specific concepts are used to convey an idea or notion in the source language. They are unknown in the target language; cultural-bound concepts are the expressions and concepts that connect with the way of living anywhere. For example, they relate to a type of food, religious beliefs, or social customs.

[Nida \(1964\)](#) says that the difference between cultures complicated the process of translation more than the difference between languages themselves. It relates to what [Faiq \(2004\)](#) states that culture is the attitudes toward the world and the events; it is a set of values and beliefs shared by a group of people.

### Autobiography

Autobiography is one of the most important literary genres. [Anderson \(2001: p. 50\)](#) states that autobiography is a backward-looking narration written by someone concerning his existence, life aspects, and personality. Autobiography is a literary genre that generally focuses on the writer’s life and includes events, people, incidents, and even attitudes that have influenced his life.

[Lejeune \(1989: p. 120\)](#) defines autobiography as “The retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his existence where the focus is his individual life, in particular, the story of his personality.”

Like other literary genres, translating autobiography is quite challenging since it is rich in cultural-bound expressions. The translator has to be more precise while translating autobiography than literary genre ([Taylor, 2014](#)). She claims that translating specific terms in autobiography should focus on the message and the meta-message involved. Other scholars like [Hatim and Mason \(1990\)](#) have

underscored the critical role the semiotic dimension plays in the translation process, taking into account all contextual and textual elements interacting with each other to produce a meaningful message (Nazzal, 2018).

#### **Translation Strategies:**

It is impossible to translate the cultural-bound expression perfectly. Still, it is possible to translate such terms focusing on the purpose of the source language text. The translator will be able to translate cultural-specific concepts and literary expressions if they focus on the meaning of the SLT (Guerra, 2015).

“Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original.” (Newmark, 1981: p. 39)

The difference between semantic translation and the literal translation is that semantic translation takes the context of the source language text into consideration. While literal translation doesn't do so, however, it sticks very closely to the lexis and syntax of the S.L. (Newmark, 1981)

Domestication strategy and foreignization strategy are well-known translation strategies. They help translate cultural-bound concepts and literary expressions.

Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997: p. 55) proposes that “Domestication designates the type of translation in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for target language readers”. This strategy means replacing the source culture with the target culture. On the other hand, Foreignization is a translation strategy where the translator keeps something of difference and foreignization of the source language text. Thus, the translator may need domestication, foreignization, or sth in between according to the purpose of the translation.

However, ordinary language is often used to describe cultural customs where a literal translation damages the meaning, and a translator may use a descriptive-functional equivalent (Newmark, 1988).

Another common translation strategy is cultural borrowing which means “transcription” or “borrowing” (i.e., reproducing or, where necessary, transliterating the original term): It stands at the far end of SL-oriented strategies. If the word is formally transparent or is explained in the context, it may be used alone. In other cases, particularly where no knowledge of the S.L. by the reader is presumed, transcription is accompanied by an explanation or a translator's note (Ordudari, 2007).

Transposition is a translation procedure that “Transposition involves replacing one-word class with another without changing the meaning of the text. It can be applied intralinguistically” (Walinski, 2015).

The translation is an overlapping process in which the translator has to find the best method and strategy to convey the message and purpose of the source text. Sometimes, the translator uses literal translation to get meaning in which

there is a wide lexical gap. So a lot of information will be missed. According to Bassnett (1991), this is called “untranslatability” which usually occurs in the absence of lexical substitution in the target language. Vinay and Darbelnet propose a “modulation” strategy to overcome this problem. Vinay and Darbelnet define modulation as “a variation through a change of viewpoint, of perspective, and very often of a category of thought” (Newmark, 1988: p. 88). There are two types of modulation, fixed and free modulation. Munday (2008: p. 57) states that fixed modulation is used when a translator prefers to use a “favorite expression” in the target language rather than a literal translation, whether this expression is confirmed in a dictionary or not. Meanwhile, free modulation is used to achieve the closest equivalence in translating the source text. That means the translator solves the problem of lexical gaps and missing information uniquely.

Cultural substitution is another type of translation strategy involving a cultural expression or item with a target language expression or entity that similarly affects the target reader. It enables the translator to get rid of the strangeness of the source language text. It also “refers to the translation of some known or unknown concepts in the source language by using the substitution from the culture of the receptor language rather than by other available means of meaning equivalence” (Pokasamrit, 2013).

In this study, the researchers focus on some translation strategies that Guerra (2015) proposes for solutions of textual nature.

- Omission is a translation strategy in which the translator tends to avoid translating an expression of or a concept of the source text. This strategy is usually used in the case of extreme difficulties; it may harm the meaning; however, it may benefit from making the translation smooth and readable.
- Description is another translation strategy in which the translator tends to translate source language expressions or terms by describing the lexis or function in the target text.
- Calque is “described as a literal translation of a foreign word or phrase. Therefore, it can be considered a type of loan or borrowing translation because the translator borrows the S.L. expression or structure and then transfers it in a literal translation.” (Shmasneh, 2016: p. 27)
- Equivalence is a translation strategy that aims to describe the same situation differently by using different stylistic or structural methods to produce an equivalent text. Newmark (1988) states that cultural equivalence is a translation strategy in which the translator gives an approximate cultural equivalent for the source language expression. However, this translation is usually limited and not accurate.

## 2. Methodology

This study has about 39 examples, including some complex cultural bound expressions; the purpose of choosing these examples is to investigate the translation strategies used by the translator and the problem that affect the problem the

process of translation.

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach to examine the strategies of translating culturally-bound expressions.

The researchers selected this book since it is translated by a foreign translator, Humphrey Davies, and it is full of culturally bound expressions.

### 3. Discussion and Data Analysis

In this analysis, the researchers focus on translating cultural and literary specific terms and expressions and choose some outstanding examples from the autobiography to be discussed and analyzed.

First, Barghouti's autobiography *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* has a highly metaphorical language that describes the writer's life in exile, Homeland, and in between. This book is "...particularly remarkable is his ability to find the profound in the mundane, and to see the world with the freshness of a child's eye, yet tempered by the wisdom of experience. The second thing that makes the book incisive is Barghouti's quiet self-confidence, which allows him to lambaste the occupation and the deceptive 'peace process' without a hint of whining or exaggeration" The Jordan Times.

The following examples show that the translator used the semantic translation strategy successfully:

#### Example 1:

“الله يهدا على شارون يا رب” P12 L 19

The translator translates into:

**“Lord, bring it all down on Sharon's head!” P 4 L 3**

The translator tries to convey the meaning of the source language text by using an expression in the target language that is very close to the contextual meaning of the original text. Therefore, the readers of the target text can get the meaning and the purpose of the translated text quickly since the translator considers the context while translating the S.T.

The translator doesn't stick to the lexis and syntax of the source language since he expands the sentence by using a new word, “head,” to keep the source text's meaning.

#### Example 2:

(روح يا مرید یا ابن سکينة بنتي الله يعلي مراتك) او (الله يعلي مقامك بين الناس) P 32 L 20+21

The translator translates into:

**“Go, Mourid, son of Sakina, my daughter, may God elevate your rank!” or “God raise high your standing among men!” P 19 L 24+25**

The translator tries hard to keep the source language meaning by closely rendering the second language's semantic and syntactic structures. Thus, it is an excellent example of the exact contextual meaning of the original.

The translator of this autobiography commonly uses the semantic translation strategy.

The following examples show that the translator used the communicative

translation strategy successfully:

**Example 1:**

(و)اللي يجرب المجرب عقله مخرب P11 L 10+11

The translator translates into:

**“Stupidity is trying what’s already been tried and expecting different results.” P 2 L 29-30**

In the previous example, the translator uses different lexis and syntax to render the meaning of the source text. For instance, he uses the word ‘stupidity as an equivalence for the word “عقله مخرب”. Furthermore, he expands the translation by adding the words “expecting different results” to abide by the purpose of the text. It is a clear example of communicative translation strategy since he preserves the effects of the source language text on the target language readers.

**Example 2:**

طيب يلا نخطف صلاة العصر P43 L 4

The translator translates this expression into:

**“Okay, let’s get the afternoon prayer in quickly then.” P27 L 19**

The literal translation for the word نخطف is “kidnap” while the translator here translates it into “get...in quickly” which gives the semantic meaning without using the literal translation for the word meanwhile the translator keep the purpose and the effect of the source language text.

The following examples show the translator’s use of the cultural borrowing strategy.

**Example 1:**

حقول الرويس والسحايل P 123 L 10

**The Ruweis and Sahayil fields P 92 L 24**

**Example 2:**

رظف الطابون P 138 L 5

The translator translates it into:

**Ruzuf P 103 L 16**

**Example 3:**

العتابا والميجانا والدلعونا P 139 L 2

The translator translates it into:

**The ;ataba mijana, and dal, ona P 104 L 6**

The translator transliterates the original term in these examples since there is no precise equivalence for the source language.

The translator uses modulation strategy as shown in the following examples:

**Example 1:**

عفارم عليك يا ولد P 135 L 4

The translator translates it into:

**Bravo, my boy. Correct. P 101 L7**

The word “عفارم عليك” is a Turkish expression in origins which means “aferin sana”.

This expression means “أحسنت” in Arabic. Egyptian people borrowed this ex-

pression from Turkish people during the Ottoman existence in Egypt. The translator prefers to translate the term into “bravo” instead of “well-done,” not only to convey the message of the source text but also to keep the effect and the flavor of the source text even the translation may not confirm in a dictionary.

**Example 2:**

ابن نكتة P 162 L 14

The translator translates it into:

**Loves to tell jokes P 122 L 20**

The literal translation for this term “a son of a joke” is awkward and unsuitable, so the translator tends to use a modulation strategy to achieve the highest level of equivalence, avoid lexical gaps, and misses information.

In the following example, the translator uses equivalence strategy to translate the following example:

الجفت P 23 L 4

**Smooth grindings P 11L 22**

The translator translates the word “الجفت” into its English equivalence, “smooth grindings.”

The translator describes the situation in a different style and structure to produce an approximate cultural equivalent in the target language text.

The following example shows the use of literal strategy:

فقد الحجر حجريته والشارع شارعيته . طارت سقفة السقوف P 100 L 22+23

**That the stones have lost their stone-ness, the streets their street-ness. The roof-ness of the roofs P 74 L 4+5**

In the previous example, the translator follows the original text word for word. The translator tends to use a literal strategy since the source text is a bit confusing and has ambiguous clauses to simplify it. He translates the source text word for word without alerting it. This strategy is usually used to avoid the risk of making any mistakes.

The translator uses cultural substitution strategy as shown in the following examples:

**Example 1:**

بحبها اكثر يا استاذ P 262 L 17

The translator translates it into:

**P 204 L 21”Keep going, sir.”**

In this example, the translator replaces the source language term with another in the target language that doesn’t have the same propositional meaning but similarly affects the target language readers. For example, the word “بحبها” means to give more. However, the translator translates it into “keep going” which conveys the purpose of the source language text.

**Example 2:**

طريقك خضرا يا تميم P 109L 4

The translator translates it into:

**Your road is blessed, Tamim P 82 L 12**

In this example, the translator translates the word “خضرا” into “blessed” instead of “green”

The word “green” has a positive impact on the Arabic language. Sometimes, it is used in praying for someone or to something. The translation of this example gives the readers the purpose of the text.

The translator of Mourid’s autobiography *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* uses deletion in translating pages (166/167). He deletes more than three paragraphs (he deletes the paragraphs that describe Hussien Barghouti’s death). It is considered a failure for the translator since he doesn’t convey the entire content and messages of the paragraphs in the abovementioned pages.

He also uses definition strategy in translating “عقاله” p15 L16. He translates it into “the cord that keeps it in place” p6 L24. The translator defines that source language term to convey the precise equivalence in the target language text.

#### 4. Conclusion

Throughout this research, the researcher deals with different translation strategies that the translator uses in translating “*I Was Born There, I Was Born Here*”, The researchers focus on translating cultural-bound expressions that are considered a challenge for the translator since he is a British translator and doesn’t matter the source language culture. For example, he deletes complete paragraphs (p. 166/167). This affects the translation of the source text negatively since it omits crucial parts of the original text. This contrasts with the omission strategy, which allows the translator to delete a word or words that don’t affect the source text message. However, the translator deletes the abovementioned paragraphs containing many ideas and messages of the source language text.

On the one hand, the translator uses cultural borrowing strategy in his translation. Still, he translates the word “الحلابات” into “An apt name” which doesn’t reflect the source language meaning, he could use the cultural borrowing strategy instead. But, on the other hand, he translates the phrase “لون التوتياء” into “the color of zinc” which is wrong; the correct translation for it is “raspberry color.”

The translator uses several strategies throughout the book. Still, he mainly uses these three basic strategies, for example, cultural borrowing, to translate expressions with no precise equivalence in the target language. Also, he tends to use semantic translation since it’s the best strategy to give the source language meaning. Moreover, he uses communicative translation as he uses different lexis and syntax to render the meaning of the source text which also shows the translator to keep the source language flavor and effect.

Throughout this research and the background of the researcher about the Arabic culture and translation strategies, in the coming research the researcher can compare between the translations of two different books for the same writer. The first is translated by an Arabic translator and the second book is translated by a foreign one, in order to find the difference between the two translations in terms to the cultural-bound idioms and expressions.



The original sentence	English translation	Strategy
10 L9 ملون التوتياء	The color of zinc P 2 L 5	
و(اللي يجرب المجرب عقله مخرب) P11 L 10+11	Stupidity is trying what's already been tried and expecting different results P 2 L 29-30	Communicative translation
P12 L 19 الله يهدها على شارون يا رب	"Lord, bring it all down on Sharon's head! P 4 L 3	Semantic translation
P15 L16 حطته وعقاله	His kufiya and the cord that keeps it in place P 6 L 24	Cultural borrowing Definition strategy
P19 L 14 افلتنا من حاجز طيار	"We've just avoided a flying checkpoint; P 9 L 21	Semantic translation
هو الزيت المعصور في القف اللبيفية الهائلة. P21 L 14	The olive is the pressed oil flowing from the enormous palm-fiber pressing mats P 11 L 4+5	Cultural substitution
P 23 L 4 الجفت	Smooth grindings P 11L 22	Equivalence
( روح يا مرید یا ابن سكينه بنتي الله يعلي مراتك) او (الله يعلي مقامك بين الناس) P 32 L 20+21	"Go, Mourid, son of Sakina my daughter, may God elevate your rank!" or "God raise high your standing among men!" P 19 L 24+25	Semantic translation
لا نفعتنا صلاة ولا شفيع لنا صوم يا بني. سبحانه طلع لابس برنيطة وشورت. وناقصه يجدل سواف. P 41 L 1+2	"Performing our prayers didn't help us and keeping the fasts didn't get us in with Him either, sonny. It turns out the Almighty wears a kipa and shorts. If He curled his side-locks, He'd be perfect." P 26 L 3+4+5	Semantic translation
P43 L 4 طيب بلا نخطف صلاة العصر	"Okay, let's get the afternoon prayer in quickly then." P27 L 19	Communicative translation
P 48 L 19 بالكاكي	In khaki P32 L 15	Cultural borrowing
P 49 L 11 الكليشيوات	Cliché	Cultural borrowing
P61 L 17 مانشيتات الجرائد	Newspaper headlines P42 L19	Cultural substitution
لو كانت عكا خافية من هدير البحر. ما وقفنش ع الشط P82 L11	"Had Acre feared the sea's roar, it would never have stood on the shore!" P 58 L 20+21	Semantic translation
P 86 L 4 العجر (اي النور)	The nawar (gypsies) P 61 L 30	Semantic translation
P86 L 15 بين اللبدة والطربوش	Between their skull caps and their tarbushes. P 62 L 13	Cultural borrowing description
فقد الحجر حجريته والشارع شارعيته . طارت سقية السقوف P 100 L 22+23	that the stones have lost their stone-ness, the streets their street-ness. The roof-ness of the roofs P 74 L 4+5	Literal translation
P 107 L 10 كافكاوية	Kafkaesque P 81 L 6	Cultural borrowing

## Continued

طريقك خضرا يا تميم P 109 L 4	Your road is blessed, Tamim P 82 L 12	Cultural substitution
طز في الاتفاقيات P 113 L 10	Screw agreements P 85 L 11	Semantic translation
عكازه P 121 L 7	his stick P 91 L 2	Semantic translation
حقول الرويس والسحايل P 123 L 10	The Ruweis and Sahayil fields P 92 L 24	Cultural borrowing
عفارم عليك يا ولد P 135 L 4	Bravo, my boy. Correct. P 101 L 7	modulation
رظف الطابون P 138 L 5	Ruzuf P 103 L 16	Cultural borrowing
العتابا والميجانا والدلونا P 139 L 2	The ;ataba mijana, and dal, ona P 104 L 6	Cultural borrowing
بلادي سامحينا ان خطينا قصداكي ونحو غيرك خطينا ومثل النقش في ثوبك خيطينا 1+2+3 P 140 L	<i>My country, forgive us if we've sinned.</i> <i>We set off to come to you but to others inclined.</i> <i>Stitch us in with the threads of your robe's design</i> P 104 L 26+28+29.	Semantic translation Re-ordering strategy
الحلابات P 154 L 7	An apt name P 116 L 3	It was not translated
ابن نكتة P 162 L 14	Loves to tell jokes P 122 L 20	modulation
يزغدم الو الو P 165 L 17	Tweedle o-oh o-oh P 125 L 7	Semantic translation
قلندهار P 169 L 16	Qalandahar P 127 L 13	Cultural borrowing
الغيتو P 172 L 13	Ghettoes P 129 L 24	Cultural borrowing
برواق P 182 L 7	At his own sweet pace P 138 L 8	Cultural substitution
المقاطعة P 195 L 18	The Muqata,a P 149 L 16	Cultural borrowing
دولاب الفورتونا P 199 L 4	Fortuna's wheel P 152 L 11	Cultural borrowing
لا احد يشاركها الانين تحت لطمات الرعد وجلسات كهرباء البرق P 220 L 7+8	<i>No one is left to share their moans beneath the blows of the thunder</i> <i>And the electric torture sessions of the lightning</i> P 168 L 25-27	Semantic translation
عصر الابارتيد الكوني P 238 L 19	The era of universal apartheid P 184 L 13	Cultural borrowing
التهاب القوافي P 245 L 10	Inflammation of rhymes P 189 L 24+25	Semantic translation
الحقائق الاكيدة لا تحتاج الى البلاغة الحصان العائد بعد مصرع فارسه يقول لنا كل شيء دون ان يقول اي شيء P 245-246 L 18-20, L 1-2	Truth needs no eloquence. After the death of the horseman, the homebound horse says everything without saying anything. P 190 L 1-5	Semantic translation Transposition
بحبها اكثر يا استاذ P 262 L 17	P 204 L 21 "Keep going, sir."	Cultural substitution

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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