Translation of Tought, Literature, and Philosophy from Al-Jahiz's Perpespective: Possible or Impossible

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Abstract

Al-Jahiz is considered an outstanding Arab writer and scholar who wrote on a wide range of topics and provided many insightful opinions on many topics to scientists and literary men.One of the important topics he dealt with was translation and translators. He dealt with translators regarding their knowledge of the field they are translating and their knowledge in the source language and the target language as well. Al-Jahiz pointed out that there is a conflict between the source language and the target language. Each tries to exert an influence on the other.

Al-Jahiz discussed how the type of the science to be translated and how the insufficient number of translators who translated in such a field affect the translator's work.

This study investigates his opinion regarding the aforementioned matter, and his argument about it will be based on his examples of translated texts which were translated during the Abbasid era.

Keywords:

Abbasid era - Al-Jahiz - greek philosophy - literature - translation - Umayyad era.

الملخّص

يعد الجاحظ عالما وأديبا متميزا في بحور شتى، وقدم آراء قيمة لجمهور العلماء والأدباء. ومن بين الموضوعات المهمة التي تناولها الترجمة والمترجمون، فعرض رأيه في الترجمان، من حيث علاقته بالعلم الذي سيترجم فيه، واللغة التي سيترجم منها، واللغة التي سيترجم إليها. وأشار صراحة إلى وجود صراع حضاري واضح بين اللغتين المترجم منها والمترجم إليها. فكلاهما تحاول أن تجذب الأخرى وتؤثر فيها.

وتحدث الجاحظ عن أثر العلم الذي سيترجم منه، وقلة العلماء الذين ترجموا فيه على المترجم الأخير، فكلما كان العلم عسيرا، والعلماء الذين ترجموا فيه قلة، كلما كانت أخطاء المترجم الأخير كثيرة، وكان أمر الترجمة عليه ثقيلا.

وتأتي هذه الدراسة لتستجلي رأي الجاحظ في الموضوع أعلاه، ومناقشته فيه نقاشا يستند إلى نصوص مترجمة في العصر العباسي.

الكلمات المفاتيح:

الأدب - الترجمة - الجاحظ - العصر الأموي - العصر العباسي - الفلسفة اليونانية.

Résumé

Al-Jahiz est considéré comme un remarquable savant et littéraire arabe qui a écrit sur une grande gamme de sujets et qui a présenté aux scientifiques et aux hommes littéraires de nombreuses opinions précieuses et originales sur maints thèmes. L'un des thèmes importants qu'il a traités était la traduction et les traducteurs. Il a présenté son point de vue vis-à-vis des traducteurs par rapport à leur connaissance thématique et à leur connaissance des langues à partir desquelles et vers lesquelles on est amené à traduire. Il a mis l'accent sur le conflit civilisationnel entre la langue source et la langue cible et l'influence que chaque langue tente d'exercer sur l'autre.

Al-Jahiz a discuté comment le champ ou le domaine auquel se rapporte la traduction et le nombre insuffisant de traducteurs qui y ont traduit affectent la qualité de la traduction et la mission des traducteurs.

Cette étude analyse l'opinion de ce chercheur et ses arguments portant sur la question susmentionnée à partir des textes traduits à l'époque abbasside.

Mots clés:

Al-Jahiz - Ère Abbaside - Ère Omeyyade - Philosophie grecque - Littérature - Traduction.

Introduction

Digging deeper into the Arabic cultural root shows well the strong tie that connected the arabic culture with other ancient cultures at the Abbasside era as taking from and making use of the world's cultures were very welcomed practices and an important part in forming the community identity. Translation played an important role in arabic civilization growth, and that was because the scientific atmosphere was very encouraging and motivating. At that time, there were enlightenment, openness and confidence, so there was no fear from acculturation; however, there was an Arabic ID that looked for every science by which it could complete the whole circle of civilization, and by which it could implant its thinking.

Gratitude is for Arabic Language as it played an important central role in civilization communication and cultural interaction which had a big influence on translation itself. That was justified because Arabic has the ability to comprehend the translated texts and reproduce them using original Arabic vocabulary that made such texts be natural as if they were not translated; rather, they were original Arabic text[1].

During the first Abbasid era, the Greek, Persian, Indian and all other nations' sciences which were under the Abbasid rule were transformed into Arabic. Such transformation was achieved by two routes: The first route was the route of translation; such a way received a lot of interest from the Abbasid Caliphs and their Ministers especially the Barmakids, a Persian influential family from Balkh. The other route which was more popular was the Arabization of so many communities and moving to the Arab culture with what they (the nations) had of different sciences, traditions, and lifestyle. All that paved the way to an Arabic civilization that links the spiritual instructions and the intellectual material aspects of life.

Taking from other civilizations and depending on them doesn't mean that Arabic language at that time was poor. This was mentioned by Ihsan Abbas when he wrote his book Malameh Younaniya fi Aladab Alarabi(Greek features in Arabic Literature). He says: "What so ever it was, Arabic literature flexibility when accepting foreign features is not considered a defect in the language itself, nor is it an evidence of a defect in the identity of the language itself.

It's worth mentioning, that translation was not the only achievement at that time, rather it was only one stage amongst many Arabic Islamic innovation's stages which were:
• Translation;

- Explanation;
- Criticizing and Correction;
- Innovation[2]

The Beginnings of Translating into Arabic

There are different opinions about when translation into Arabic started. Some see and think that translation into Arabic in Islamic countries refers to the Messenger Mohammed (PBUH) era as he said in one of his saying "Whosoever learns other people's language shall be safe". The most famous figure who learnt the Syriac language at that time was Zaid Ibn Thabit. It was narrated that he learnt it within only sixty days; then he learnt the Roman and Persian languages. Moreover, the oldest garment which refers back to the year 22 AH had a text which includes the name of Amr Ibn Al-'As. It was a three-line text which was written in Greek, and the Arabic translation was below. All this noted that translation started at the onset of the Islamic Era[3].

However, others see that the actual beginning of translation refers back to the onset of the Umayyad era. It was mentioned more than one time that Khaled Ibn Yazeed Ibn Mu'awiyah sent to people in Alexandria asking for some books in medicine and chemistry to translate into Arabic. He was described by Ibn An-Nadeem in his book Al-Fahrast (The Index) that he was an eloquent speaker, and a poet; he was firm and a thinking man. He was the first to whom books in medicine, astronomy, and chemistry were translated. He was called the wise amongst Marwan family"[4].

Ibn Khillikan described Khaled Ibn Yazeed Ibn Mu'awiyah saying: "He was the first who rewarded translators and philosophers and made all the wise and professionals closer to him"[5].

It was said that Khaled Ibn Yazeed Ibn Mu'awiyah invited a Byzantine monk whose name was Miryass to come from Alexandria. The former asked the latter to teach him chemistry. Furthermore, the former asked another one whose name was Istafun to translate what was brought by the monk into Arabic.

Another famous figure who cared for translation during the Umayyad era was Omar Ibn Abdul Aziz. He once accompanied to Medina, a city in western Saudi Arabia where Al-Masjid an-Nabawi is a major Islamic site, one scholar form Alexandria whose name was Ibn Abhur after the latter converted into Islam with the help of Omar Ibn Abdul Aziz. Ibn Abdul Aziz depended on Ibn Abhur in establishing the medicine career at that time[6].

Omar Ibn Abdul Aziz moved the scholars who used to teach in Alexandria

School to Antioch so as to teach in Antioch School. It was also known that the first school didn't close when such scholars left; however, it stayed open. One of the most famous physicians who remained in Alexandria School and kept it open was Saieed Ibn Nofal.

Although it's still unknown when translation really started, the translated material assures that translations at that time were poor and passed through stages. For example, in the Umayyad era, translation was exclusive to some sciences such as chemistry, medicine, and astronomy, while during the Abbasid era, it comprised more sciences such as philosophy, logic, experimental sciences, and literary books[7].

The influence of translation on the Abbasid affairs

We can say that Al-Mu'tazila, a group of talkative figures appeared in Basra in the late Umayyad period and thrived during the Abbasid period, including Al-Jahiz, Abu Uthman Amr Ibn Bahr Ibn Mahboob Ibn Fazarah Laithi Kanani Basri (159 AH – 255 AH) who was a senior prose writer in the Abbasid era, and born in Basra and died there, was one among so many groups who cared and gave much interest to reading and translation. They aimed at looking at other cultures and argue their scholars and speakers. So Al-Jahiz said: "if there had been no out speakers, the public from different nations would have disappeared"[8].

Speakers at that age were influenced by what was mentioned in the Greek philosophy; in other words, they were influenced by the Greeks' arguments or talks especially in pure philosophical issues. This phenomenon was assured by some orientalists who discovered a relationship between Al-Mu'tazila group's principles and beliefs and what was common amongst the foreigners' beliefs and principles[9].

Alfred Von Kremer, an Austrian orientalist, said: "The development and growth of Al-Mu'tazila were influenced by the Greek theology. They were influenced by Yahya al- Dimashqi (John of Damascus) and his following student Theodore Abu Qurrah[10], was a 9th-century Orthodox Christian theologian who lived in the early Islamic period, in particular."

Professor Reuven Snir, also assures that Al-Mu'tazila group in their latest development was influenced by the Greek philosophy.

Another figure who was interested by the Greek Culture was Yahya Al-Barmaki. It's narrated that he used to ask those who gathered around him who were interested in argument, he used to ask them to discuss the subject of Platonic love as it's mentioned in Plato's book Banquet. In this context, that

Plato used to ask Aristotle to do some arguments with other philosophers about love. So it seems that the interest of Yahya Al-Barmaki resulted from knowing what's written in the book[11].

Moreover, it was cited in some ancient books that the above-mentioned Yahya was a thinking man. He used to have a council where speakers from different nations used to gather. He once said to his council while they were gathering around him: "As you talked a lot in different issues such as the universe, creation, nothingness, contiguity, spacing innovation, affirmation, negation, motion, stability, quality, quantity, modification and editing, now talk about love not in the form of argument, but let everyone of you say whatever comes to their minds"[12].

As translation was highly valued, whoever wanted to join the governmental institutions to translate had to pass a very hard test. Such a career, may promote its holder to high ranks in the state. One might become a judge or a ruler. The other condition that should be available when they want to join such institutions is being knowledgeable in different sciences. In order to pass these two steps, they needed to read whatever was translated from Greek such as Greek wise sayings and what was narrated in Greek books; also they had to read the correspondences between Alexander the Great (Alexander of Macedon) and Aristotle. Moreover, they had to read some Indian stories which talk about the wisdom of the king, such stories were as Panchatantra (Kalila and Dimna) which were rewritten by Abban Ibn Abdul-Hameed Ibn Laheq who wrote it in a poetic style. He rewrote it in a form of a fourteen-thousand line poem; virtually, he was able to do that after he had read it, and understood its clues; then he presented it to Ja'far Al-Barmaki[13].

It's also noteworthy that the Abbasid Caliphs gave much interest and care to translation, and they also accepted and welcomed all scientific achievements, believing that these were the best ways to level up the society. For example,Abu Ja'far Al-Mansoor and Haroon Ar-rasheed were the Abbasid Caliphs who gave importance to this field; translation. During the former's period of ruling, a figure who's called Hunain Ibn Isaac translated some books from Persian and Greek; some of the books were specialized in medicine and were written by Heracleides and Alius Galenus. Haroon Ar-Rasheed established Dar Al-Hikma (House of Wisdom) which could work as a forum where scholars and learners could meet. The Caliph didn't forget to provide that forum with so many books which were transferred from Anatolia and Constantinople.

Moreover, the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'moon, the son of Haroon Ar-Rasheed,

gave much more importance to Dar Al-Hikma and to translators as well. He did something completely different as a sign of his interest. He offered Al-Hajjaj Ibn Matar, Ibn Al-Batreeq and others, scholarships to Constantinople to make them study and translate from Greek into Arabic whatever they could translate in all different sciences. And for this purpose, Al-Ma'moon used to write to the Constantinople Emperor as Ibn An-Nadeem mentioned[14].

According to Al-Jahiz, the translator should have some characteristics

Al-Jahiz is considered one of the seniors in the group of Al-Mu'tazila who cared very much in taking from other cultures. Their goal was making use of such cultures to be able to argue against other Islamic groups and against different groups which were popular during the Abbasid era[15]. To be able to argue against such groups wouldn't have been easy if Al-Jahiz and others hadn't been aware of translation and Arabization.

Anyone who would like to study what Al-Jahiz left, would find him able to talk about different matters. He was well-versed in the science of argument, and whenever he was involved in talking about translation, you would find him aware of all the qualifications that a translator should have. That is, whenever he talked about translation, he would mention things like the translator's knowledge of the two languages: the source language and the target language, and the knowledge of the subjects that the translator was translating. In addition, translators must be aware of all the subjects that they could or couldn't translate.

All different characteristics that any translator should have are summed up into two points:
- The translator's knowledge in the subject they are dealing with shouldn't be less than their knowledge in translation as a science;
- A translator must be the most eloquent figure among others in the two languages they are dealing with. In other words, a translator must be fluent in both languages[16].

However, Al-Jahiz, didn't forget to talk about negative effects of speaking two languages. He assured that the two languages that a translator uses or speaks might be closer or far from each other which might affect the translator's performance in both. He says in this situation: "whenever we find him (i.e the translator) speaks two languages, we know that he could probably speak one language more than the other. In other words, according to Al-Jahiz, the translator can't be equally fluent in the two languages[17].

He justified his opinion; he said, that any speaker has a limited power of

speaking that he can perfectly exploit when speaking one language. When there is a bilingual, this means that he has to divide that limited power in two parts which ultimately means that he can't be equally fluent in the two languages he posses[18].

His judgment was based on what he witnessed in his age. When foreigners started translation at his time, Arabic didn't have reliable books where all of its characteristics are listed. If it had had such books, translators would have found the closest equivalents when translation. As this was the case, most translations into Arabic were not very much successful as translators adopted literal translation. Later on, the situation started to improve once certain figure as Al-Kindi appeared. These people were fluent in Arabic and their first language. He as well as others was able to understand Arabic, its vocabulary, grammar and all its rhetorical aspects[19].

The previous opinion of Al-Jahiz makes use optimistic and pessimistic concerning being a bilingual. Pessimism is due to the fact that none can be very fluent in two languages, according to Al-Jahiz. Optimism is due to the fact that inability of possessing two languages is not because of the speakers themselves. Rather, that is because different languages are like enemies. One may overcome the other when both possessed by a translator[20].

The relationship between translators and the science that they translate

Al-Jahiz didn't give one general opinion that can be true on all sciences; he believed that sciences are different from each other in terms of their difficulty, subjects they're dealing with, the relationship of them with the human psyche, and their flexibility whether they can be translated or not. Thus, he gave various opinions that were justified depending on Al-Mu'tazila's principles.

He also mentioned that the relation between the translator and the science they are translating is based on different issues: the level of the subject's difficulty and the number of translators who translated in such a subject. The more difficult the subject is, and the less number of translators who dealt with it, the harder the job of translators will be, and thus more mistakes may be made[21].

Al-Jahiz said that if the translator does not understand the intended meaning of the text under translation, they may leave a negative influence on the translated version. In this sense, they could be equal to copyists as copyists may interfere when copying a text that might miss a word and add a word from their own; the deed which is not their right; they might be unable to give the exact needed substitute[22].

All this was due to the fact that most scientific expressions were not very well comprehended by translators at that time. The following example will clarify that issue. Matta Ibn Yunus tried to translate Aristotle's Poetics. The translated version was not very much clear, and that was because the translator was not aware of the stylistics of narrative poetry. Similarly, the Syriacs were like the Arabs in the sense that they are not familiar with the narrative poetry characteristics. Moreover, the dominant topic of the book which is tragedy was not familiar to the translator. It's worth noting that the Abbasid era can be divided into two periods: the first period when Al-Jahiz lived most of his life, and the second period. Translators who lived in the first period had a hard time translating such narrative poetry or lyrics. Consequently, translators of the second period retranslated those books adopting a new methodology in translation which was paying most of the attention to the vocabulary and their Arabic equivalents, ignoring, to some extent, literal translation. If they had not been able to understand such vocabulary, they would not have been able to do the job successfully[23].

Abu Hayyan, a philosopher lived in the 4th Cent. AH, denied translating the Greek philosophy which was translated into Syriac and then into Arabic. His argument was like how could a translator translate from a language that he himself is not fluent in, and he himself is not good at philosophy? Abu Hayyan argued Matta Ibn Yunus while the former was comparing between the Greek logic and Arabic syntax saying: "You do not know the Greek Language, so how come that you call for learning it while it has disappeared for a long time, its speakers and users have also gone, and whoever used to use it has died. Moreover, you translate into Arabic what had been translated from Greek into Syriac"[24].

Zaki Mubarak, an Egyptian writer, poet, and journalist, had his opinion on Abu Hayyan's argument. The former believed that taking from the Greek philosophy should be completed via communication rather than translations. Cultures should meet in a point depending on minds not on a language itself. He believed that the Arab intellects should start building their own cultures making use of other cultures. Mubarak also provided successful examples as Ibn Rushd and Al-Ghazali. Both are successful in making use of other cultures regardless of the route they followed whether it was a translation or any other route.

Zaki Mubarak said in this context: "that way of transferring the Greek philosophy was the main reason behind the vague, unclear image of philosophy in the Arab World". He added: "while I was studying philosophy, I faced such

ambiguity, so I concluded that those who succeeded in building the Arabic philosophy like Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd avoided translating from one culture to another; however, they tried to build and develop the philosophy via staying in communication with the Greek culture or any culture they wanted to take from. They also did that job well because they took the Arabic or Islamic psyche as a start point. Then they tried to trace what goes well with either the Arabs' religion or the Arab's psyche. Adopting such a method, they were able to make philosophy amongst the Islamic environment active and make thousands of people with or be against it"[25].

All that made the floor for prose's birth and for prose's prosperity. Prose started to be adopted widely; that is prose began to be a strong means to be used in writing on philosophy and other sciences. Also prose was able to absorb logic and to prove itself in being a tool in writing on literature which is based on mind rather than on emotions, and which respects human beings' psyche and mind, such literature took from other cultures' literature such as the Persian's, Greek's, and Indian's.

A reader who examines such arguments may have the following question in his mind: What relations link between Arabic and other languages' sciences and literature?

Actually, the mother tongue, whatever it is, could face a fatal disease when it takes from other cultures. That is, when translators pour what they translated into Arabic for example, it could be problematic in terms of losing the Arabic identity. However, all translations' trials that took place during the Abbasid era were completely far from that risk that endangered the Arabic ID. Their efforts were paid to take from others' sciences and cultures aiming at strengthening Arabic. He drew this example; he considered Arabic culture as a tree that needs to be watered. The water was like other's sciences. When that tree absorbs such water, it must grow up higher and higher appearing to people as the Arabic tree of sciences without losing its characteristics[26]. All this was implicit in Zaki Mubarak's comments.

During that era, translators didn't feel embarrassed to ask about whatever they hadn't understood. They used to do that for two reasons: Either to fulfill their desire of knowing more about what they didn't know, or to add to what they had already known. This happened more than once. For example, Al-Jahiz wrote in his book Al-Bayan wa Al-Tabyin(The Book of Eloquence and Demonstration) that Mu'ammer, the head of one of Al-Mu'tazila's groups, met an Indian physician who's called Bahla. The former asked the latter about

rhetoric. However, the latter didn't give an answer and said that in India, they had something written on it, but he was unable to explain as he couldn't translate. Bahla said that he was neither able to understand rhetoric and its aspects well, nor was he a good translator, so how could he tell Mu'ammer what rhetoric was in the Indian language[27]?

What was mentioned above supports Al-Jahiz's opinion as he said that a translator must be knowledgeable in the topic they translate. Translators' knowledge in any field helps produce a free mistake text regarding the most appropriate vocabulary which will be used in the translated text as the translator knows what jargon can be used in similar original texts in the target language. Furthermore, when the translator is well-versed in the topic he translates, it will help him not to translate word by word, rather, he can read the original text, understand it, understand the connotations of certain vocabulary and expressions, and then he can reproduce a text in the target language being also able to find out an appropriate word if any was missed.

Religion Books

Al-Jahiz thinks that translating religion books is harder and more difficult than translating any other books. He justifies that by saying that such a translation can't be well done unless the translator perfectly understands the thoughts, and how these thoughts were expressed. Thus, this requires the translator to explain the connotations and shadows of the vocabulary used, and this is related to monotheism. They, the translators, must be well-versed in this field. Also, the translators must be able to differentiate between what is said by Allah, and what is said by others so as to avoid attributing what is told by Allah to people or the other way round.

According to Al-Jahiz, the translator must know what is meant by the common speech and the specific one. In other words, there are words that can be used to indicate the kind in general, while there are words that can be used to indicate the specific. For example, the words that start with the article "the" or the pronoun "all" are usually used to talk about the kind in general; however, the opposite of that is the words that are used to indicate one item in specific.

The translator must also be able to differentiate between the narrated stories which were mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and the ancient stories which were inherited from one generation to another. The translator, according to Al-Jahiz, should distinguish between the truth and the lie and what is neither; there are certain stories that can't be judged as a truth nor can they be judged as a lie. For

example, if there are stories or interpretations of creation, or prophets' lives and they were approved by the holy book in Islam which is the Holy Qur'an, we can say, according to Al-Jahiz, that they are true. If such stories are denied by the Holy Qur'an, they are considered lies. If they are neither approved nor denied, we shouldn't judge them[28].

Al-Jahiz warned the translator of being ignorant in religion. He says that to make a mistake when translating topics in mathematics, chemistry, and philosophy is tolerable as long as these topics are related to human beings' life, education, or careers. However, making a mistake in translating topics in religion can't be tolerable as misunderstanding expressions may result in mistranslating the source text and giving a wrong equivalent which could make the target reader misunderstand the original real meanings. In other words, the relation between chemistry and the reader or learner for example is that it can teach them; however, reading in religion aims at leading people to reach to the Creator, and it also leads them to correct legislation so as to live quite fairly[29].

Al-Jahiz was very much concerned with teaching people the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an and the meaning of its verses and vocabulary. He wanted that so as to prevent people from misunderstanding the book of this religion (Islam). It's the referee for Muslims, so they should understand every single word there. His fear was justified because so many people from different nations converted into Islam, and not all of them speak Arabic or influent in Arabic, so they may misunderstand certain verses. If they try to translate what they misunderstand, of course this will lead to an inaccurate translated version[30].

Al-Jahiz directs some questions to those who want to translate books related to religion and to any religious fields. He wants to ensure that any translator who dares translating religious materials is able to distinguish between what can be considered as an evidence of doing something, and what can be considered as a semievidence, we can't totally depend on it in legislation. The translator should guess whether there are words which are missed or modified in the original text or not[31].

All these have to be taken into consideration while translation is made. The consequences of any misunderstanding will be serious. If the translator is unaware of such issues, they might deviate from the intended meaning and so mistranslate it. The translated copy will be far from the original. Al-Jahiz thought that such ignorant might be the reason behind misunderstanding the Greek philosophy. He wanted to say, that the former Arab philosophers misunderstood the Greek philosophy, and so their translations were inaccurate; for example,

they referred some of Plato's books to Aristotle. They did that as a result of their misunderstanding the philosophy of both[32].

Al-Jahiz added another point. Old manuscripts may have some words which are unclear or even missed because of time. Thus, he warned those who copied such manuscripts of creating substitutes; he said if those copyists found different substitutes each time they copied the text, we might have a text that would be different from the original. He also stressed that translators should avoid interfering in the original text. When one word was unclear or erased, they had to look for the original. It was not their job to create substitutes in the original text. Al-Jahiz believed that the first author could find it difficult, and it could take him time to correct something that he himself had written in his masterpiece, so how could the translator or the copyist do such a job easily? Al-Jahiz believed that modifying a text was for sure more difficult than writing it for the first time. According to him, the text which had been modified more than one time by different copyists or typewriters could be a pure misleading text and a complete lie.

He said, the author of the text is like an owner of a building. The copyist who is hired to copy the text is like someone who benefited from a building which is not his own. Thus, is the one who rents that building would be as careful to keep it as it was by the owner? This example is drawn to clarify Al-Jahiz's opinion. He found that the first author is more cautious to keep the text as much original as it was more than the translator or the copyist. He also says that the author may find it much easier to compose a ten page text than finding the original lost word or to make it up. If this is the case for the author, how can the copyist do it easily? Al-Jahiz clarifies that if more copyists change or add to the text, the latest copy of the manuscript will be not only far from the original, but also it may include fake information. The worst yet to come if translators do such a deed. If a book is kept being translated more than one time; each translation depends on a prior one, not on the source text, we may end up with version which is strange from the source text[33].

Committing such mistakes doesn't occur because the science of translation is defective or because it doesn't have basics; rather, they are committed due to translators' carelessness. Some translators do their translation without paying attention to the embedded meanings or connotations. They do it in a hurry, so they abuse the source text. They are to blame, not the science itself. This is what Al-Jahiz concluded from his observations.

Al-Jahiz had his observations and opinions in simultaneous translation. It was

mentioned previously that Al-Jahiz believed that if one speaks fluently more than one language, there must be abuse of one language over the other. He excluded from this generalization Moses Ibn Sayyar; who is a narrator. Ibn Sayyar has the ability to speak two languages very fluently without letting one language affect negatively the other. Al-Jahiz said that Ibn Sayyar was as eloquent in Arabic as in Persian. He used to recite a verse from the Holy Qur'an while he was sitting in the middle between two groups, for example: Arabs and Persians. He used to recite a verse, look at the right, and perfectly explain it to Arabs in Arabic; he also used to look at the left, and explained it to Persians in Persian. Doing that, none can judge whether Ibn Sayyar was more fluent in Arabic or Persian[34].

A conflict may have aroused on this occasion. It was well known that Al-Jahiz didn't speak Persian, so how could he judge and evaluate Ibn Sayyar as being fluent in the two languages? So Al-Jahiz couldn't be the referee to judge. To assess Al-Jahiz opinion on Ibn Sayyar, they needed well-known figures who really could speak Persian and Arabic and who could evaluate anyone who speaks them.

Thus, where could they find such judges? If there had been experts to judge, the generalization of Al-Jahiz which says that it's impossible to find a fluent bilingual would have been false.

Some criticism can be directed to Al-Jahiz story:

Firstly, Al-Jahiz assumed that there would be none who could speak two languages with the same level of eloquence, and he excluded Ibn Sayyar. However, it's a rule of thumb, that if there were people who are not only bilinguals but also able to evaluate any bilingual, the rule of Al-Jahiz would be invalid.

Secondly, the story of Ibn Sayyar who used to sit in between Persians and Arabs sitting either at the left or at the right respectively assumes that these two groups used to sit separately because they spoke different languages which means that speaking different languages prevented them from being one group.

Thirdly, can we consider interpreting a verse into two different languages a translation? If so, this means that Ibn Sayyar was translating the verse into Persian in such a situation; however, Al-Jahiz assumes that translating religion books is impossible.

Fourthly, the story which was mentioned above tells us that Arabs were sitting at the right, and Persians were sitting at the left. The question is, did that happen by chance or was it planned?

The last issue has an interpretation. The language of the group who sat at the right, which was Arabic, was considered the main language of the state; while the language which was spoken by the group sitting at the left was the secondary. All of that worked to emphasize the importance and the high rank of Arabic compared to other languages.

Translating poetry and wise sayings

Al-Jahiz considered the ability to write good poetry was exclusive to Arabs and to anyone who speak Arabic. He announced that it had been hard and impossible to translate Arabic poetry into any other language. Otherwise, if any poem was translated, it would be any type of literature but poetry; it would be converted into prose which loses the rhetorical aspects of poetry. Thus, translating prose into prose is considered easier than translating poetry into prose[35].

The above-mentioned declaration of Al-Jahiz is considered fanaticism to Arabs[36]. There are some famous poets whose origin is not Arabic. Such poets appeared in the Abbasid era. Some of them are Bashar Ibn Burd, Abu Nuwas, Abu-l-'Atahiya, and Ibn al-Rumi. However, to be fair with Al-Jahiz, his declaration can be interpreted in two different ways. He said that good poetry is exclusive to Arabs. If he means by that those who were born in an Arabic atmosphere, absorb the rhetoric of Arabic, and speak it well, he is absolutely right. In contrast, if he meant to say that only Arabs who descend from Arabic origin can write good poetry, his opinion would be considered fanaticism.

Regarding translating poetry, Abu Sulaiman, a philosopher, has his opinion that supports the opinion of Al-Jahiz. The former says that the aesthetic values of poetry will go when being translated into another language[37].

Qudama Ibn Ja'far, a Syriac scholar and an administrator for the Abbasid Caliphate and a scholar in the fields of rhetorics and philosophy, repeated what was above mentioned by saying that the Greek poetry which was said by Greek poets lost its aesthetic values, but kept its meaning when it was translated into Arabic[38].

Ihsan Abbas, a Palestinian professor at the AUB, considered a premier figure of Arabic an Islamic studies, assures that Al-Jahiz's opinion is almost right; however, it could have negative influence on translation. In other words, if we declare that translating poetry is impossible as it loses rhyme, rhythm, metaphors and other aesthetic values, people will stay apart from translating poetry into Arabic, and even if translators really try to translate, their efforts will be in vain[39].

The assumption made by Al-Jahiz was not a barrier preventing translating poetry; rather, it worked as an excuse if the translators produce a poor version of the translated text. This difficult job wouldn't be done by any translator unless they found themselves possess many languages, or at least the most popular languages in their age. And suppose that the reader understands what's meant by the superiority of Arabic poetry is the supreme power of writing a unique Arabic poem that doesn't have any equivalents in other languages or cultures, such understanding works as a barrier which prevents any trail of translation from or into Arabic[40].

One may understand that the particularity of the Arabic poetry is equivalent to different aspects that are particular to each nation. In other words, the Persians are unique in talking about politics, literature, and drawings; the Romans are famous for knowledge and wisdom; Indians are famous for thinking, vision, patience, and witchcraft; Turkish are known for their courage and bravery; Negroes are known for their patience, happiness, and their hard work; finally, the Arabs are known for their help, feeding others, fulfillment, generosity, eloquence and oratory[41].

However, Al-Jahiz could really mean what he said as he believes that the Arabs are different from other nations in terms of their eloquence and rhetoric, and that's why the language of the Holy Qur'an is Arabic. Also his view could have based on the translated versions that he read and examined as he found that such translated texts lost a lot of their aesthetic values. In addition, it was known that Al-Jahiz was aggressive and hostile towards people from other nations. Thus, his attitude worked as a means to ensure that Arabs are superior to other nations[42].

Al-Jahiz was not the only one who prefers not to translate poetry. Others have the same view. For example, Robert Frost defines poetry as what gets lost in translation. He meant that it's impossible to carry over from one language into another the special qualities of the poem such as rhyme, rhythm, aesthetic values, all because there is no exact equivalent from one language into the other. It is difficult to translate poetry as a poem is not about emotions only; it could be an image of life, reflection of philosophy or culture. What created the beauty of a poem is not the meaning or the used images; rather, it's about the unfamiliar way of expressing the meaning. Such a way can't be compensated when being translated.

For example, Arab poets gave much care to the rhyme while poets of other nations don't; they are interested in writing lyrics. In other words, non-Arabic

poetry has to be sung; such a characteristic is not important in Arabic poetry[43].

Some contemporary scholars see that translating poetry is possible as long as three conditions achieved. For example, Abdul Wahid Lu'Lu'a, who is very experienced in translation, thinks that to translate poetry, the translator needs the followings:

• Deep knowledge in the languages: his/her mother tongue, and the second language;
• Deep knowledge in the cultures and history of both languages;
• Being aware of some other languages which are related to both languages: the source and the target one;

The third condition is considered to be the most important as there are poets who are inspired from a neighboring culture[44].

Moreover, translating wise sayings from other languages into Arabic doesn't have one generalization to be applied to all nations according to Al-Jahiz. He said that some wise sayings become more rhetorical when being translated while others lose their aesthetic values. However, Al-Jahiz had the same attitude towards translating Arabic wise sayings; in other words, he also believed that translating Arabic wise sayings is like translating Arabic poetry; it makes them loose their aesthetic values and their big influence on human psyche, and this is due to the connection between the words used in the saying and the rhythm on one side, and the intended meaning on the other[45].

It's worth mentioning that Indian books, Greek wise sayings, Persian literature, all were translated into Arabic. Some of them became more rhetorical and thus more influential when being translated, while others remained similar to how they were. Some people think that translating Arabic wise sayings isn't impossible. They think that if these wise sayings had been translated, translators would have found equivalents in other languages keeping in mind that they would have lost their rhyme and their rhythm.

According to Al-Jahiz, the meter, rhyme, and rhythm make the wise saying more influential as rhetoric has its influence on human psyche. If such sayings lose these characteristics as a result of translation, they will be similar to prose which is not as influential as the rhymed writings. He believed that all languages have something in common in terms of vocabulary that talk about certain topics, but he also believed that Arabic is superior to other languages in terms of internal rhyme, which is an important aesthetic value in Arabic, and which makes translation more difficult.

Translating Greek Philosophy

Al-Jahiz had his opinion regarding translating the Greek philosophy. He thinks that translating Greek philosophy can't be well done. The translation will remain insufficient. He justified his opinion depending on two reasons: First, he said that the translator can't say exactly what the wise wanted to say as the wise has specific connotations that he wanted to convey through the exact words or sound effects he used, so the translator can't convey all of this[46]. The translator who is strong enough to translate such wise sayings must be able to know what's hidden between words, the derivations of all the used words and why are such words chosen but not others. He also must know the interpretation of the used words. Al-Jahiz mentioned some names as examples. He said how come that those who translated Aristotle's words are equal to him? How come that Ibn al-Muqaffa', Ibn al-Batreeq and others be like Aristotle? And how come that Khaled Ibn Yazeed who was a caliph only for three months and who was an eloquent speaker, a poet and a translator be like Plato?

Al-Jahiz considers that such translations are below the level of the original texts because the knowledge of the translators in such a field (philosophy) is less than the knowledge of the philosopher.

The second reason that Al-Jahiz adopted in justifying his opinion is that he assures that the translator must have as equal knowledge in the topic he translates as his knowledge in translation. Being able to translate is not enough for Al-Jahiz. He also assured that the translator must be knowing and aware of different rhetorical aspects of the two languages he's dealing with: the source language and the target language[47].

Therefore, depending to Al-Jahiz's opinion, translating philosophy surely makes the translated version below the level of the original text. Moreover, Al-Jahiz isn't convinced with what was achieved by such Muslim translators who translated the Greek philosophy. Furthermore, he trivializes them as well as their achievements by saying: Since when was Khaled Ibn Yazeed equal to Plato?

An important question arises here. How was Al-Jahiz able to Judge Khaled as being inferior to Plato? Was Al-Jahiz fluent in both languages Arabic and Greek to issue such a judgment? The only answer is that he was neither that fluent nor that qualified to issue such a judgment.

Despite Al-Jahiz's opinion in this field, there are still areas where civilizations meet, concepts look similar, Arabic, Greek, Persian, Roman, and Indian thoughts are all in harmony. Such areas are even mentioned by Al-Jahiz himself. For example, when defining rhetoric, different civilizations give similar definitions.

When a different people from different civilizations were asked to define rhetoric, a Persian said it's when you know when to stop or continue. A Greek said it's choosing what to say; a Roman said the ability to decide whether to choose brevity or redundancy, and an Indian answered rhetoric is the clarity of connotations[48].

The opinion of Al-Jahiz regarding translating philosophy or rhetoric was defeated by a successful translation that was achieved by some translators who were able to translate an Indian text into Arabic with a high level of accuracy. Mu'ammer Abu Al-Ash'ath said: "I found in that translated text the followings: the first step towards rhetoric is using the rhetorical aspects successfully. The outspeaker must choose the exact words, mustn't talk to a ruler the way he speaks to the public; he also mustn't talk to a king the way he does with ordinary people. He must be able to manage his talk. He mustn't revise all used vocabulary very carefully unless he meets a wise or a philosopher[49].

It may be difficult for us to find out the Persian, Indian, Greek, and Roman influence in building the innovated Islamic civilization in terms of science or literature. Although Al-Jahiz assured in his book Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin that the above mentioned Indian translated text tells us, in a way or another, the influence of non-Arabic civilizations over the Arabic one, it's still known that the Arabic mentality is based on two solid resources which are Islamic doctrine and the Holy Qur'an[50].

It's clear that Al-Jahiz gave his opinions based on the experience of people in his age; however, he was right in certain cases and wrong in others. With no doubts, he had a deep look on non-Arabic cultures. This explains why his literature was affected by Persian, Indian, and Greek cultures. He also demolished all cultural barriers in his literature. He said: "Here are some books spread between people, books of Euclid, Alius Galenusand others; all have something to tell people even though they are different"[51]. He also said: "A book is read anytime and anywhere; what's written in that book appears in the reader's speech. It's available in different ages and in different countries"[52].

Conclusion

Translation is an important means to let different nations communicate. It needs, according to Al-Jahiz, good knowledge and high skills. Different arts and sciences need different levels of skills. In other words, some arts and sciences need stronger skills to be translated than others; however, others are impossible to translate as they are tough and complicated.

Having examined the opinion of Al-Jahiz, I concluded the followings:

Translation can't be well done unless the translator has good knowledge and fluency in the two languages: the source language and the target language. In addition, the translator should have deep knowledge in the field he translates in. This was assured by Al-Jahiz in more than one place.

Translating books of religion and books of philosophy needs deeper knowledge in understanding words' connotations; this needs the translator to be very fluent in the two languages and to be able to highly understand the texts.

Translating poetry and wise sayings is not impossible; however, the translated text may lose important aesthetic values such as rhyme and rhythm.

Al-Jahiz gave contradictory judgments in certain issues. One of the topics where he gave contradictory opinions was his opinion on possessing two languages of the same level of fluency.

However, Al-Jahiz is still considered an encyclopedia and well-versed in the field of translation. He appreciated the importance of translation. He also made use of many different cultures and wrote on different topics. All his works are still considered good references to examine.

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