EXTENDING CONDOLENCES TO DIFFERENT AUDIENCES: A TRANSLATION PERSPECTIVE[1]

Abstract: *Higher education institutions worldwide pursue well-defined and overriding goals, including research, teaching, and community service. To achieve these objectives, they demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of their staff. Institutional leadership actively strives to create a supportive and welcoming environment that enables staff members to excel in teaching, research, and other professional responsibilities. This article examines institutional translation in the context of condolence messages extended to members of the academic community, particularly those who may feel uneasy around discussions of bereavement, as well as to express sympathy to the recently bereaved. It analyses three condolence circulars widely publicized among staff members in two multi-ethnic universities: Sultan Qaboos University and United Arab Emirates University. Since the faculty consists of locals and expatriates, the circulars are issued in two languages: Arabic, the official language and the source language, and English, which serves as the target language. Methodologically, the study applied Vermeer's (1989) Skopos theory and Nord's (1997) threefold purpose of translation framework. The findings reveal that while a functionally oriented translation strategy is employed in the condolence circulars of both universities, the United Arab Emirates University predominantly adopts a formally oriented approach, tailored for a non-Arab Muslim audience.*

Key words: *condolences, functionally-based strategy, formally-based strategy, translation*

FORMULER DES CONDOLÉANCES SELON LES DESTINATAIRES : APPROCHE TRADUCTOLOGIQUE

Résumé : *Les établissements d'enseignement supérieur du monde entier poursuivent des objectifs clairement définis et prioritaires, notamment la recherche, l'enseignement et le service à la communauté. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, ils manifestent un sens aigu de responsabilité envers le bien-être de leur personnel. Les instances dirigeantes s'emploient activement à créer un environnement favorable et accueillant qui permette aux membres du personnel d'exceller dans l'enseignement, la recherche et l'ensemble de leurs responsabilités professionnelles. Cet article examine la traduction institutionnelle dans le contexte des messages de condoléances adressés aux membres de la communauté universitaire, en particulier à ceux qui peuvent se sentir mal à l'aise face aux discussions liées au deuil, ainsi qu'aux personnes récemment endeuillées. Il analyse trois circulaires de condoléances largement diffusées auprès du personnel dans deux universités multiethniques : l'Université Sultan Qaboos et l'Université des Émirats arabes unis. Étant donné que le corps enseignant se compose à la fois de nationaux et d'expatriés, les circulaires sont publiées en deux langues : l'arabe, langue officielle et langue source, et l'anglais, qui fait office de langue cible. Sur le plan méthodologique, l'étude mobilise la théorie du Skopos de Vermeer (1989) ainsi que le cadre des trois finalités de la traduction proposé par Nord (1997). Les résultats montrent que, si une stratégie de traduction à orientation fonctionnelle est employée dans les circulaires de condoléances des deux*

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universités, l'Université des Émirats arabes unis adopte majoritairement une approche davantage formelle, adaptée à un public musulman non arabophone.

***Mots-clés** : condoléances, stratégie fonctionnelle, stratégie formelle, traduction*

1. Introduction

A university is an institution where students pursue academic degrees for future employability, with the expectation that they will be recruited by companies seeking highly qualified candidates. Employers recognize the value of hiring a diverse staff, as it helps maintain high standards in teaching, research, and community service. To maintain these standards, universities prioritize administrative uniformity while striving to create a supportive and comfortable working environment. Fostering collegial relationships among staff has always been a key priority, given its direct impact on workplace dynamics and productivity. In this context, social and cultural activities–such as music, theatrical performances, film screenings, and sports–are commonplace in university settings. However, the realities of life, including bereavement, inevitably affect members of the academic community. When mourning events occur, they elicit expressions of sympathy, which institutions seek to convey in an organized and meaningful manner. One way to effectively and efficiently convey sympathy and offer condolences is through circulars to staff, providing a formal platform for expressing grief and solidarity. These circulars serve as a communicative bridge, allowing grief-stricken relatives, colleagues, and friends to pay their respects, whether by attending funerals or offering condolences in other ways. Notably, condolence circulars function as a key element of institutional communication within the academic environment, helping to "bridge the gap between the living and dead, as well as between the immediately bereaved and the wider community-in-mourning" (Brennan 2008, p. 326). At Sultan Qaboos University and the United Arab Emirates University, these messages are issued in both Arabic and English, reflecting the bilingual nature of these institutions. Since Arabic is the official language of both countries and universities, it serves as the source language, particularly given the incorporation of Qur'anic verses to convey formality and a consolatory tone. English, in turn, functions as the target language. In this regard, Pym (1992, p. 31) argues that "the fact that a text is read as a translation is sufficient basis for projecting both the [source text] and [transferred text] positions and thus for analyzing the text as a translation." This form of translation is normally referred to as institutional translation, defined as "any translation carried out in the name, on behalf of, and for the benefit of institutions" (Gouadec, 2010, p. 36). Or, in the words of Jamoussi, et al. (2024, p. 2), it is "a workplace that uses the services of translators to produce translations for its own use, either directly (in-house) or indirectly (through outsourcing)." "The focus is on translation activities that address the specific needs of these institutions, whether these translations are performed in-house or outsourced" (Jamoussi et al., 2024, p. 4).

Regarding condolences, the contrast between how the two languages handle them is interesting. The source text and its translation serve a definitive and stratified communication purpose, ensuring that as many people as possible can engage in this communication exchange. It may be conjectured that translation plays a role in facilitating such complex communication processes.

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For heuristic purposes, this article examines how translation, regarded as a seemingly effective means of communication, is executed in three representative condolence circulars selected from a series of emails at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and United Arab Emirates University (UAEU). To facilitate a more comprehensive analysis, Vermeer's (1989) Skopos theory and Nord's (1997) approach are applied.

It is essential to acknowledge that translators, whether novices or experienced professionals, are likely to encounter unique challenges in the course of translation. They often struggle to obtain appropriate strategies for addressing linguistic and cultural difficulties that arise when translating from one language to another. Typically, two strategies can be employed: formal translation, which strictly adheres to the cultural and linguistic norms of the source language, and functional translation, which prioritizes the expectations of the target audience. Each approach has distinct characteristics and applications in real-world translation practices. The former approach is suited for literary translation where the objective is to preserve the cultural nuances and specificities of the source language. For example, the Egyptian playwright Raafat Duwayrī's 1988 folkloric drama Qiṭṭah bi-sabaʽ ti-rwāḥ (literally: "a cat with seven lives") was translated into English by Carmen Weinstein and Raafat Duwayrī as Cat with Seven Lives, maintaining the original cultural reference regardless how unfamiliar it may seem to the target audience. In contrast, the functional approach is often adopted in context where effective communication is the primary goal. For instance, the English proverb "A cat has nine lives" was adapted by BBC News in 2019 in an article titled "The Cat Who Has Been Given a Tenth Life," which reported on the cloning of a deceased pet named Garlic. When translated into Arabic by BBC Arabic, the phrase was rendered as Qiṭṭah bi-sabaʽ ti-rwāḥ (literally: "a cat with seven lives"). This example illustrates how translation is often target-oriented, prioritizing language that sounds natural.

It would be useful to set forth a theoretical framework for this discussion. Skopos theory will be applied because it "relies on key concepts in pragmatics, such as intention and action" (Hatim, 2001, p. 74). More specifically, Nord (1997) states that the purpose of any translation activity is threefold: a) The general purpose, which refers to the broader goal beyond the act of translating, such as the translator's motivation (e.g., gaining reputation, earning a living, etc.); b) The communicative purpose, which concerns the specific aim of the target text (TT), such as persuading, promoting, instructing, or simply providing information; and finally, (c) The purpose of the translation strategy, which addresses the decision of which strategy to adopt and which to leave behind.

Similarly, Vermeer states that translation primarily depends on the purpose of the target text (1989/2012; see also Reiss and Vermeer, 1984/2013). A corollary to this is that translation strategies are designed to produce a "functionally adequate" translation. The underlying rules of Skopos theory, as proposed by Vermeer (cited in Munday, 2018, p. 128), are as follows:

> « (1) A translational action is determined by its intended Skopos. (2) It is an offer of information in the target culture and TL concerning an offer of information in the source culture and SL. (3) A TT does not initiate an offer of information in a clearly reversible way. (4) A TT must be internally coherent. (5) A TT must be coherent with the ST. (6) The five rules above stand in hierarchical order, with the Skopos rule predominating. »

Thus far, Skopos theory provides translation theorists and practitioners not only with effective tools for smooth translation but also with the flexibility to create more translations.

For instance, "the English 'radar' /ˈreɪdɑ:(r)/ translates as رادار for the Palestinian audience but جهاز ضبط السرعة for the Omani audience" (Thawabteh, 2024, p. 16). In this case, while the purpose of the former is to communicate a source text item to a Palestinian audience, the latter targets an Omani audience. A totally different calque, i.e., نظام ساهر is used to address the Saudi audience.

2. Offering Condolences Across Arabic and English

To provide a fairly comprehensive discussion, the concept of condolence is defined by Collins Cobuild (2003; emphasis in original) as follows:

> « A message in which you express your sympathy for someone because one of their friends or relatives has died recently… When you offer or express your condolences to someone, you express your sympathy for them because one of their friends or relatives has died recently. »

People are socialized to behave appropriately during both happy and sad occasions. In the latter, when there is death in a family, those around the grieving family express their condolences to help alleviate the impact of the loss on the mourners.

It is a well-established fact that languages represent linguistic, cultural, and semantic realities differently. Arabic and English are no exception. The two languages have limited cultural affinity, and thus, translation issues often arise due to the cultural disparities between the two. As Nida and Reyburn (1981, p. 2) point out, such cultural gaps "produce the most far-reaching misunderstandings among readers." Similarly, Sofer (2002, pp. 65-66) asserts:

> « The conscientious Arabic translator is aware of the generic difficulties in working with two languages as different from each other as English and Arabic. […], there are vast cultural differences between a Western language such as English and a Semitic language like Arabic. One cannot translate these languages without paying attention to these cultural differences. »

Lefevere (1992, p. 1) succinctly notes: "Not all languages seem to have been created equal. Some languages enjoy a more prestigious status than others, just as some texts occupy a more central position in a given culture than others—the Bible, for instance, or the [Q]ur'an." Similarly, Thawabteh (2016, pp. 13–14) observes that the "Qur'an occupies a linguistic elevated status in Arabic and enjoys a spiritual value in Islam, thus its translation into other languages is always characterized by a clear evaporation of the linguistic and stylistic beauties." Consequently, "nothing can be translated from Arabic satisfactorily. The Arabic version of the foreign is always shorter than the original. Arabic loses in translation, but all other languages being translated into Arabic gain" (Salloum and Peters (1990, pp. ix-x). A case in point is the act of offering condolences in English and Arabic.

"Ways of expressing condolences crucially vary from one culture to another" (Hussein, 2023, p. 199). In Arab-Islamic culture, the ideological underpinnings of extending condolences are particularly significant. Fatalism serves as a foundational principle and a symbol of faith, representing a key characteristic of Arab-Islamic culture. As Hussein (2023, p. 200) states, "Condolence tells the bereaved people that death is the individual's destiny since death is [an] inevitable end that might visit anyone [at] any time." One of the most inherently fatalistic Qur'anic verses is كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّوْنَ أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ which translates as, "Every soul shall have a taste of death: and only on the day of judgment shall

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you be paid your full recompense" (Yusuf Ali, 2024, 3:185). Another highly formulaic religious expression is the Qur'anic verse إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون innā lillahi wa-innā ilayhi rāji'ūna, which literally means, To Allah we belong and to Him we shall return." The meaning of this phrase is context-dependent, as demonstrated a few verses earlier: "Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say, when afflicted with calamity: 'To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return'" (Yusuf Ali, 2024, 3:155-6). According to this passage, Allah tests human beings through fear, hardship, and loss, whether in material possessions, lives, or labor. Those who endure such trials and utter this formulaic expression are promised divine reward. In this context, the phrase evokes fatalistic associations in the minds of the reader or listener, reinforcing the cultural and religious significance of resignation to fate.

In English culture, however, "English people in the Western world may not be able to express their condolences and feelings by using the right words. They feel lost, hesitate to speak, and sometimes remain silent, unable to formulate a suitable statement" (Zunin and Zunin, cited in Abdul-Majid & Salih, 2019, p. 546). Similarly, Brennan (2008, p. 345), in studying the Hillsborough disaster and the condolence books following the death of Diana, concludes that these books "demonstrate the relatively narrow range of words available to us in times of loss and the ways in which emotions triggered by personal loss are altered by our attempts to language them."

Nevertheless, Smith (cited in Hwayed & Al-Ameedi, 2022) stresses the presence of condolence formulaic expressions in English, categorizing them into four types: (1) classical stock-based condolences, which are contextually appropriate for all occasions (religious, cultural, social, etc.), such as "I am sorry," "with a heavy heart," "sadly passed away"; (2) religious belief-based condolences, which align with an individual's religious beliefs–for instance, in Christianity, "rest in peace" is commonly used to show respect and sympathy for the deceased; (3) quote-based condolences, which involve repeating phrases from poetry, sacred texts, or well-known sayings; and (4) condition-of-the-deceased-based condolences, which provide relief to the bereaved, particularly in cases where the deceased had been suffering from a chronic illness (Smith, cited in Hwayed & Al-Ameedi, 2022, p. 2). Brenan (2008, p. 337) describes the characteristics of condolence books, stating that "the depth of religious content and engagement takes a variety of shapes and forms, ranging from the frequent appellation 'God bless' to the more substantive citation and allusion to biblical scripture." Brenan (2008, p. 336) further discusses the function of eulogia, explaining that "condolence messages operate not only to commemorate the deceased but also to comfort and console the author and the message's intended addressee, usually the community in mourning at large." This function aligns with the condolence circulars in this study, as will be demonstrated later.

Regarding English-Arabic translation, Hussein (2023, p. 195) explores the challenges faced by translators when rendering Arabic condolences into English. Hussein finds that these challenges are inherently cultural and suggests that they can be addressed by ensuring that the target text evokes the same emotional effect as the original.

3. Methodology

As a research tool, condolence circulars will be analyzed to explore how translation functions within a funerary context. The study examines these circulars through the lens of the Skopos

theory (Vermeer, 1989) and Nord's (1997) three-fold approach to translation. The overall aim of this article is to investigate the translation of condolence expressions, using three circulars issued by SQU (one circular) and UAEU (two circulars) as illustrative examples.

3.1. Design of The Study

As the research problem was defined and refined, data were selected from three condolence circulars. The total word count for each sample is as follows: Sample 1 contains 60 Arabic words and 40 English words; Sample 2 has 53 Arabic words and 57 English words; and Sample 3 comprises 19 Arabic words and 16 English words. For confidentiality, all personal details have been removed from both the original and translated texts.

Condolence circulars in Samples 1 and 2 follow a relatively standard formulaic structure, including: (1) An introductory condolence message (present only in Sample 1); (2) A Qur'anic verse, intended to provide comfort by evoking the imagery of eternal paradise; (3) a phrase expressing acceptance of divine will and fate (included in Sample 1 but omitted from Sample 2); (4) the name of the issuing institution (SQU or UAEU) as the eulogizer; (5) a eulogy directed toward the deceased's immediately family; (6) a prayer asking for Allah's mercy upon the deceased and consolation for the bereaved, aiming to alleviate their sorrow; and (7) a concluding Qur'anic verse affirming that all human beings will ultimately return to Allah (included at the end of Sample 1 but omitted in Sample 2).

It is important to note that in Sample 1, the condolence message is addressed to a diverse audience, including expatriates from various religious and cultural backgrounds–such as Arab-Muslims, non-Arab Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists–alongside Omani nationals.

Sample 3 differs significantly from Samples 1 and 2 as it begins directly with formulaic expression number 4, followed by expression number 5. This structural variation may be attributed to the fact that Sample 3 is intended for non-Arab Muslim employees at UAEU.

3.2. Significance of The Study

Existing literature on the translating of condolences from Arabic into English is relatively extensive (e.g., Yahya, 2010; Abdul-Majid & Salih, 2019; Hwayed & Al-Ameedi, 2022; Al-Jurani, 2022, among others). However, this study is significant as it focuses on institutional translation, a topic that, to the best of our knowledge, has received little to no attention. One notable exception is a study by Jamoussi et al. (2024), which, while relevant, does not explore the genre of circulars, leaving it an unexamined territory. Additionally, this study is important as it draws on Skopos theory, which may offer valuable insight into the translation of condolence messages within multi-ethnic institutions, where both English and Arabic are increasingly prominent as languages of communication among their staff members.
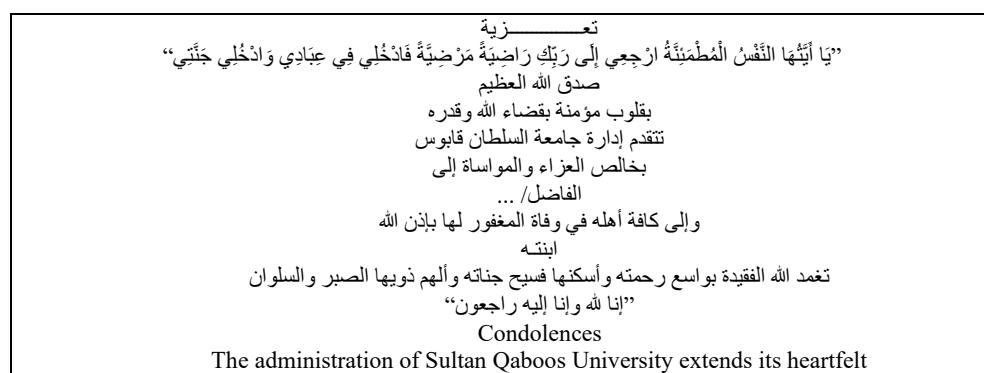
4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The theoretical framework established thus far must be applied to the immediate data to diversify and substantiate the argument. Accordingly, Sample 1 below is examined, which extends condolences to an Omani employee at SQU. In Arabic, the circular follows a distinct textual-visual layout, characterized by a unique combination of lexicon and syntax.

The Arabic تعـــــــزية (literally: "condolence") appears prominently at the top of the circular to ensure that the reader's attention is fully and effectively captured. This is followed by a verse deeply embedded in religious-based social convention: ۞ا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي which translates as: "(To the righteous soul will be said:) O (thou) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord, well pleased (thyself), and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then, among My devotees! Yea, enter thou My Heaven!" (Yusuf Ali, 2024, 89:27–30). The inclusion of this verse in Sample 1 reflects Islamic doctrine, which emphasized the immortality of the soul. Death is perceived not as an end but as a transition to another life. The verse, regarded as a hallmark of Islamic death discourse, is frequently incorporated into both written and spoken expressions of condolences.

The propositional meaning, which refers to or describes "a real or imaginary world" (Baker, 2018, p. 12) operates in conjunction with the following inextricably interwoven utterances, contributing to a consolatory tone. Examples include بقلوب مؤمنة بقضاء الله وقدره (literally: "heart filled with preordained destiny"), بخالص العزاء والمواساة إلى (literally: heartfelt sympathy"), and وفاة المغفور لها بإذن الله (literally: "the departed female"). At first glance, the propositional content of these utterances appear to be in conflict with their pragmatic function–specifically, the illocutionary act of offering condolences. As Farghal and Borini (2015, p. 148) note, "it is not possible to relate the propositional content to its pragmatic function." Nevertheless, the translation appears to have been guided primarily by its Skopos, aiming to evoke sympathy among the target language audience for the bereaved family. Why is it not in 'a clearly reversible way'? While the offer of information in Arabic carries a distinct and unquestionable air of formality, reinforced by its sacrosanct status through the use of a Qur'anic verse and classical Arabic, its English rendering adopts a less formal tone while maintaining coherence and cohesion–for instance, "extends its heartfelt condolences," and "on the sad demise of his daughter."

The explicit purpose in Sample 1 necessitates employing functional-based strategies, bearing in mind the adherence to the target culture norms (Nord 1997). In this case, the translator functions as an independent text producer, deliberately moderating the Islamic tone of the source text by omitting two Qur'anic verses that may not resonate with the target audience. This translation by omission is justified, as Baker (2018, p. 43) explains: "If the meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanations, translators can and often do simply omit translating the word or expression in question."

تعـــــــزية
"يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي"
صدق الله العظيم
بقلوب مؤمنة بقضاء الله وقدره
تتقدم إدارة جامعة السلطان قابوس
بخالص العزاء والمواساة إلى
الفاضل/ ...
وإلى كافة أهله في وفاة المغفور لها بإذن الله
ابنتـه
تغمد الله الفقيدة بواسع رحمته وأسكنها فسيح جناته وألهم ذويها الصبر والسلوان
"إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون"
Condolences
The administration of Sultan Qaboos University extends its heartfelt

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> condolences to
> Mr. …
> On the sad demise of his
> daughter
> May Allah rest the deceased in eternal peace and grant strength to the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss

Sample 1: Condolence to an Omani Employee at SQU

The following section examines Sample 2, where the target language audience is presumed to be Arab Muslim employees at UAEU. Notably, the structure of the input text shares several similarities with Sample 1 but also exhibits distinct differences. Sample 2 introduces the benediction ("In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful") at the very beginning, drawing the TL readers' attention before the Qur'anic verse (O reassured soul…."). The benediction serves multiple functions in Arabic sociolinguistic practice, among which one particularly relevant to our discussion is its role as a permit-getter. As Thawabteh (2016, p. 75) explains, "The rhetorical purpose of the benediction is more or less a sort of warm-up for what will be said so that the audience can psychologically be prepared for receiving the speech" Specifically, in the context of Qur'anic recitation, the benediction functions as a necessary prelude, allowing any reader to recite the Qur'an or a portion of it. This is evident in Sample 2, where the Qur'anic verse requires the benediction. Additionally, it acts as an utterance initiator, whether spoken or written, regardless of the context–be it a Qur'anic recitation, a Friday sermon, a funeral, or a marriage oration.

The Qur'anic verse itself is one of quiet contemplation, intended to remind the audience of the Day of Judgment and destiny–fundamental pillars of Islamic belief. It becomes a vehicle for fatalism, with language conventionally serving as the voice of societal institutions (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 15).

> بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
> "يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي"
> صدق الله العظيم
> تتقدم أسرة جامعة الامارات العربية المتحدة
> بأحر التعازي وصادق المواساة إلى الدكتور...
> وذلك لوفاة المغفور له بإذن الله
> والده
> سائلين لذويه الصبر والسلوان
> In the Name Of Allah
> Most Gracious, Most Merciful
> O reassured soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing to Him
> And enter among My (righteous) servants and enter My Paradise
> Holy Quran, Fajr: 27-30
> The United Arab Emirates University
> expresses sincere condolences to
> Dr. …
> for the passing of his
> father
> May Allah have mercy upon him

Sample 2: Condolence to Arab Muslim Employee at UAEU

In Sample 2 above, the Arabic text exhibits more emotionality and subjectivity than its translation. This is believed to be true as the two languages show discrepancies and disparities in terms of style, culture, and linguistics. The translation is far less stringently formulaic (with clear detachment and rationality) than the original (see also Brennan, 2008, p. 344). Overall, the translation would sound unnatural in English as it is out of tune with the way English text reflects pragmatic reality and develops within such a register. Nevertheless, it remains communicative insofar the intended audience is concerned, i.e., a Muslim audience.
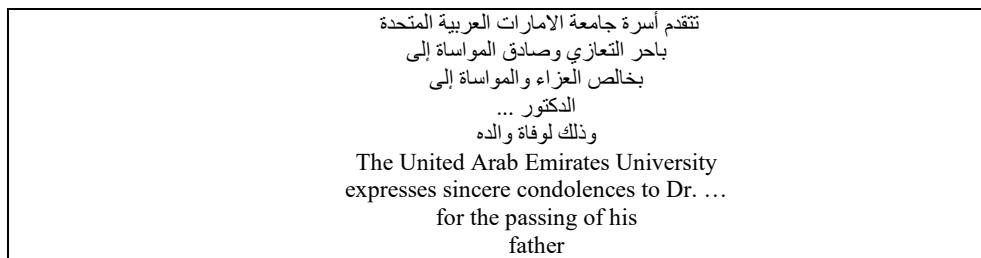
Bearing all this in mind, however, the translation still qualifies as a translation, as it is formally based and longer than the original (57 words in total). From the perspective of Skopos theory, the translation is determined by "a particular purpose and for particular receivers" (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 11). It serves as an offer of information similar to that observed in the original, and it is reversible; simply, the translation seems to have been circumscribed by opting for a formally based translation method.

Following Nord's (1997) approach to translation, the goal of Sample 2 is to preserve the condolence tone as much as possible by employing strategies conducive to that tone. In Arabic, the purpose is explicit–expressing sympathy with the bereaved family. However, in translation, some deviation from the original intent may be observed. Specifically, the target audience is twofold: Arab-Muslim and non-Arab Muslim employees. The former is familiar with Islamic discourse and the underlying ideology of offering condolences, which is conveyed in Arabic. Similarly, the latter is likely to understand the ideology but may have little or no knowledge of Arabic, necessitating an English translation. Regardless of the bereaved employee's background, the higher echelon in Samples 2 and 3 ensures that the communicative intent is effectively maintained. Whether the translation in Sample 2 is considered target-oriented or source-oriented, Skopos theory remains applicable–albeit paradoxically–to both approaches. While the former aligns explicitly with Skopos theory, the latter may not, at least on the surface. However, even when source-oriented, the translation can still be seen as adhering to Skopos theory, as the formally based translation accommodates the religious sensibilities of non-Arab Muslim members of the campus community.

Notably, in Sample 2, the translation targets a Muslim audience that not only recognizes but also internalizes various religious formulaic expressions, often infused with religious terminologies. This audience has a thorough and intimate understanding of such expressions. Interestingly, despite the translation's high level of formality, the communicative purpose proposed by Nord (1997) appears to be maintained. However, we must acknowledge that its functionality is well-suited to this Muslim audience. Munday explains this phenomenon: "A translator would need to decide how much information to add to ensure that sufficient communicative clues were present to allow a TT audience to retrieve the ST intention" (2016, p. 02). In the UAE context, although Arabic is the official language, both locals and Arabs widely use English. Formal translations also cater to this demographic.

Our final discussion of Sample 3 below reveals that the non-Muslim employee audience encounters a fundamentally different translation with a distinctly different purpose. The religious meaning of the original text is, to some extent, attenuated or lost. However, this does not appear to be an issue. Overall, the translation is target-oriented, aligning with cultural expectations. Notably, the original text is condensed to 19 Arabic words compared to the 53 words in Sample 2, likely to maintain coherence between the source text and target text, as proposed by Skopos theory. Simply put, the translation conveys a direct intentionality, closely aligned with the communicative thrust.

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تتقدم أسرة جامعة الامارات العربية المتحدة
باحر التعازي وصادق المواساة إلى
بخالص العزاء والمواساة إلى
الدكتور ...
وذلك لوفاة والده
The United Arab Emirates University
expresses sincere condolences to Dr. …
for the passing of his
father

Sample 3: Condolence to non-Muslim Employee at UAEU

From a Skopos vantage-point, the remarkable uniformity of underlying rules is fulfilled, resulting in a fully cohesive and coherent translation that closely meets the expectation of the target audience.

Conclusions

Institutional translation plays a crucial role in facilitating the workflows of institutions, as exemplified by SQU and UAEU, where condolence circulars may be regarded as a hallmark of this type of translation. These circulars appear in two languages, one of which is typically the source language —most likely Arabic, given its status as the official language. In a study by Jamoussi et al. (2024, pp. 6–7), "over 49% indicated that Arabic was their official language." English then serves as the target language, aligning with the source language in various textual instances.

The three circulars reveal notable discrepancies. The SQU circular addresses two primary audiences: Muslim and non-Muslim. The translation in the circular is evidently functional, maintaining the rule of reversibility and presenting a new offer of information distinct from that in Arabic. For example, the source text, imbued with a religious tone, is rendered into a religiously neutral, formulaic socio-cultural expression.

The study also indicates that the translators' decisions align with Skopos theory, meaning the translation is determined by its intended purpose. In this case, the objective of the translation is to extend condolences to an employee following the death of a family member and to inform other employees so that appropriate social actions can be taken.

The other two circulars by UAEU exhibit notable differences from that of SQU to varying degrees. Although Samples 1 and 2 share some similarities, they also reveal substantial differences. The SQU circular employs a functional-based translation whereas UAEU utilizes a combination of formal and functional translation. The formal translation appears to target non-Arab Muslims who are well-versed in religious formulaic expressions, while the functional translation seems to be aimed at non-Muslims.

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