Interpreting in the Libyan Uprising: A Study of Interpreting Strategies from Arabic to English

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an account of the interpreting process and its strategies in warzones, and most importantly during the Arab Spring, specifically in Libya. The data used is divided into two categories, Mummar Algaddafi speech during the Arab Spring, and press conferences of Libyan officials and two interviews on CNN. The article will present the significant issues interpreters deal with during live interpreting session whether on Live TV or during a conference. The first category to be discussed is omission and the loss of meaning during interpreting. The article will also discuss the way interpreters sometimes tend to add information for explaining purposes or emphasis. Lastly, the importance of creativity and approximating the meaning, as in using metaphors in the TT to interpret ST metaphors. It is evident through the discussion that (1): interpreters deliberately use particular strategies during conflict zones and they are mainly: omission, addition and approximating. This is either to emphasis a particular narrative or shape the audience views. (2) Undoubtedly, interpreters play a major role in rendering the message to the world, as they use different strategies while interpreting some to emphasis a certain narrative, while others simply to clarify the text.

INTRODUCTION

Today, interpreters working in conflict zones are highly regarded as mediators since they operate under different circumstances that inevitably influence their interpretation. The emergence of conflicts across the world, particularly in the Middle East region led to significant need to a fairly new discipline in the Translation Studies area related to interpreters in warzones. Unfortunately, until today, there has been a dearth in research in this particular area; thus, this article aims to shed light on the various strategies interpreters’ use during those times. In this article, we aim to approach the topic from the interpreters point of view, and focus on the strategies interpreters use – whether deliberately or not- while interpreting in conflict zones.

Hence, this article aims to enrich the research conducted about interpreting during times of conflicts by shedding light on specific issues and strategies to which warzones interpreters face during their work. Such issues could either occur due to dialect related issues (i.e. Libyan dialect versus other Arab dialects), or simply because of cultural references that are mainly familiar to the people in that given country. This article intends to highlight several strategies interpreters tend used during conflict times, and highlights the interpreter’s role in conveying the message into the TT audience.

INTERPRETING

“The translator’s activity is more like that of a writer, while the interpreter’s performance is more like that of an actor” (Nolan, 2005: 3). Scholars recognize interpreting as an oral immediate translation (Jones, 2002). There are different types of interpreting; the most common ones are consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. Consecutive interpreting is considered as the oldest and most difficult type of interpreting, it is explained by Gonzalez, Vasquez and Mikkelson as the type where an interpreter waits until the speaker finishes the source language message, and then interpret it into the target language. This type of interpreting requires a set of skills that interpreters should acquire for instance, intensive listening and comprehension skills, note-taking techniques, good knowledge and a trained memory (ibid). Frequently, the interpreters are standing next to the person they are interpreting for in consecutive interpreting and not in an interpreting booth as in simultaneous interpreting.
Simultaneous interpreting (henceforth SI) is defined by Russell as “the process of interpreting into the target language at the same time as the source language is being delivered” (2005: 136). Russell further states that interpreting is a highly complex process in which language is perceived, comprehended, translated and produced simultaneously and under severe time pressure. Mack highlights that SI is the type of interpreting used in conveying information, for example in internationally broadcast summits, meetings and conferences, political statements, press conferences and parliamentary debates. This type of interpreting is sometimes called live voice-over or revoicing (2001). The challenging process through which interpreters go during SI may greatly affect their performance. Jones claims that SI is an unnatural activity and has to be cultivated (2014). He asserts that simultaneous interpreters face many difficulties they need to overcome using different approaches. On the other hand, Gerver argues that the difficulty in the process lies within transmitting the speech at a faster rate, rather than in the process of decoding and encoding (1969). The demanding nature of the SI process may affect the interpreter’s ability, especially when the speech is too long, which causes fatigue and mental strain. In addition, the breaks that the speaker takes, or the speed at which they are speaking may greatly influence the interpreter and drain their concentration abilities leading to exhaustion (Anderson, 1976). In 1978, Seleskovicth describes SI as a multitasking process that requires a high level of concentration, and similarly Phelan (2001) stresses that interpreters today should not interpret for more than fifteen minutes. Pöchhacker draws attention to a survey conducted in 2002, where interpreters showed a high level of work-related, fatigue, exhaustion, and mental stress; they also pointed that it is sometimes challenging to cope with the speaker’s language and delivering speed (2004). Benmamman and Framer (2010) state that no matter how experienced the interpreter is, it is impossible to provide a consistent and accurate interpretation after 30 to 40 minutes of continuous SI. They further assert that scientific studies have proven that mental fatigue sets in after approximately 30 minutes of sustained interpretations, leading to loss of accuracy (2010).

It is quite common that interpreters make mistakes due to exhaustion, or simply because they did not hear a word or did not understand it correctly. Jones states that in case a mistake is made, interpreters have two choices, to either correct themselves, or ignore the mistake if it was insignificant (2002). It is in fact essential that interpreters have certain strategies that help them manage such difficulties. Interpreters should be able to understand the message and skilfully transfer it to the target text TT, not necessarily by finding linguistic equivalents of the source text ST in the TT (Seleskovicth, 1978). It is difficult for interpreters to decide how to approach and respond to certain issues while interpreting, for example, the problem of lack of equivalences in the TT, culture specific references, the existence of different dialects, and the issue of what is considered taboo in the TT. As culture and language are intertwined and as they are both essential for the translation and interpreting process (Faïq, 2008), cultural specificities will greatly affect the interpreting process. Dialects pose another challenge, as Tipton and Furmanek (2016) point out, as it is important to understand and distinguish different dialects to be able to render the meaning correctly. Al-Salman and Al-Khanji (2002) describe nine common strategies that are widely used among interpreters in Arabic-English interpretation when encountering difficulties:

1. Skipping: to leave out unnecessary repetition, redundant expressions or any unimportant information.
2. Anticipating: to expect what will come next and amend the information to put it in the most appropriate way possible in the TT.
3. Summarising: to minimise long sentences by maintaining the content and yet delivering the message.
4. Approximating: to provide the closest equivalent or synonym to have a similar TT expression.
5. Code-switching: to shift the style from standard to informal or colloquial language that is used when the interpreter is under pressure due to the speaker’s fast delivery.
6. Literal interpreting: to use literal translation.
7. Incomplete sentence strategy: to utter unfinished sentences due to the occurrence of unfinished sentences by the speaker.
8. Addition: to add extra information to either explain or emphasise.
9. Message abandoning: to resort to silence when the interpreter cannot interpret the message due to difficulties they are facing.

INTERPRETING IN CONFLICT ZONE

Though scholars such as Inghilleri and Harding (2010) and Askew and Salama-Carr (2011), suggest that there has been an increasing interest in the role of translators and interpreters in conflict zones over the few last years, other scholars such as Guo (2009), Baker (2010), and Footitt & Kelly (2012) allege that very little scholarly literature is available on the use of language in wartime. Nowadays, the significance of similar studies is due to the globalisation of conflicts via the intervention of the International Community and other human rights and peacekeeping organisations in most conflicts worldwide, which gives more attention to the issue of language mediation in wars. The high demand for war-zone interpreters, which emerges from their effective participation in various aspects relating to the conflict leads to a high demand in studies within the field.

DATA

The data for this research consists of two categories. The first category is of a live interpreting session into English of Al-Gaddafi’s speech on Aljazeera English on 22 February 2011. The other category is divided into two parts, (a) an interpreting of two press conferences held in Libya on 18 March 2011 one by the Libyan deputy foreign minister Khaled Kaim while the other by the Libyan foreign minister Musa Kusa, and (b) two interviews broadcasted on CNN channel. Below is the analysis of the interpreting strategies used by interpreting.
**THE ANALYSIS**

**Lost in Interpreting**

As mentioned earlier, interpreting is an exhausting task and hence interpreters are likely to make errors such as restating the words in the source text language, deliberately not interpreting some or merely misinterpreting something. In this section, we will discuss two categories where interpreters lost the meaning. When the meaning is lost during interpreting, it is either a strategy used by the interpreter because of the insignificant of the information, or due to difficulty interpreting the ST into the TT for various reasons such as exhaustion or lack of equivalence.

**Dialectic issues**

Although Modern Standard Arabic is considered the lingua franca for the Arab region, dialects are often used in daily communication. Thus, differences between dialects can create a gap in understanding and in the communication process, which, in turn, can lead to difficulties in interpreting. Das writes in this regard that one word may have different meanings in two different dialects, leaving the interpreter to decide whether to find a regional equivalent or use a standard one (2005). The difficulty does not only lie in understanding certain terminology used within that dialect, but also in the way in which to interpret them and their connotations into the target text language.

Interpreting Algaddafi’s speech is fraught with difficulty as he uses the Libyan colloquial dialect and terminology that is mainly used among people of specific tribes in Libya. Consequently, this can lead to misinterpretation and loss in meaning, as the interpreter might be forced to resort to strategies such as skipping or abandoning a message as discussed earlier. This is shown in the following extracts taken from Aljazeera English (Aljazeera, Feb 2011); the underlined phrases are those the interpreter did not interpret:

| Aljazeera English interpreter | Algaddafi |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| 1 What forced us to this?     | تين إلى زرنا؟ مهاتر لله! يغازى بابتها أنا باقفي طوية طوية |
| Oh god, Benghazi I built it, brick by brick, we are happy with it and still building it now | |

| Aljazeera English interpreter | Algaddafi |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| 2 The leader has a beard and he is telling the women not to go out starting from today. Did you see this setback? He said brought me donations, I am your caliph and I am with Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri! Oh is that it! Do you want to be governed by Al-Zawahiri? | داي لحية ويقول للنسوان ما عاني بيطعن اعتباراً من اليوم، رأيت هكذا؟ قال جوابي! أنا بالائياً أنا باقفي طوية طوية نماي يراك يحكمك الزواحري أخراً! Oh god, Benghazi I built it, brick by brick, we are happy with it and still building it now |

These colloquial phrases are used by Algaddafi, but are not interpreted by the interpreter. Algaddafi uses these phrases as a way of communicating with the public, as his speech is of communicative nature. In the first example, one can notice that the interpreter used the skipping strategy to avoid interpreting the cultural expressions. In contrast to the second example, where the interpreter chose to summarise the ST, perhaps to convey the message in a rather clear way. Thus, it can be argued that the interpreter does not interpret these colloquial words for various reasons: firstly, they are communicative and perhaps less significant as the rest of the phrase in the source text and thus not relevant to the target text audience. For instance the usage of the phrases "what forced u/oh god" is mainly as an exclamation and Algaddafi’s way of showing his denial and unbelievable of what is happening in Libya. One can argue that while interpreting phrases of a communicative nature might always seem insignificant.

The second reason is the lack of equivalence between source text and target text language, and a literal translation would be incomprehensible to the target text audience. Thirdly, the interpreter chooses to interpret the relevant message due to the length of the speech and time restrictions, particularly bearing in mind Algaddafi’s speed at delivering the message. As mentioned earlier, interpreting is a very hard task, and bearing in mind Algaddafi’s improvised speech and his speed of uttering the message may cause several problems to the interpreter. Hence, interpreters usually summarise the gist of the information to interpret, disregarding anything else that they regard as redundant or trivial.

**Overlap between arabic and english**

It is worth noting that during the interpreting of Algaddafi’s speech, there are a number of incidences where the interpreter fails to interpret Arabic words into English and simply repeat the Arabic words, which might be attributed to the interpreter’s fatigue or simply to his inability to cope with Algaddafi’s speed of delivering the speech. For example, the interpreter literally uses the same Arabic word Algaddafi uses; and interprets them into English, or simply disregards it. Consider the examples below taken from Aljazeera’s English interpreter (Aljazeera, Feb 2011):

| Aljazeera English interpreter | Algaddafi |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| 1 Misrata houra, Zliten houra, Khoms houra, Msallata houra... uhuh... free as | مصراتة حرزة, زليتن حرزة, الخمس حرزة, مسلاتة حرزة |
| well well |

| Aljazeera English interpreter | Algaddafi |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| 2 Zawiya...التمرة، أم القبائل الزاوية the mother of all tribes | أنتم قبيلة الزاوية، أم القبائل الزاوية |

As mentioned earlier, interpreting is an exhausting task and hence interpreters are likely to make errors such as restating the words in the source text language, deliberately not interpreting some or merely misinterpreting something. In this section, we will discuss two categories where interpreters lost the meaning. When the meaning is lost during interpreting, it is either a strategy used by the interpreter because of the insignificant of the information, or due to difficulty interpreting the ST into the TT for various reasons such as exhaustion or lack of equivalence.
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The examples above demonstrate the use of two strategies combined together, self-correcting combined with incomplete sentence strategy. This is seen in the first example; Al Gadafari lists names of different tribes and states that they have their own free will. He says the name of each tribe and adds the word حرة /free/, which defines what he means. The interpreter here simply repeats the same list, using the same word in Arabic/حارة/, leaving the target text audience in confusion. He later tries to amend the situation by adding the word ‘free as well’, to correct himself. The interpreter’s repeated use of the Arabic word, instead of providing the English translation, can be explained with the speed with which Al Gadafari listed the cities, thus creating a rhythmic sound, perhaps leading the interpreter to follow the rhythm and mistakenly repeat the word in Arabic. It is also possible that the interpreter simply lost concentration, as this happens after almost 20 minutes of continuous interpreting. This is similar to the second example, when the interpreter mistakenly repeats Al Gadafari’s Arabic words, which is followed by a self-correction and an interpretation of the phrase in English at a later point. It can thus be challenging to be able to maintain coherence in a live interpreting session - the difficulty arguably increases even further in improvised, lengthy, and colloquial speech like Al Gadafari’s.

Addition to the Source Text

Interpreters in wartimes sometimes resort to the addition strategy, which means adding certain material during interpreting process in order to support the narratives of a particular side of the conflict. Various examples of adding expressions by interpreters occurred in the Libyan conflict. In a press conference that took place on 18 March 2011, just one day before the actual implementation of NATO operations in Libya, the Libyan deputy foreign minister Khaled Kaim of Al Gadafari’s regime announced a ceasefire, whilst the Libyan government spokesman Moussa Ibrahim acted as the interpreter. Moussa Ibrahim used the addition strategy to add information, as shown underlined in following example:

| Moussa Ibrahim the Interpreter | Khaled Kaim |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| **1** The other important point is that the armed forces are located outside the city of Benghazi1 | النقطة الأخرى أن القوات المسلحة موجودة خارج مدينة بنغازي |

The interpreter, who is acting as the regime’s spokesperson, added the word ‘important’ in an attempt to stress the point that could prevent the NATO intervention in Libya for emphasis purposes. This is similarly the case in the following example, during a press conference on the 18th March 2011, where Moussa Ibrahim was the interpreter for the Libyan foreign minister Musa Kusa, when Ibrahim used the addition strategy again to emphasize the problem Libyans will face due to the NATO intervention. In this seen in following example, the underlined phrases are those added by Ibrahim.

| Moussa Ibrahim the Interpreter | Musa kusa |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| **1** And we believe that this will take the country back to safety and security for all Libyans... Such as the No-fly zone which includes commercial and civilian flights which will increase the suffering of the Libyan nation and Libyan people and will have negative impact on the general life of Libyan people. Also, the total and inclusive freezing of all Libyan assets and investments will have a very negative impact on normal Libyans and will also negatively impact the way or Libya ability to fulfil its contracts and agreements locally and internationally2 | ولن نهو القصف في مجال تجاري شامل الأرصدة والأموال مما يسبب ضررا كبيرا للشعب الليبي ويشمل مطارات الرحلات التجارية والتجارية ومقاعد الطيران والمسؤوليات وصولا إلى الغرب الذين يشملهم دبلوماسيون واقتصاديون ليبيا وإلغاء الاتفاقيات وانعدام القدرة على الوفاء بالأركان والالتزامات المحلية والدولية |

There are many factors that would justifies using the addition strategy for this interpreter who is originally a Libyan official, for instance the critical timing of the two press conferences, as well as the serious intention of the Libyan regime to prevent the international intervention. This perhaps is the reason why interpreter play a major role in influencing the way the message is being conveyed to another language, and how it may prevent an international intervention through the addition of particular expressions.

There are rather more similar examples in two interviews that were broadcasted in CNN Channel. In both cases, the CNN interpreters attempted to influence the target text by adding phrases to provoke an emotional reaction in the receptors that the interviewees did not say. The first example occurred in an interview held with the mother of the famous victim of rape Iman Al Obeidi, whose story was broadcasted on several channels. The CNN interpreter managed to influence the target text by using the addition strategy and adding phrases as shown underlined, that the mother of Al Obeidi did not say. Similarly to the other example, in an interview held with a former soldier who had defected from the Al Gadafari regime, the former soldier narrated an account of two girls aged 15 and 17 years old who were kidnapped and then raped by the soldiers of pro-Al Gadafari troops. Consider the following examples:

| The CNN Interpreter | The Mother of Al Obeidi |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| **1** It was a feeling any mother would have after talking to her daughter after a very long time... I could not understand a word because she was crying she even made me cry | زى شعور أي أم تحدث مع ولدته بعد فترة طويلة... لم أفهم ما هي تقولها من غيره لكنها تبكي حتى صبرتني |

| The CNN Interpreter | The Mother of Al Obeidi |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| **2** Two school girls 15 and 17 years old. | زوج بنات كانت تعيشين في طرابلس سنة |

It is clearly evident that both interpreters used the addition strategy to add information that have not been said by the narrator in the ST. This can be explained by two main reasons 1) the interpreter aimed to emphasis the tragedy by explaining the situation or giving details, 2) by describing the
The decision by the

Where are you from? From Algaddafi

The Great Jamahiriya

Consider, consider as the Mecca

The Aljazeera interpreter reintroduces Algaddafi’s idea using a word that carries the same connotation as the word in the source text. ‘Mecca’ originally refers to the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the holy city of Islam and the direction to which all Muslims across the world pray (King, 1999). This metonymy has recently been introduced to the English language and is, according to the Meriam Webster Dictionary, used as a reference for a place that attracts many people. Thus, it could be argued that the interpreter uses the word Mecca to highlight the significance of Libya as a country and a role model for all African nations. By doing so, the interpreter skillfully conveys both the message and the stylistic form to the target text audience. To Berárdez, however, using the metonymy Mecca is not a good choice, since the word only carries associations or values in certain societies. He further argues that the word will not be understood by Western cultures, because of its different value in each culture (2013). One can argue that using this term can potentially cause some misunderstanding to the target text audience.

Al-Khafaji highlights that repetition in Arabic “can have didactic, playful, emotional, artistic, ritualistic, textual and rhetorical functions” (2005: 6). Repetition in English Language, however, is considered redundant and undesirable, which may cause a dilemma to interpreters. The translation of repetitions or the use of more than one synonym differs from one interpreter to another, but there are different mechanisms that interpreters use to approach this issue. The first method is to render the word or phrase into the target text language, using the linguistic equivalent. The second method is to convey the meaning in the most appropriate way possible but without reliance on linguistic equivalence. The third way is omission, which means to delete all unnecessary meanings and words to avoid repetition. The fourth is by providing an explanation to the target text audience.

Following is providing an example to the target text audience.

In the following example, Aljazeera’s interpreters deleted there petitions, or explain the repetition to the audience.

| Aljazeera English Interpreter | Algerdafi |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Where are you from? From mariam? Or any other tribe? | كل الشعوب الإفريقية تعتبر ليبيا قلها |
| 1 All african nations consider, consider as the Mecca | كل الشعوب الإفريقية تعتبر ليبيا قلها |

The interpreter chooses to use the summarising strategy by deleting the tribes’ name, and by adding his own explanation. Instead of following the sequence in which Algaddafi mentions the tribes’ names, the interpreter deletes the second tribe and adds “any other tribe”. For the target text audience, the beginning of the target text is ambiguous, and that the repetition of tribes’ names might confuse the audience who is perhaps not sure whether these names are cities or tribes. One would argue that the interpreter renders the message to the target text audience fully, by explaining the significance behind the statement, and by avoiding repetition that might be confusing to them. By deleting the names of the tribes, the interpreter does not disregard any important information, yet manages to render the message precisely as in the source text.

Similarly in the following examples, the Libyan government spokesman Moussa Ibrahim was interpreting for the Libyan deputy foreign minister Khaled Kaim during a press conference, where he used several strategies to render the message in the best way that serves Algaddafi regime’s narrative and agenda, consider the following example:

| Back translation | Interpreter | Khalid Kaim |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|
| The Great Jamahiriya | Moussa Ibrahim | The decision by the Libyan authorities |

In the previous example, Moussa Ibrahim was interpreting from English into Arabic for the Libyan deputy foreign minister Khaled Kaim. Ibrahim somehow used the addition strategy to add the term ‘the Great Jamahiriya’ instead of ‘the Libyan authorities’. This is because the term ‘Jamahiriya’ is mainly associated with Algaddafi and his regime. This is considered as an embellishment of the term ‘the Libyan authorities’, because people in the pro-regime had always been proud to quote Algaddafi’s phrases. However, in another incident when the same interpreter, Moussa Ibrahim, was interpreting for the Libyan foreign minister Musa Kusa, he did
not replace any terms, and he added only one word. He added the word ‘Libyan’ to embellish the image of Algaddafis’s regime, and the fact that he was still in control of all states in Libya. Consider the following example:

| Back translation | Interpreter Moussa Ibrahim |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| Therefore, the state encourages | Therefore, building on this, the Libyan state encourages |

CONCLUSION

Equally, to any other field, warzone interpreters use several strategies, namely: omission, addition and approximating to emphasize a particular narrative or provoke audience’s emotions. Thus, interpreters are not only mediators at conflict times, but they can be the weapon governments use to change the public’s views. The above analysis has shown how interpreting is a sophisticated process, but with similar strategies that interpreters apply in different situations. The most common strategies used by interpreters in warzones are omission, whether deliberately or unintentionally. Omission is usually a method used by most interpreters when the speaker is repeating insignificant information, in case of redundancy, or sometimes when they fail to understand or find a proper equivalence for cultural references used in the source text. Contrary to the first strategy, the second strategy is addition of information, mostly for clarification purposes. However, sometimes, as in the cases analysed above in warzones, interpreters are influenced by their ideology or their political agendas. For instance, they add words, or reproduce the source text in a rather different way to portray a message they wish to emphasize by adding particular terminologies. This is the case with the CNN interpreter, whose interpreting aimed to provoke the audience to highlight and support the NATO intervention. The final strategy, which is approximating, which is a mixture of various techniques interpreters learn and adopt throughout the years of their experience, by being attentive, quick, smart and eloquent. Being an interpreters means losing the luxury of having the time to think and edit your translation, thus most interpreters try to familiarize themselves with the current events to be aware of the culture and terminologies they might come across. Sometimes, with famous quotes, or popular metaphors, interpreters/translators opt to render them into a similar quote or metaphor in the target language, others simply choose to explain or omit the quote or the metaphor.

In this paper, we have argued that interpreters play an undoubtedly role in rendering the message to the target language audience, and at times shaping their opinions according to their beliefs. According to Baker (2006: 105), translators and interpreters face an ethical choice of whether they reproduce the existing ideologies encoded in the narratives of the source text, or if they distance themselves from them. It is especially true during wartime, since interpreters play the role of the mediator between two opposing parties, and what they wish to convey to the world. It is in our conclusion that most interpreters are somehow influenced by their background and ideology whether deliberately or not. This is evident in the terminology they choose, the strategies of omission addition, or approximating and other factors that affect the target text. Nonetheless, interpreters are sometimes influenced by the network’s agenda more than their own, by the way the channel reframe the interpreting by selecting certain parts to air other than others, or by the way it is reframed within the news. Interpreters are sometimes at a dilemma of being loyal to the text, to their beliefs, or to the media’s agenda.

END NOTES

1. The video: (ArchiveLibyan, 2011).
2. The video: (17Feb2011, 2011).
3. The video: (Xgotfiveonitx, 2011).
4. The video: (VexZeez, 2011).
5. The video: (ArchiveLibyan, 2011).
6. The video: (17Feb2011, 2011).

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