

Farghal, Mohammed; Almann, Ali (2015). *Contextualizing Translation Theories. Aspects of Arabic-English Interlingual Communication*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, xi+197 pp.

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The book authored by Mohammad Farghal and Ali Almann is a coherent, very useful handbook of translation theory and didactics focused on the pair of languages Arabic / English. It is approached from a functional, discourse-and-communication perspective. Therefore, this handbook, which is conveniently short, clear and accessible, is aimed at the student of translation as well as the instructor. Organized across a number of key topics or dimensions, all of them broad in scope and generally from a macro, top-level perspective, it also offers a wealth of examples at the micro-level of language use. All in all, the volume attempts to present to the reader an introductory panorama of linguistic, textual, pragmatic, cultural, semiotic and stylistic aspects in order to make (Arabic/English) translation “an informed act”. The small “conclusion” section at the end of each chapter helps summarize the main points and move forward to the next chapter.

This book is a necessary complement for the translation student that wants to apply to the Arabic language the linguistic strategies found in earlier works, but it also goes beyond, giving importance to cultural and social aspects of translation. There are constant references to Arab culture and norms, the examples drawn from contemporary Arabic literature in translation, or the translation of English literature into Arabic. It is very difficult to find apt contrastive examples of the range of linguistic, semiotic, stylistic and intercultural aspects here revised, and much more so when it comes to the pair

of languages Arabic / English, but the authors are up to their profile as sophisticated linguists and translation theorists.

The categories frequently overlap, however. This comes as no surprise to seasoned theorists who know that categories are only means to access the extremely complex and multi-dimensional linguistic phenomena. Chapter nine deals with the “communicative dimension” of translation, and one could argue that in fact all aspects considered in the book are communicative; rather, the focus here is the sociolinguistic aspect of language variation from a classical Hallidayan approach in the path set before by key essays such as Hatim and Mason 1990. The great development of audiovisual translation in recent times could provide much more scope for discussion, for example as regards the increasing use of Modern Standard Arabic, which is less and less restricted to purely formal contexts, or the development of new modes of communication where Arabic has an increasing presence.

Chapters are consistently organized. The authors warn that the translation activity “is eclectic in nature” and that “there is no single paradigm that can respond to all questions arising during the process of translation” (172). I cannot agree more. *To miss the train* in its figurative sense can be approached as an implicature (*pragmatic dimension*, p. 113) or as an iconically functioning sign (*semiotic dimension*, p. 131). The rendering of semiotic expressions cannot be considered different from the cultural dimension of translation. Since, as the authors recognize, “it is quite rare to have optimal equivalents when translating between two languages which are linguistically and culturally distant like Arabic and English”, the focus has to be a different one from that of equivalence or even the “indexical import” (137) of the utterances. Since “languages perceive and map socio-cultural activities and world experiences in different ways” (137), distortion is to a certain extent inevitable. Farghal and Almanna’s functionalistic focus provide an optimistic and felicitous approach that sets the standard for the student and the practicing translator, as well as for the student of contrastive linguistics, always bearing in mind that this is an introductory handbook.

Farghal and Almanna have written a primarily didactic text, and therefore I feel a tendency to emphasize loss or mismatch in the selection of translation examples. As a stylistic guide for the student, the book is valuable and thorough. But I miss, especially in the chapter dedicated to style, the creative power of translation. Being a functionally-oriented essay, it is reasonable that the main focus resides in norms and the elusive aim of accuracy and equivalence. This is a concise and clear handbook with a didactic purpose and, for example, the approach to Bourdieu’s *illusio* and *habitus* (43-45), which is only sketched yet very aptly included, opens up possibilities of further research for the student and anyone interested in how the practice of translation goes beyond a highly skilled attempt at re-telling what has already been said before, pointing instead to a creative, dynamic and socially motivated activity: a “social game” (46) determined by ideologies and many other factors.

This is the work of two scholars who are also reputable literary translators. There is a constant reference to the personal experience of an expert, and the student will really appreciate it.