

Abstract

Sonorous Overtones in Classical Arabic Poetry: Translated?

Languages possess different tools for intensifying overtones of speech. Whereas the resulting effect is semantic, the devices used may be grammatical, phonological or lexical. Words can be “motivated” in three different ways: phonologically, morphologically and semantically (Ullmann, 1993: p. 42). Phonological motivation, including onomatopoeia, sound symbolism, aesthetic effects and associated phenomena are part of the very fabric of classical poetry. Arabic is a non-concatenative language. To create words, it relies on the combination of radical consonantal roots that represent lexical meaning, with morphological patterns, which represent functional meaning. Through the manipulation of morphological patterns, Arabic creates morphologically related words denoting semantically related concepts and ideas. The modification of these roots by means of vowels gives a specification to the primary sounds by coloring them according to the conditions and the point of view that the word it is related to. The language used in Arabic poetry is, thus, made sonorant enough to reflect the poet’s psyche and emotional status through the intensification of speech overtones. Being translated into many Western languages, the overtones that color this poetry are not always in evidence. This research work adopts a comparative approach by assessing a corpus of fifteen French and English translations of a sample verse line from classical Arabic poetry. This verse line employs diverse tools to intensify the poet’s appeal: alliteration, assonance, affective lexical aspects and contrastive parallelism. Assessment in this paper is done diachronically and synchronically. The translations are assessed according to their chronological order, and they are compared to both the original text and to one another. A translation would be considered effective when it conveys the source overtones; the technique(s) of translation used may enable translators to implement different, yet equally effective, intensifying devices.

References

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