

Translating Narrative Techniques in Toni Morrison's Novels into Arabic with Special Reference to the translations of *The Bluest Eye* by Kamel Yusef Hussein and *Beloved*

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Abstract

The main focus of this paper is to explore the narrative techniques Toni Morrison employs in constructing her novels. Morrison builds up her stories to reveal the quest for a distinct cultural identity. Richness of Toni Morrison's fiction is achieved through various aesthetic components including narrative techniques. These techniques shape the narrative style, narrative situation, the narrators, the focalization, order of events, tense, and other elements. The study aims to describe how such techniques which make up Toni Morrison's narrative world are handled in the translation from English into Arabic. It aims to identify and investigate the different challenges translators encounter when translating narrative techniques in the novels of Toni Morrison, with particular reference to *The Bluest Eye*, translated by Kamel Yusef Hussein, and *Beloved* translated by Amin Alayouti. The paper also attempts to show the various translation strategies the translators have adopted in their attempt to reproduce the narrative techniques used in the novels.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, African-American novel, narrative techniques, translation of narrative techniques, *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*.

Introduction

Toni Morrison, a Nobel Laureate, is one of the foremost twentieth century African-American writers whose award-winning novels have captivated the hearts of both the common readers and the scholars of literature. The Nobel Prize committee describes her as one “who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import gives life to an essential aspect of American reality” (Nobel website). Morrison was the first African American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in 1993. Well-known internationally as a novelist, editor and a Professor Emeritus at Princeton University, Toni Morrison is one of the leading literary figures in the whole world. Thanks to translations, readers from all over the globe are now enjoying her stories of African-American suffering and resistance. Morrison is deemed by many as “one of America’s foremost contemporary novelists,” who “had a profound influence on America’s national literature” (Kort 212). Yet, due to translation, her impact is transnational and her audience is extremely diverse.

Toni Morrison's texts are particularly interesting to translators around the world in general and to Arab translators in particular, since most Arab countries were subject to colonization, and are still suffering from its aftermath. Arab countries live in either a colonial, or a post-colonial space, and individuals are struggling to keep their history, culture, and identity. For instance, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison is telling a story that many girls and women in the Arab world can relate to: “Morrison’s writing documents how Black feelings of inferiority result from the values of America’s white hegemonic system: a system she calls the “master narrative” that perceives Blacks as objects of contempt” (Aimee Pozorski 277). The hegemonic infiltration of white values is forced not only into the black community but also in the Arab World which suffers as well from the hegemony of Western ideologies and values. In our world, evidences of this permeation are perceived clearly in the strife of some of Arab people to acquire

Western style. *Beloved* exposes the mechanism through which slavery sought to legitimize itself by "classifying" the African race as inferior. In a similar manner, the domination of the US and Europe legitimizes itself by "classifying" Arabs as inferior and backward. In addition to such similarities between the contexts of Arab countries and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and *Beloved*, many Arab communities suffer from those terms of discrimination that African Americans suffer from. Besides such affinities, Morrison's works provide the Arab literary world, through translation, with works that enrich readers' awareness of African American culture, history and folklore.

Most of Toni Morrison's works have been translated into Arabic. Some works, interestingly, have been translated by two or more translators. Translations are not merely "duplications" of source texts; rather they transfer thoughts, feeling, attitudes and culture.

Examining narration in translation is essential and studying how translators employ narratives and narrative techniques to present them in the TL either by transferring them as they are (foreignizing them) or by making some changes (domesticating them).

Venuti claims that translators of novels usually do not alter the basic elements of narrative structure, "The plot isn't rewritten to alter events or their sequence. And none of the characters' actions is deleted or revised" (470). Nevertheless, changes in certain narrative techniques, however periphery, could be traced in TTs.

On the other hand, narrative theorists often assume that "the act of translation is never neutral and may involve significant alterations (not just with regard to linguistic and cultural issues, but also in terms of plot and narration)[. . .] the rendering of place and time, perspective and narrative voice can vary from source to target text." (Lars Bernaerts et al 204) and this is what the present study endeavors to discuss.

O'sullivan assumes that there are two voices in the narrative discourse of the translated text: the voice of the narrator of the source text and the voice of the (implied) translator. The voice of the translator can be identified on two levels: the first is the voice of the implied translator as the author of the paratextual elements such as prefaces, endnotes, footnotes, and here her/his voice is clear. Hermans believes that there are situations in which the translator has "to come out of the shadows and directly intervene in a text which the reader had been led to believe spoke only with one voice" (cited in O'sullivan, 202).

The other voice, of the translator, as O'sullivan argues, can be identified on a discursive level, as a voice at the level of narration itself, one which is not assimilated into the voice of the narrator of the source text. Therefore, when there is a dislocation between the two voices, the voice of the translator is heard, not hidden (205). It is according to the translator's choice to determine the extent to which his or her voice is heard as separate from the author's voice. Hilikka Pekkanen explains that in situations of choice between two or more feasible alternatives "the translator either takes a step further from the author's choice or decides to follow the author's voice more closely" (3). The translator, thus, either follows the authorial choices closely or chooses to produce narratological effects which differ from those produced by the author. In the latter case we can hear the translator's voice (4).

Narration is a complex subject, containing within it a great number of concerns. Porter Abbott identifies narratological concerns as follows: prolepsis, analepsis, point of view, voice, order, anachronies, distance, omniscience, and other concerns (339).

The narrative techniques employed by Toni Morrison, in her works reveal the quest for distinct creative writing. In 'Memory-Creation and writing' Morrison explains that as she developed the pieces of a story, she discovered

that she preferred them unconnected. She feels that “the resulting narrative, with events that relate, but do not flow coherently or directly, best communicates the story of the fractured perceptions resulting from a splintered life”(338). This accounts for the links between form and content in Morrison's fiction. “Fractured narratives result from and reveal the splintered perceptions caused by shattered lives—from the wounded Pecola Breedlove (*The Bluest Eye*) to the scarred Sethe Suggs (*Beloved*)” (Rose 38). Jane Atteridge Rose believes that Morrison's uniting of form and content facilitates the objective of having readers fully experience the text (38).

Analysis

Narrative Structure

Morrison's mastery of the art of narration takes her novels, including *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, to a new level of style and makes them “writerly texts”. Roland Barthes defines a ‘writerly text’ as one which: (a) starts by foretelling the end in the beginning; (b) uses the multiplicity of entrances and exits for the narration and narrators; (c) employs a non-linear chronology; and (d) offers a severely twisted plot (cited in Mansouri and Omar 336).

All these features reveal themselves in *The Bluest Eye*: The novel is circular; it starts from the end and its events move towards this end. The cyclic nature of Claudia's narrative is also suggested by the season headings Morrison gives to the four parts of the novel. The narrative cycle begins with the part entitled ‘Autumn’ and ends with ‘Summer’.

Beloved's narrative is neither chronological nor linear; it is related through several narrative voices in flashbacks that take us from freedom to slavery and vice versa. It stands in opposition to the linearity of Western history. The “narrative meanders forward, slips backward, spirals upward or downward, and then goes forward again. Individual stories complement each other; readers must participate by collecting the partial stories into a whole”

(Lovalerie King 68). *Beloved's* narrative is "comprised of the fragmented recollections of Sweet Home's traumatized survivors" (68). Single events are revisited from multiple points of view, which Morrison presents by employing first and third person narrators.

The Translators' choices

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison chooses a young black girl who is an observer-participant in the story and as one of its main narrators. Harold Bloomfield observes that Claudia has "two voices in the story. The primary one is her adult self-looking back on the year when the marigolds failed to bloom and her friend Pecola withdrew from their common life into mental illness; the other voice is Claudia's rendering of herself as a child growing up in Lorain, Ohio" (39). The distinction of the two voices is clear through the difference between the simple language Claudia the child uses and the more complex one Claudia the adult uses. The question is how could the translator make this distinction clear in the TT?

The introductory passages are narrated by Claudia the adult as she reflects on the year when marigolds did not bloom,

What is clear now is that of all of that hope, fear, lust, love, and grief, nothing remains but Pecola and the unyielding earth. Cholly Breedlove is dead; our innocence too. The seeds shriveled and died; her baby too. (21)

In the TT the voice of Claudia the adult carries a similar tone, of an adult,

أما ماهو واضح الآن فهوأنه من كل ذلك الأمل و الخوف والشهوة و الحب والحزن لم
تبقى إلا بيكولا و التربة المجدبة. لقد مات تشوللي بريدلوف، و كذلك براءتنا و ذوت البذور
و ماتت، و كذلك وليدها أيضا. " (19)

Claudia the child appears in the narration of the events in that year, about her adventures with her sister Frieda.

My sister comes in. Her eyes are full of sorrow. She sings to me:
“When the deep purple falls over sleepy garden walls, someone thinks of me” I doze, thinking of plums, walls, and “someone.”(12)

However, instead of keeping the perspective of the child and preserving the simplicity of its language, the translator, as in the following example, uses a complicated style that is not consistent with the child's perspective and diction:

تُقبل اختي وعيناها مترعتان حزناً. تغني لي: "عندما يحلّ الأرجوان العميق على أسوار حدائق الناعسة، سيفكر احدهم فيّ.. " تأخذني سنة من النوم، وأنا أفكر في أشجار البرقوق، والأسوار، و "أحدهم" (26)

Here the translator uses "مترعتان" an eloquent word for full, and تأخذني سنة من النوم, a very elevated way of saying “I doze”, which has Qur'anic undertones . The perspective in this example from the TT does not, therefore, match that in the ST, which is meant to capture Claudia's language as a child. As the translator makes some changes, we may say here the voice of the translator is audible.

In addition to the first person singular which shows in the above examples, Morrison also creates the voice of an omniscient narrator to offer her readers details unreached by Claudia. However, narration keeps alternating between third and first person; character-narrators, other than Claudia, appear in the form of 'first-person-narrators to tell their thoughts. These include: the mother, Pauline Breedlove, the father Cholly Breedlove, and the misanthrope Soaphead Church who take part in the narration, tell their own agonies and offer their perspectives on the events. Toni Morrison successfully and innovatively makes switch between the first and the third person narrators to sail deeply in the consciousness of her characters and to fathom their complex psyches. In the TT the translator tries to reproduce such structure in which different narrators take parts.

In *Beloved*, The story belongs mainly to Sethe, but “her narration and recollections must be considered along with information revealed through the third-person narrator and the voices [and perspectives] of other characters” (68). The omniscient narrator does not pass an ethical judgment indirectly to the audience giving readers the space to think as one way Morrison uses “to evoke strong reader interaction with her texts” (Devine viii). An outstanding example is the presentation of multiple versions of Sethe’s infanticide and the delay of passing any kind of judgment of her act. The omniscient narrator delves in characters’ minds and provides the reader three different perspectives of the same action, the infanticide. The first one is focalized through the schoolteacher who comes to take Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home,

Right off it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim. [...] Two were lying open-eyed in sawdust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one—the woman [...] You’d be feeding them maybe, holding out a piece of rabbit in your hand, and the animal would revert—bite your hand clean off. [...] The whole lot was lost now [...] She was looking at him now, and if his other nephew could see that look he would learn the lesson for sure: you just can’t mishandle creatures and expect success. (149,150)

This racist perspective of the schoolteacher is not to be accepted by the audience after seeing much of the inside of Sethe in the previous narration. Phelan writes, “We feel emotionally, psychologically –and ethically - jarred by seeing her from what is such an alien perspective, one that thinks of her as “a nigger woman” and as a “creature” equivalent to a horse or a hound” (324). Phelan further explains that the revealing of the incident from this alien perspective is put first as a narrative strategy for two reasons: to highlight the inadequacy of schoolteacher racist perspective and to show the horror of Sethe’s

action without any emotional inclination. "The physical description is not pretty and it is impossible to find a way to make it pretty" (324).

"وضح على الفور، بالنسبة للمدرس على الأخص، أنه لم يكن هناك ما يطالب به. [...]
كان اثنان منهما يرقدان في النشارة مفتوح العين؛ والثالثة تضخ دما على ثوب
الزنجية الرئيسية- المرأة [...] ربما تطعمهم ، وأنت تمد لهم قطعة من أرنب في يدك
فيرتد الحيوان- ويقضم يدك و يبتريها بترًا. [...] كانت تنتظر إليه الآن، ولو أن ابن أخيه
الآخر كان بإمكانه أن يرى تلك النظرة لاستوعب الدرس بالتأكيد: أنت لا تستطيع بكل
بساطة أن تسيء معاملة المخلوقات و تتوقع النجاح." (263،264)

The TT reader could feel the racist tone of Schoolteacher and the physical description that lacks any kind of respect or feelings. The perspective is kept through the use of a similar angle in both ST and TT, where numbers are used rather than names to identify human being "إثنان", "الثالثة", "الرئيسية" the equivalents of "two", "the third", and "the main one", respectively. Such use of numbers rather than names, and its production in the TT, is important to reflect the perspective of the schoolteacher, who sees human beings as chattel and who counts slaves as property rather than views them as humans.

The second telling of Sethe's murder of her child, is made through Stamp Paid's perspective; it provides things left in the first telling, how and why Sethe ran to the shed with her children,

So Stamp Paid did not tell him how she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way: one on her shoulder, one under her arm, one by the hand, the other shouted forward into the woodshed filled with just sunlight and shavings now because there wasn't any wood [...] Nothing but sunlight. Sunlight, shavings, a shovel. The ax he himself took out. Nothing else was in there except the shovel—and of course the saw. (157)

Stamp Paid's description is still from the outside. Even though he describes her like an animal, he does not humiliate her, he tells about her instinctive reaction to anger, and as if from Sethe's own perspective, he captures the horrible feelings Sethe experiences the moment she recognizes Schoolteacher.

Examining the target text, we find a similar presentation of Paid's thoughts, in terms of perspective

وهكذا لم يخبره ستامب بيد كيف طارت، تنتزع اطفالها كأنها صقر يحوم؛ كيف انعقف ووجهها، كيف عملت يداها كأنها مخالب، كيف جمعتهم بكل الطرق واحدا على كتفها، و واحدا تحت ذراعها، و واحدا تمسك به من يده، والآخر تصيح به أن يتقدم إلى الأمام في سقيفة الخشب التي تمتلئ بضوء الشمس فقط والنشارة الآن لأنه لم يكن هناك أي خشب. [...] لا شيء سوى ضوء الشمس. ضوء الشمس، النشارة، و جاروف. كان هو نفسه قد أخرج الفأس. لم يكن هناك أي شيء آخر سوى الجاروف- وبالطبع المنشار " (275,276)

We notice here the similarity even at the level sentence structure, and the repetition of 'sunlight' for emphasis or aesthetic use to create a certain emotional effect. Morrison here uses multiple narratives as a technique that helps her reader to withhold any ethical judgment of Sethe. However, Stamp Paid's telling participates in presenting the horror of Sethe's action, "a pretty little slavegirl had recognized a hat, and split to the woodshed to kill her children" (158):

"و تعرفت أمة جميلة صغيرة على قبعة وغادرت المكان إلى سقيفة الخشب لتقتل أطفالها" (276)

The contrast here is between the condensing description of Sethe, as "a pretty little slavegirl", "أمة جميلة صغيرة" which seems positive, and the plain statement of the killing "to kill her children", "لتقتل أطفالها". The ethical complexity lays in this contrast that has been reproduced in the TT. Phelan explains that the plain statement contrasted to the description of Sethe swinging

her baby may lead us, as readers to the ethical judgment that her reaction was wrong (325). However, the condensing description along with our previous sympathy towards her give us space to postpone any judgment and continue to contemplate the horror of Sethe's reaction and look for other versions of the same event. Readers of the TT are empowered to give similar reactions to the text as the multiple perspectives are transferred into the TT.

The third telling is made by Sethe herself with some comments by the narrator. Phelan contends that Sethe with her circling around represents the author's technique of circling all stories purposefully (326). Sethe's story is thinking more than saying. It is in the form of rememory, of what happened,

Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off— she could never explain. Because the truth was simple, [...] she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings [...] And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe. (163)

Sethe's telling of the event is obviously the opposite of the two previous tellings. The progression of narrative perspectives is from the outside represented by Schoolteacher, to the inside of Sethe. Phelan notices that the purpose of her choice was not to kill but to protect. Her instinct is of a 'mother-love' which is part of humanity. Sethe here does not show any of the horrors of what we saw in the two previous tellings. Hers is a simple and normal reaction

voice, here we also trace the translator's choice to interfere in the selection of tone, which, however, slightly alters the perspective of the narrator.

Conclusion

It is important to understand that to "read Morrison without attention to her narrative structures and methods is to obscure her always careful relation of character to theme, shape to focus, voice to effect" (Wagner 203). The two translations discussed keep the multiple perspectives and voices selected by the author and follow the angles of vision from which the events are narrated. However, in certain instances, the translators intervene and slightly change the features which distinguish the voice of the narrator. O'sullivan explains that when the translator makes changes at the discursive level, his/her voice would be audible. The translators of the two novels do not frequently intervene with the voice of the narrator, and hence their voices are rarely audible. Nevertheless, their voices are sometimes heard. The translator of *The Bluest Eye* changes a child perspective into that of an adult, whereas the translator of *Beloved* tames a violent accelerating scream into an organized repetition of "no". Overall, Toni Morrison has a unique skill of telling stories and an exquisite art of narrating her novels. Kamel Yusef Hussein, the translator of *The Bluest Eye*, and Amin Al Ayouti, the translator of *Beloved*, managed for the most part to reflect Morrison's unique narrative techniques which reflect her themes and bring to life her characters.

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ترجمة تقنيات السرد في روايات توني موريسون إلى العربية بالإشارة إلى ترجمة روايتي "eeBluestEyhT" لكامل يوسف حسين و "elovedB" لأمين العيوطي

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المستخلص:

تقوم هذه الورقة البحثية بدراسة تقنيات السرد التي تستخدمها الكاتبة الأفريقية الأمريكية توني موريسون في كتابها رواياتها لإظهار الهوية الثقافية التي يتميز بها المجتمع الأفريقي الأمريكي . و تزخر أعمال توني موريسون بالعديد من العناصر الجمالية و منها تقنيات السرد التي تشكل و تبني أسلوب و حالة السرد و الرواة و ترتيب الأحداث و الزمن و عناصر أخرى في بنية السرد . تهدف الورقية البحثية لدراسة كيف تم ترجمة هذه التقنيات إلى العربية و تبحث عن أهم التحديات التي واجهها المترجمون في روايات توني موريسون بالإشارة إلى رواية "TBluestEyehe" "أكثر العيون زرقة" ترجمة كامل يوسف حسين و رواية "Beloved" "محبوبة" ترجمة أمين العيوطي . و تظهر الدراسة أهم الاستراتيجيات التي استخدمها المترجمون في محاولتهم لنقل تقنيات السرد إلى العربية.

الكلمات الدالة : الرواية الأفريقية الأمريكية ، تقنيات السرد ، ترجمة تقنيات السرد ، أكثر العيون زرقة ، محبوبة .