CULTURAL COGNITIVISM AND THE TRANSLATABILITY OF THE ARABIC PROVERBS

EL COGNITIVISMO CULTURAL Y LA TRADUCIBILIDAD DE LOS PROVERBIOS ÁRABES

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Resumen: El propósito de este artículo, que no pretende ser exhaustivo, es analizar algunos proverbios árabes desde la perspectiva lingüística-cognitiva, para determinar la oportunidad y capacidad de su traducción a lenguas románicas como el español.
Palabras clave: Árabe, español, inter-traducibilidad, proverbio, románica.

Abstract: The objective of this paper, without any pretense to be an exhaustive study, is to analyse several Arabic proverbs from a linguistic-cognitive perspective, with a view to assessing their suitability and capacity for translation into some of the Romance languages, such as Spanish.
Key words: Arabic, inter-traducibility, proverb, Romance, Spanish.

The collection of proverbs has been selected as a source for the data analysed for its special and specific nature. There can be no doubt that a collection of proverbs in any language represents the most sublime linguistic expression of a people's idiosyncratic character and system of values, as well as the thousand-year old depository of a determined collectivity. In this sense, sayings and proverbs constitute a veritable treasure trove not only for the linguist but also for those specialists using the language in order to analyse and describe such features as are inherent in a specific culture.

The collection of proverbs may equally serve as a corpus to analyse, describe and compare the degree of similarity and difference between various cultures. The verbal aspect, prime source of every type of phraseology, links the proverb to the popular language and to spontaneity. Since the proverbs have a collective authorship, they clearly belong to the collective community which has spawned it. This is so inasmuch as the individual listener comprehends the proverb even though it may not have been uttered in its entirety. The subject of a proverb (or a saying) is the culture which has seen it come into being. Thus – and particularly if it is in frequent use – it mirrors the conceptual world of this community. A phrase such as *a la chita callando* ("furtively, on the sly") would be incomprehensible without some knowledge of Spanish history, culture and fauna. Therefore, the question of how proverbs are invented and received can be tackled from a variety of perspectives:

THE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Proverbs, and the wide range they cover, stem from the system of values sustaining the ideals of a community of people. Proverbs give a pointer to what that community considers positive or what it rejects as negative. Thus, a collection of proverbs reflects a system of values marked culturally, bringing with it a didactic and instructive dimension for coming generations. We do, however, find, apart from these universally recognizable features, reference to such items as clothing, food, festivals and celebrations, and even mourning.

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

History has a certain impact on the invention and spread of a number of proverbs. In many of them the historical events are fundamental, since many incidents and situations throughout history have given rise to the creation of not a few proverbs. Therefore, recreating these circumstances contextually is an indispensable condition for understanding the *raison d'être* of such proverbs. In the case of the Portuguese and the Spanish proverb the historical dimension is fundamental for….

1 the reception and understanding of many proverbs and the wide range they cover both semantically and pragmatically.
2 understanding their *raison d'être.* In other words, some knowledge is essential of the historical vicissitudes and implications in order to know why a proverb is the way it is. *Ni quito ni pongo rey, sino que defiendo a mi amo y señor* ("I neither banish nor appoint a king, but defend my Lord and Master") refers to a historical event, in the same way as *lanzada a moro muerto* ("it's easy to be brave when the danger has passed").

All of this is due to the fact that the proverb or saying is eminently verbal as opposed to written, as is a joke or other linguistic manifestation of collective and anonymous authorship. The apprehension of a proverb, although it may be universal, is subjective and individual, which is why the historical dimension is indispensable in order to conceptualise and translate it. Proverbs have arisen in a specific cognitive atmosphere, and they are put to use in a concrete situation related to the subject speaking or to his audience.

> ".....in a particular fashion, the very consequence of their verbal nature, of the specific way of conceiving and materialising the spoken language (not read, or recited, or written), all these expressions adapt (formally and semantically) in a perfectly natural way to the subjective necessities of the speaker and in the context of the conversation" (Vigara Tauste, 1998:126).

This verbal and subjective dimension sometimes forces us to reconstruct the historical context of the birth of the proverb or saying. The reconstruction of the historical context is particularly necessary in order to interpret it with its full pragmatic values, as in the following instance:

A proverb such as إن لله جنودا منها العسل, "*Among God's soldiers, honey"* is impossible to understand unless we reconstruct the context. It deals with an invincible highwayman called *Al Ashtar, the clever one,* who could only be overcome by being poisoned with honey. The proverb is only

effective if supplemented by the saying "*obsession is worth more than pure strength".* In the following example the historical perspective is very explicit:

جازاه جزاء سنمّار*("He was paid the way they paid Sennamar").* The latter was a famous Persian mason summoned to build a palace of hitherto unknown proportions for a pre-Islamic monarch, an ally of Persia, who governed the Arab tribes. When the mason had completed his architectural wonder, the king, instead of rewarding him, did away with him so that he shouldn't be able to build another similar one.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE

In addition to the temporal aspect already mentioned, the spatial dimension is sometimes a determining factor in the invention of proverbs. Space not only permits the creation of specific proverbs but can be reflected in them by means of three dimensions.

NATURAL GEOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Names of rivers, geographical features such as hills and mountains, plains and deserts run through many of the proverbs. In this respect – with the exception of the mention of some place names – the geographical descriptions do not encounter any problems of translation. Compared to the animal world, and making exception for *Mecca* and *Uhud*, they are without the special symbolic importance attached to the names of animals. Words such as *river, mountain, well, land, clay…*appear. One example is the following:
ألقاه في اليم وقال له: إياك، أياك ان تبتل بالماء *("He threw him into the river and said 'Be careful, mind the water doesn't get you wet").* This proverb applies to situations in which our actions involve a series of inevitable conclusions.

FAUNA

Animals are constantly present in the proverbs through the use of similes and metaphors- in some cases- and more explicitly in others. In Arab culture the animal is very illus-

trative, and has played an important role in many Arabic works of fiction prior to the tenth century, such as *The animal* by Al Yahid, *Animal Life* by Damiri, or the best known work in the West, *Calila y Dimna* by Ibn Al Muqaffa, translated during the court of Alfonso the Wise, and which La Fontaine was acquainted with before writing his *Fables.* We must not forget, moreover, that a sura in the Qur'an quotes the name of *The animal,* in which, among other representations, a comparison is made between animal organisation and human organisation. In point of fact, the composition of an Arabic proverb includes every type of creature – horse, camel, lion, elephant, monkey, hyena, wolf, fox, dog, gazelle, sheep, ram, goat, bull, giraffe, donkey, snake, crocodile, tortoise, hedgehog, alligator, ant, silkworm, spider, fly, bee, butterfly, hare, rooster, hens, fish, eagle, owl, crow, turkey, ostrich, mouse, duck…The creature is not, however, named as such, but by means of the characteristics and values which the Arabic language attributes to it. That is to say that, when a particular animal appears, the reader will not percieve it in its literal sense, but in what it represents for the community of speakers. These creatures appear catalogued according to the symbolism afforded, for example, their strength, their capacity for memory, astuteness, dignity or lack thereof, rare existence, etc.

The animal appears under observation, with domestic animals more frequent as well as those forming an integral part of Man's environment, together with such as possess certain features particularly outstanding and offering a good example. Less frequent are those which are considered weak and feeble, lazy and less intelligent. In the case of the latter, they usuually appear as supplementary to the action and not in a subject role. Hence the cognitive value of these representations. Of the animals, the one valued most highly for its nobility and intelligence is the horse, as opposed to the common Western concept relating Arabic to the camel. A horse, in the early years of Islam, was actually valued as equal to ten camels. In the proverbs the horse represents beauty, speed, loyalty (over and above that which the dog symbolises in Western culture), strength and power, intelligence, perspicacity and dignity.

أحرى من فرس *Swifter than a mare.*

أبصر من فرس *Better vision than a mare* (said about people with good eyesight).

ليس الفرس بجله وبرقعه *The mare is not a mare for her saddle and tackle.* (equivalent to "clothes maketh not the man").

لكل جواد كبوة *For every horse, a setback.* (in other words, even horses can slip up. Everybody can make mistakes).

The lion is the symbol of courage, of command, respect and being in charge. He's the King of the Woods. These attributes, either Man has to have them or should have them. He does have them in proverbs such as ..

هذا الشبل من ذلك الأسد *This cub belongs to that lion* (in other words, "like father like son" or "a chip off the old block", but only in a positive sense).

He should have these attributes in.

الكلب الراكض خير من الاسد الرابض *A running dog is better than a sleeping lion.*

The duck is the symbol of innate skill and efficiency acquired genetically:

إبن الإوز عوام *The duckling is a born swimmer. "Like father like son",* when the action valued and commented upon is positive.

The monkey is the symbol of restlessness, feebleness, lack of dignity. There is, in fact, an inverse representation of the monkey in Spanish and Arab culture. The "monkey boy" in Spanish is good-looking. The "monkey boy" in Arabic is ugly. Thus:

القرد فى عين أمه غزال *In the eyes of its mother the monkey is a gazelle.*

The wolf is the symbol of unjustified aggression, savagery, treachery, hunger and irresponsible valour. The snake shares with the wolf the vices of treachery and disloyalty.

أغدر من ذئب *More treacherous than a wolf.*

من استرعى الذئب فقد ظلم *Whoever commends himself to the wolf as shepherd, is acting unjustly.*

لا تلد الحية إلا الحية *The snake only gives birth to another snake.* ("A chip off the old block", in a negative sense).

The gazelle is the symbol of beauty, speed, affection and sleep. There are a number of phrasal expressions in this category:

Sleepier than a gazelle. Swifter than a gazelle.

تأتي الثروة كالسلحفاة، وتذهب كالغزال *Good luck arrives at the pace of a tortoise and departs like a gazelle.*

Another example is the following:

أقول له تيس، يقول لي احلبه *I tell him it's a billy goat, and he tells me to milk it.*

This proverb is used when the nature of the request does not correspond to the situation. The problem facing the translator is that it might be difficult for anyone not acquainted with animals and farm life to understand. She-goats are milked, not billy goats. Another difficulty resides in the fact that in Arabic the word "cabrón" does not have the same meanings as in Spanish. Thus the word for "male goat" is sixth in ranking order in the Spanish Royal Academy Dictionary, the first being "person or animal playing dirty tricks or causing a nuisance".

The camel, an exotic creature in both Spanish and Portuguese, is famously present in a large number of proverbs.

لا ناقة لي فيه ولا جمل *In that matter I've neither a male or a female camel,* implying that the matter does not concern one, or that nothing is lost by it.

استنوق الجمل *The male has turned into a female camel.* This proverb is used to make an example of a disgraceful person.

أخلف من بول الجمل *More back to front than a camel's piss.* Camel-drivers are well acquainted with the fact that the penis of a camel points forwards when mating but backwards when urinating. The proverb refers to people who adopt contrary attitudes.

FLORA

Equally important in Arabic proverbs is the presence of vegetation, and it is expressed with similar characteristics and in similar terms to those of the fauna. One example is the following:

الزين فالدفلة ولكن حار *Beauty exists in the oleander, but bitter it is.* In other words, there is extraordinary beauty in this poisonous plant. Don't allow yourself to be attracted by physical beauty (especially among people) but be aware of the moral aspect and attitudes.

البصل طال طوله، مرده لأصوله *However much the onion grows, it'll return to its former shape.* The onion, when it is green, has a shoot which can reach a length of over one metre, but the more it grows the more it dries up and returns to its former size under the soil.

All these manifestations, with their particular cognitive perspective, exercise an impact on the strategy used in the translation process. The object of this Paper is to describe the degree to which these manifestations impinge on the translating of an Arabic collection of proverbs into an Indo-European language, as is the case of Spanish, Portuguese or English.

A PROVERB'S TRANSLATABILITY

The ability and capacity to translate a proverb are conditioned by several converging factors.

The linguistic aspect.

The proverb generally rules out a denotative reading. Being a phrasal expression, the words of which it is composed may only be construed as evoking a meaning foreign to their literal sense. This externalisation, as it were, of the evocative and significative nature of the reference is what has brought the Spanish philosopher, Ortega y Gasset, to apply a negative label to the use of phraseology in thought transference:

> "The mission of thought is to reflect upon the state of things (…) Let us suppose, however, that a man uses thought, not to reflect upon those things, but to construe them in an imaginary way, adding any bits they might be without (…) More falsehood, falsifying (…) That's what I call thinking in phrases, or in phraseology" (Ortega y Gasset, 1966:482).

This interpretation by Ortega y Gasset settles for denoting reality through linguistic descriptions as opposed to the use of reconstruction or imaginative representation, as is the case with phraseological expression and metaphor, for example. He is thus condemning, among other pragmatic aspects, the utility and effectiveness of the proverb or saying in describing and mirroring currents of thought. For that is what the saying and the proverb are – phraseological expressions. They do not lend themselves to a strictly controllable reading via a semantic application of the meaning, but go beyond their linguistic aspect, so to speak, in order to engage their associative and evocative elements. Clearly, then, when not operating strictly via the signifier/significant mode, but instead incorporating the meaning deriving from its inherent symbolism, the proverb *particularises* where formal language *universalises.* This particularising aspect is perhaps what has brought Ortega y Gasset to condemn the process of

phraseologising, as it encapsulates, in a certain sense, thought which our author understands as being universal. In order to overcome this negative element which in no way helps resolve the problems confronting the translator, we find fit to apply Zuluaga's suggestion for the analysis of phraseological constructions:

> "When analysing vocabulary, the translator must examine not only the simple words as such, but also – and this is most important from a cognitive point of view – the composition of the units and the prefabricated constructions" (Zuluaga, 1999:539).

This examination is above all of a linguistic nature, but it is also supra-linguistic inasmuch as it involves a life experience existing within a community of a determined speech pattern.

Lexical

The vocabulary shaping the construction of the various proverbs reflects the life experience of the community which has given rise to the proverb or saying. The diverse activities, whatever they may be (mercantile, agricultural, industrial, technological) are also cognitive factors to bear in mind in analysing the construction of the sayings. Let us take, for instance, this proverb:

إن مما تنبت الأرض، ما يقتل حبطا أو يلم

Of that which grows in the earth, some will satisfy and some will kill. That is to say, out of the good may emerge the bad, and it would be as well to do all things in moderation. The vocabulary in this example pertains to Nature, the soil and livestock. Not all leafy and seemingly harmless plants are nutritious, we are told, but may well turn out to be toxic. This proverb reveals itself to be the inverse of the Spanish saying: *lo que no mata, engorda* ("if it doesn't kill you, it'll fatten you"). While this Spanish proverb tempts us with articles of food of doubtful health value, the Arabic proverb advises us not to have too much trust in appearances, and in any case proceed with moderation.

The collection of proverbs, stemming as it does from the immediate experience of the community from which it derives, is impregnated, as in the cases we have previously considered, with natural elements from the immediate environment. A frequent feature is the universal presence of animals. The names used, however, are in the majority of cases representative of the perception the community has of birds or animals. In other words, the names are not descriptive but associative and symbolic. The name of the bird or animal evokes certain cognitive associations and symbolisms. Some of them are universal or capable of being universalised. The *lion* is the king of the jungle. The *tiger* is a fierce wild animal. The *fox* is sly and cunning. The *eagle* is a bird flying high, powerful and majestic…etc. Other birds, however, although common in the Mediterranean Basin, do not acquire the same symbolism. The owl which in Spain brings good luck, and which sometimes hangs as a charm in necklaces, is a bird signifying bad luck *par excellence* in the southern Mediterranean. Some small birds, although known by their scientific nomenclature, do not possess the same symbolism. For example: إن البغات يستنسر في أرضنا *The little bird, al Bugat, in our land becomes an eagle,* which is to say that "among us, the weak one puts on a bold appearance, making himself strong". This proverb has at least two applications. It refers as much to the feeble youngster as to the fact of "allowing the weak to get the better of us". The name of the little bird, *Bugat,* in this proverb is more symbolical than descriptive, on a par with what is the case with the eagle. For speakers of Spanish and Portuguese the symbolism of the eagle is similar to that for Arabic-speaking people, whereas the name of the frail little bird does not conjure up similar comparisons. A possible solution to the problems of translation into another language would be to use the name of some similarly frail, shy and easily frightened bird in both the Spanish and Portuguese languages.

Although some names are peculiar to a language and complicate translation, the experience they afford may be universalised. The human experience implicit in these names may, in most cases, be applied to the human being irrespective of

his or her culture. In this respect some of them only require a simple linguistic version of the vocabulary as in the following:

اللي ما يعرف للصقر يشويه *He who knows not the eagle, roasts it.* The eagle is a bird of prey very much appreciated in the Arab world precisely because it serves to hunt with. Whoever is unaware of this seizes this useful hunting tool and is worse off for sacrificing it. This proverb exemplifies the person who is incapable of putting true value on his circumstances.

Puns

The play on words in sayings and proverbs is a common feature and appears to be universal. Recourse is had in constructing proverbs to the use of homonyms and polysemy. The following proverb denoting matters of universal experience and observation is very poetic in Arabic in that it combines homophony with poetic use of metaphor: حيث يهوى القلب تهوي به الرجلThe *foot gravitates towards where the heart venerates.* In other words, where our heart is, there our feet will lead us. The linguistic construction in Arabic makes use of the polysemous verb *Hawa:* ("love, venerate, adore, like", enabling persons of different ages and circumstances to interpret at their will). *Hawa* does however, also have the meaning of "plunge into, fall"…

The same phenomenon may be observed in the following example in which there occurs a homonymous construction *Dhahab* (gold) and *Dhahab* (went away).

نحن نحب الماضي لإنه ذهب ولو عاد لكرهناه*We adored the past because (Dhahab) it went away/is golden, but if it had returned we would have hated it.*

There do exist some metaphorical expressions in Arabic using homonyms, however, which sometimes make it difficult to understand them, and they are translated with a meaning foreign to the original, as in this case:

العصا من العصية *Asa is Asiya's.* Asa and Asiya are proper nouns for mares. *Asa,* however, also means a "stick" (chip)

and *Asiya* "disobedience". What normally might be understood by "a chip off the old block" finds itself converted in certain versions into "a stick for disobedience".

This play on words is of course impossible to convey in either Portuguese, Spanish or English. Which is borne out by the following assertion:

> "One of the obstacles continually facing the translator is the translation of phraseological entities, such as idiomatic expressions, proverbs, etc., as they possess a particular structure converting them into singular entities; a problem which is made all the more urgent by the fact that there exist a very small number of bilingual and multilingual dictionaries easily accessible and devoted to this field of linguistics" (Muñoz Sevilla, 1997:431).

The question here, however, is not merely a matter of dictionaries and interpretations which are exclusively linguistic, but also of constructional and cognitive fundamentals, and the significantly wide use of paremiological resources.

We may observe, then, that although the sum of human experience is universal, its means of expression is particular.

Syntax

The syntax of proverbs and sayings is not always in concord with the *ad hoc* grammar of the language it is being served by. When they are not being presented in their entirety as idioms and idiomatic expressions, proverbs may contain these within their structure. Idiomatic language is defined as "using words in a way that sounds natural and grammatically correct to native speakers of a language", as in the Spanish *por si las moscas* or the English *How do you do.* In the following Arabic proverb we may observe that the syntactic structure threatens to be ungrammatical inasmuch as the word order is very unusual:

الغائب عذره معه *The absent party is not at fault* (has his reasons, that is). We can trace these syntactical aspects in

present-day diglossia among Arab communities. The previous example reveals a certain tendency towards dialectisation. The ungrammatical features, however, are not only syntactical but also textual. For – as we stated in the introduction to this work – the authorship behind the proverb and the saying is collective, and with this characteristic, knowledge of it is also collective. That is why on numerous occasions only part of the proverb is expressed, omitting the remaining part which supposedly is widely known anyway. This partial expression of the proverb poses certain specific problems for the interpreter owing to the predictability of proverbial constructions, competently explained by Zuluaga from the communication theory evolved in his research quoted in this Paper. The proverb ضربني وبكى، وسبقني واشتكى *He hit me and he wept/he went forward and he complained,* is abbreviated on more than one occasion to one of the following alternatives:

ضربني وبكى *He hit me and he wept.*

سبقني واشتكى *He went forward and he complained.*

Any member of the native community will have the entire proverb registered in his mind. This collective knowledge, stored away, will allow him to complete the remaining part of the proverb quite independently of the segment spoken. What this segmentation supposes for the translator is that, if he is acquainted with the language but not the culture, he will be restricted to translating the segment in question without taking into consideration the proverb's general perspective. Even if he knows the other half, he will still have certain difficulties when translating only the existing words since the part omitted will not appear.

Parallelisms which cannot be replicated

Although the proverb in its universal aspect represents a human experience, in its particular and idiosyncratic aspect it mirrors an experience without parallel in the language of the addressee. We support in this respect Palmer's assertion, applicable to the case under review:

> "This imaginary world sometimes represents at close hand what we apprehend on the basis of direct daily experience, but which is not to be trusted all that much: on many occasions it offers us alternative realities and worlds of fantasy based on mythology, or on a television series, or on theories which have not been demonstrated" (Palmer, 2002:23).

The proverb does indeed reflect a daily experience not necessarily common or shared by a different community of speakers, but it also makes reference to a world of representations of what that community values either positively or negatively in accordance with its system of values. In a similar fashion that same community will sometimes establish an amalgam, as we have just seen, of reality and desire, and an amalgam of different sources conforming and moulding its roots of knowledge, as might do, for example, the written word or the communication media.

This universality of the human experience and of the moral finds expression in various ways. The Arabic proverb ما كل بيضاء شحمه translates as *not all that is white is fat*, meaning that not all that you see at a grill party is fatty meat. The same notion is put across in the Spanish proverb *no todo lo que luce es oro* ("all that glitters is not gold"). In other words, appearances can be deceptive.

Supralinguistic aspects

The pragmatic aspects rather than the semantic prevail in the delivery and the reception of proverbs. In delivering a saying or proverb, in a communicative situation, a speaker will be encompassing in his interpretation the whole verbal interaction as well as attempting a number of effects strictly not forming part and parcel of the meaning of the segment chosen. Social and cultural patterns governing the way these linguistic productions are put into practice do not always overlap from one language or culture to another. Here the use of the saying or proverb functions to a certain extent like a metaphor. In this respect Hatim and Mason suggest…

> "When an interpreter mediates between two interlocutors speaking different languages, he is faced with two types of problem: on the one hand, the strategies of courtesy tend to vary from one language to another; on the other, the risk exists that the effort to transmit the propositional meaning might come to eclipse all the subtle indicators of the way the interaction is being managed, as well as the interactive strategies of an evasive nature or determined changes of tone, as a result of which the exchange might, for example, give an impression of being more brusque than intended" (Hatim and Mason, 1995:298).

It is clear that in order to transmit both a courteous approach and the essence of the proverbs themselves, a strictly formal command of the two languages in contact with each other is merely a part of what the interpreter or translator needs to be in possession of. A mastery of how to constrict the use of the linguistic productions and their implications is also fundamental in establishing bridges of communication between speakers of different languages. In this respect, and particularly in the use of proverbs and sayings, their evocative power is manifest.

Idiosyncratic aspects

Together with proverbs and sayings, phraseological expressions have been judged to be linguistic manifestations in their own right, which is why it requires much skill in transferring them from one language to another. May the following assertion serve as an example:

> "Traditionally, phraseology has been considered the most idiosyncratic feature of a given community, and as such, difficult or impossible to translate into other linguistic-cultural entities." (Corpas Pastor, 2000:483).

In effect, the particular nature of these linguistic manifestations – as this researcher has well discovered – consists of a hybrid combination of the linguistic element and the supralinguistic element (cultural), something that makes it exceptionally difficult to translate some proverbs with these particular characteristics when in the receiving

language the cultural habits can be very different. As, for example:

بغا يكحل لها عماها *He wanted to apply make-up to her eyes with alcohol (antimony dust), and left her blind.* The difficulty in translating this proverb resides in the fact that supposedly it is her partner who applies the alcohol to the woman. This is an example of well-meaning intentions which end in disaster for which one is utterly unprepared. There are also proverbs which invert the normal cognitive order in Spanish, in which nmerous sayings speak of the contrast between the the outward appearance of things and their reality. The outward appearance is presented as positive and the reality as negative. In Arabic similar contrasts exist between appearance and the being (reality), but the first is not necessarily the positive one:

كفأرة المسك يأخذ حشوها، وينبذ *Like the muskrat, they gather their entrails and discard their good conduct.* This proverb refers to the imbalance which may occur between the utility of the people in question and their behaviour, particularly in the field of work.

Reaction and emotion in the face of different realities

On occasion, not only the task of translating the proverb or saying can be very difficult, but the very legitimacy of its use from the perspective of the target language is questionable. In this respect Corpas Pastor's remarks would seem to be highly relevant in commenting on translatability between Arabic and Spanish:

> "Social cohabitation has compelled us to establish a series of norms regulating relations among men and women. These norms possess a linguistic manifestation through a series of formulae to which the speaker has access in a given situation, even though these formulae not infrequently are resorted to in an insincere fashion." (Corpas Pastor, 1996:61).

A saying the same as a proverb, then, may be understood as a message, an instructive and evocative moral addressed by the Ego, and within which the Addressee has

little rapport – unless the saying by its very nature is of a universal kind. This fact can be explained by the very nature of social cohabitation, which is not only governed by inexplicit conventions (unwritten), but which forces us into a certain conformity both on a spatial and a temporal scale. This aspect is observable in all proverbs instrumentalising historical events, both general and local.

From all of this we may draw a number of conclusions:

1 Proverbs, although many of them are specific, relate a wealth of human experience transferable from one culture to another. The collection of proverbs gives evidence of a possible universal system of values. Positive values in both source culture and target culture are loyalty, courage, efficiency, transfer of good deeds from parents to offspring. Negative values are treachery, hypocrisy, cowardice and indolence.
2 In both Arabic and Spanish many proverbs are based on history and have been formulated according to actual historical events. Translating many of them is a difficult task inasmuch as they refer to realities not shared by the two speech communities.
3 Fauna feature in a significant way in both the Spanish and the Arabic collection of proverbs.
4 Many animals are represented similarly in the two cultures. When an animal is mentioned, no reference is made to it as such, but instead what it represents for a determined community of speakers. This representation is not always symmetrical or similar between the two linguistic systems. The *owl* which represents good luck in Spanish is a symbol of bad luck in Arabic. In fact, an Arabic phrasal expression bears this out: *More ill-fated than an owl.* The monkey used in conjunction with a child symbolises beauty in Spanish, but in Arabic it is a sign of ugliness and stupidity.
5 The linguistic construction of proverbs may be specific when puns, homonyms, etc., are used. This type of construction complicates still more its translation from Arabic into Spanish.

6 Equally difficult to translate are proverbs involving animals whose symbolism differs from one language to another, or if they exist in the one language and not in the other.

7 Sometimes the perspective of reality differs between Spanish and Arabic. Even though many proverbs in the two languages denote a positive feature concealing a different negative reality, there do exist in Arabic, however, negative features (rats) concealing a different positive reality (musk).

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