

## The Question of Ethics: What Options for the Translator?

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***Abstract:***

This paper deals with the process and product of translation from an ethical perspective, using Pym's theory as opposed to Berman's theory. Pym's concern is primarily with the translator as a mediator; while Berman's places emphasis on the process. They are seemingly contradictory, but, in fact, they complement each other when it comes to translation. This paper discusses the efficiency of the translation process within Berman's theoretical framework, stressing the task and responsibility of the translator within the translating process wherein the ethics limits are in force to meet the reader/client's expectations. This paper tries to provide a ground for discussion that might help in clearly setting ethical borders in translation. It also negotiates the impossibility of equivalence between languages, and to this effect, it capitalizes on the role of the translator as a cultural mediator.

***Keywords:*** Ethics; Mediation; Responsibility; Translation; Translator

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***Résumé:***

Le présent article étudie la traduction à la fois comme processus et un produit, sous un angle éthique reposant sur la théorie de Pym par opposition à celle de Berman. Les deux théories paraissent contradictoires; mais en réalité, elles se complètent de par l'acte de traduction. Pym attache plus d'importance au traducteur en tant que médiateur tandis que Berman focalise sur le processus comme pivot de la traduction. L'article examine l'efficacité du processus de traduction dans le cadre de la théorie de Berman et met en relief le devoir et la

responsabilité du traducteur vis-à-vis de la traduction pour laquelle l'éthique est appelée à jouer un rôle majeur afin de répondre aux attentes du lecteur/client. L'article tente de relancer le débat sur l'éthique de la traduction dans la perspective d'en redéfinir des règles de façon mieux cernée et plus claire. Il discute également l'impossibilité de l'équivalence entre les langues; c'est pour cela qu'il s'appuie sur le rôle du traducteur en tant que médiateur de la culture.

**Mots-clés:** Éthique; Médiation; Responsabilité; Traduction; Traducteur

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## Introduction

This paper discusses ethics in translation. The choice of this issue is not gratuitous since it poses real, challenging problems in the rendering of content dealing with translation—especially texts that are closely linked to humanities. This makes the issue of translation controversial, as there are no universal translation standards of ethics. Being a communication channel, translation is called upon to mediate between three sets of ethics: the ethics of source text, the ethics of the translated text, and the ethics of the translator. These sets are culturally bound. Ethics, in this respect, depending on the producing culture, changes and, as such, a definition of ethics becomes necessary.

Some online dictionaries such as [thefreedictionary.com](http://thefreedictionary.com) and [Merriam-Webster.com](http://Merriam-Webster.com) define ethics as “moral principles that control or influence a person’s behavior”; “a social, religious, or civil code of behavior considered correct, especially that of a particular group, profession, or individual”; and/or “rules of behavior based on ideas about what is morally good or bad” (Ethics, 2016a; 2016b).

These definitions underscore a certain degree of moral control conditioning the human conduct in general. For the sake of this paper, I have adopted, and following Seeber and Zelger (2007), the last definition because it clearly marks out the frame or space wherein translators can work at ease without trespassing the correctness of behaviour (good or bad behaviour). Some may wonder why we need to argue for or against ethics in translation as if we were discussing human relationships or behaviour. As a communication mediator, the translator should abide by these ethics since “all the ethical decisions draw on both factors, intention and consequences (e.g. a good intention may be motivated by an assessment of the potential consequences of a particular action)” (Seeber & Zelger, 2007: 295).

The issue is that most of the time the translator’s intention is to produce a “good” translation. In the translation process, the translator is confronted with what we may call the “textual intention” or the intention contained in the text. This leads to *interpretation* more than anything else, making the whole translation enterprise subjective.

It is important to point out that the original message always contains all three levels of information, verbal, semantic and intentional. However, it is up to the interpreter to assess the amount of each kind of information he chooses or needs to use in order to attain the goal of a truthful rendition.

(Seeber & Zelger, 2007: 296)

## Background

Our focus, as translators/translation producers, is to find an appropriate way within all these vague concepts. This stance emanates from the shared belief that “le traducteur est considéré comme opérateur pratique de l’acte de traduire et sa manière d’opérer est jugée en fonction de ce qui est tenu socialement pour le bien et le vrai de la traduction” (Gouanvic, 2001: 34). Gouanvic states that the translator is an agent in the translation production, who is socially accountable for the act of translation. As a matter of fact, the translator is ethically engaged in the translating process as a producer of a target text but also committed to the consequences of his/her translation.

This paper discusses ethics from a philosophical perspective and argues that the concern with ethics has exclusively to do with the conduct of the translator who needs to reflect on him/herself first, and then on his/her activity in a very critical way. Baker and Maier (2011) point out that:

Reflecting critically on ethical behavior means examining one’s own values, becoming more aware of them, and assessing them critically. It is ultimately a question of personal integrity, not skill in following a prescribed set of rules.

(Baker & Maier, 2011: 4)

The integrity is ethically put to test questioning the translator’s supposed neutrality, which is fundamentally needed in challenging situations where s/he is influenced or when his/her discernment is impacted on in very nuanced situations, where orienting the text purposefully becomes unethical and disserves the profession. The translator, as a member of a community, must help in mediating effectively between two languages and cultures.

As a mediator, the translator tries to reconcile two different cultures. As such, the translated text becomes the product of a forced “consensus” through which the process of translation is carried out. S/he engages his/her moral responsibility and assumes the rendering in terms of the three levels mentioned above (i.e., verbal, semantic, and intentional) with the view to achieving a “faithful” rendition (Ladmiral, 1979).

The translator’s task is not only to capture the linguistic information contained in the text, but also to account for their translation to an audience with a sense of morality likely to be different from their own. “Il convient de ne pas oublier que les comportements humains sont aussi des comportements sociaux et que c’est l’agent, c’est-à-dire l’opérateur pratique, qui en est responsable” (Gouanvic, 2001: 43). The differences in social behaviours are the product of various cultural, social, economic, and political factors interacting to impose rules of conduct. This confrontation between all factors involved in translation such as text, audience, intention, register, genre conventions, the receptor culture, the receptor language, and even the general political (ideological) circumstances, make of the translation act a hard task.

Translators need to be objective. Here again, this term needs to be handled with care since it can be subject to debate. For us, objectivity lies in the way translators set up scopes within which they become morally responsible for their translations and they have to cater for a loyal service to the client. Here, we join Vermeer’s point of view, which says that:

The key term here is loyalty, which is assessed primarily by determining whether the translator has met the requirements outlined by the client. However, translators also need to take into consideration other communication partners, such as the ST author and the TT readership. A translator who did this is ethically correct. Clearly the ethics of service is inspired in large part by the proponents of the Skopos theory.

(Vermeer, cited in Clifford, 2004: 97)

Loyalty, for us, does not mean servility. It is a common ground wherein translation (as a product) becomes possible by way of combining what translation imposes as ethically correct and the constraints involved in the act of translating, without forgetting to preserve, as much as possible, the interest(s) of the clients. Professional translators somehow obey market rules. For their survival, they need to find an ethical balance between serving the interest of the client, the translated text, and the community to whom this text is addressed since the translated text may have social implications.

As translators, we contend that translation's ultimate goal is to facilitate communication *via* textual equivalence regardless of the kind of equivalence we would like to achieve; however, total equivalence is an illusion. The problematic issue underlying the present study is "that bilingual texts, a product of translation, often create the optical illusion of 'equivalence' for readers; especially when they are presented as parallel texts in en face bilingual editions" (Lee, 2011: 879). The two texts, written in different languages, do not convey the same cultural background. This asymmetry bloats and complicates the translator's job. Language describes the intrinsic realities of a community with reference to its culture. A meaning may be misunderstood if dissociated from its milieu-culture. A search of the right functional equivalent is more than required, especially when it comes to translating, for instance, content that is deeply rooted in the culture.

## Research Questions

Two questions were selected that might comprise all the constraints to be dealt with while translating:

1. Do concepts like fidelity, loyalty, faithfulness, exactness, accuracy, and acceptability have any ethical impact in the rendering?
2. Is it ethical for the translator to display or manifest their ideology through translation?

These questions help legitimize the act of the translating process and the value incurred by this production. Such process can never avoid the translator's subjectivity. Concepts such as accuracy, exactness, and faithfulness, for example, purport to other directions, like equivalence—a value in translation in general. What is at stake is finding a way of communication between cultures. This type of communication is somehow subjective and approximate.

For the sake of our argumentation and exploration of the issue of ethics in translation, this paper raises questions that are to be discussed through two translation theories (Berman's and

Pym's) and analyzed relying on a the text-sample written in Arabic. The purpose is to see whether its content and form are transferable to the French language and culture or not.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To discuss the questions raised, a theoretical framework is proposed, whose tenets are inspired from two theories: translation as process and product (Berman, 1985); the translator as an operator of both the process and the product (Pym, 2012).

To examine the extent to which Berman's approach to translation can be effective with respect to the target text, I intend to study the text regardless of its genre (or type). It is known that Berman's focus is on literary text. Pragmatically speaking, and as professional translators, we subscribe to the view that considers the text as a string of sentences constituting a body called text having a meaning and a function.

### ***Berman's Theory***

For Berman, the translation process goes beyond transferring the amount of information contained in the text to capture the identity of the text, its content, and its writer/translator. "Berman proposed that one should 'receive the Other as an Other', the consequence was roughly that one should translate literally so as the reader understands that the source text comes from a different culture" (Pym, 2012: 10). If we ever agree that "receiving the Other as an Other" is the premise in translation, how should we account for equivalence, exactness, and accuracy?

Berman sets up the theoretical foundation(s) for translation, saying that: "Nous partons de l'axiome suivant: la traduction est traduction-de-la-lettre, du texte en tant qu'il est *lettre*. Que cela soit l'essence ultime et définitive de la traduction, s'éclairera peu à peu (1985: 45). For Berman, the translating process revolves around the letter as the core of the translation, dismissing any other component of translating. His book is a plea for considering the letter not the spirit in translation. As translators, we know that sticking to the letter is to foreground the cultural and linguistic "particularism", which could jeopardize communication between cultures. Translators search what is universal because it helps them in the rendering of a text in an acceptable way. He adds:

Poser que le but de la traduction est la captation du sens, c'est détacher celui-ci de sa lettre, de son corps mortel, de sa gangue terrestre. C'est saisir l'universel et laisser le particulier. La fidélité au sens s'oppose-comme chez le croyant et le philosophe- à la fidélité à la lettre. Oui, la fidélité au sens est obligatoirement une infidélité à la lettre.

(Berman, 1985: 53)

As mentioned above, the cultural and linguistic particularism lies in the letter. To be faithful to the letter mechanically induces a betrayal of text meaning and vice-versa. Translators are inclined to look for the best way to make their texts (meaningful) and acceptable to the receptor culture. They fully engage themselves to recreate and reproduce a balance between form and content whenever it is possible, keeping in mind that the heading under which they work is to provide a translation likely to achieve accuracy, the closest way possible, but not all the time faithful to the original. Sticking to the letter, whatever the genre or typology of the text is, is

echoing that translation is impossible, and advocating for the impossibility of communication between cultures. History shows that communication is and will still remain possible through the channel of translation, regardless of the inherent flaws.

What is unsaid in Berman's plea for the letter in translation is that he defends the dominant status of the French culture and subsequently the French language. He asserts that:

La France classique avait posé sa langue comme le medium modèle de la communication, de la représentation et de la création littéraire ; ce medium s'était constitué par l'exclusion de tous les éléments linguistiques vernaculaires ou étrangers.

(Berman, 1985: 56)

The reading/ interpretation of Berman's theory may suggest that he is missing those old days when the French language was predominating and imposing itself as a model of communication. Advocating the letter not the spirit may be related to what is called "l'exception culturelle française". For fear not to hybridize the French culture, and maintain its superiority as a satellite culture, any foreign text has to keep its own identity to be clearly and easily distinguished/identified.

### *Pym's Theory*

Critical of Berman, Pym argues that "Berman assumes, un-empirically, that the translator belongs to the target culture, acting as a border-guard delegated to ensure the foreigner that he is readily distinguished from the native" (2012:10). This means that the translator will foreground and accentuate the textual asymmetry, which certainly tends to thwart the appropriate communicative purpose of the translated text. Is it ethical for translators to stand as border-guards to remind the foreigner that s/he is readily different from the native? Berman posits that "the ethical act consists in recognizing and receiving the Other as an other", whatever the origin of this Other and its content may be (cited in Pym, 2012: 8).

For him, translation must keep literal, not to the spirit of any text "la traduction de la lettre". Ethics, for Berman, lies in "un certain respect de l'original" (Godard, 2001: 68). This is problematic in the case of the text under study. Emphasizing Berman's view on the respect of the original, Godard argues that "la traduction éthique manifeste des rapports entre les langues et les cultures toujours asymétriques" (2001: 72). Berman's viewpoint is that translation marks or rather underscores cultural differences and sets barriers to prevent cultures from appropriately communicating (avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts).

For Godard, "Berman ne définissait le 'bien traduire' qu'à partir de l'intention du traducteur" (2001: 69). Godard's argument is that for Berman, a good translation depends a lot on the translator's intention. In pursuit of his critique of Berman, Pym asserts the following:

This "Other"; this "Foreigner" Berman speaks about, is only a textual object that represents the absent person. The foreigner is only there as a token. Berman is no doubt keen to welcome the foreigner, but, as we have noted several times, he is not really involved in giving out cartes de séjours to any actual foreigners.

(Pym, 2012: 92)

In addition, “Berman welcomes the foreign, but only for as long as he remains the master of a monolingual inn” (Pym, 2012: 92). For Pym, the focus is on the translator as the main mediator between two or more languages/cultures. The translator is invested with a high authority and a function that ensures the transfer of whatever the circumstances or the conditions are. S/he acts as a “bi-cultural”, equipped with the suitable cultural background knowledge that helps provide a “good” translation. The translator appeals to an extended knowledge: the language, the culture, the circumstances of production (in terms of time and space), the audience, the supposed function of the text to translate and, of course and above all, the client’s requirements. A translator is a service provider; s/he manages the different constraints inherent to the process of translating like the cultural lag that exists between languages/cultures involved in the translation.

As already mentioned, the translator’s task is to provide communicability between cultures, or at least, facilitate understanding since his/her bi-culturality helps in bridging cultures. This task incurs a certain moral responsibility on the translator, being the warrantee of the transfer of the textual substance of any translation with the potential risks that this translation may generate. Practically, the translator has the flexibility to undertake translation in a way to fit in the function of the text s/he is translating. This flexibility is not absolute, but limited in scope since it allows for the effective management of the translation constraints (in terms of language, cultures, politics, or ideology). In support of this argument and in a dialogue based on Berman’s claims, Pym (2012) contends that the translator should:

- Respect the integrity and exactitude of the foreign expression? No sir, we don’t do that—we improve texts, to make them sound better, since that’s what our clients want.
- But we must receive the foreigner as a foreigner; we must open our culture to the other; we must cease to impose our voice on the rest of the world.
- We must give our clients and readers the high professional standards they demand. We are translators, not border-guards or shapers of French culture.

(Pym, 2012: 3)

Pym’s approach is to shift the whole focus from the text and the process towards the person dealing with the process to achieve text production. I totally agree with Pym’s approach since I believe that texts are dynamic, and that their understanding is an ongoing process that relies on some floating features, necessary to the understanding of the text. This understanding is temporal and momentary. The translator is the only illegible person to capture these floating features, analyze them, and provide a correct—not good—translation through their mediation of the two cultures.

Translators agree that cultures regulate contents. Language is only a means whereby culture manifests itself. Meanings (or messages) have no existence unless contained and comprehended within a specific culture, “in principle, contents are regulated by cultures, yet the intercultural space of the translator seems unlikely to be governed in that way” (Pym, 2012: 9).

Pym adds interculturality as a new crucial factor, which is liable to provide a good comprehension of the source culture and then, to reproduce a text that fits the requirements of an acceptable or “good” translation. Bi- or multi-cultural translators work within the intersections of the cultures involved in the translation process.

To go back to ethics, Pym maintains, “a translator ethics is not necessarily an ethics of translation” (2012: 13). The difference is that the ethics of translation lie in respecting the

content of the text in a way to render it as faithful as possible. The translator is committed to the text, not the effects the text may cause. The translator can focus on the letter only to observe the ethics of translation as a product. However, sometimes the letter goes against the spirit. He/she has to decide which of the letter or the spirit is to be taken into account. In doing so, the translator is engaging the translator ethics not the ethics of translation.

Being central to the process of translation, the translator decides on the way or the approach to adopt in translation. S/he deals with the text as a substance of his/her own work consciously or unconsciously conditioning “the ethical scope”.

The intersection of the cultures constitutes a “grey zone” where the original cultural information is received for, say, packaging, and delivered again in a translated text, complying with the norms of the receiving culture. The grey zone is the space and/or opportunity given to the translator to manipulate or readjust, for any reason(s) the text depending on his/her intention (good or bad faith). Interculturality lies in the linguistic skills and knowledge of the cultures involved in the process of translation. It helps the translator in assessing the translational situations and dealing with that grey zone, wherein ethics is not only recommended, but also needed to result in an accurate translation that “safeguards” the verbal, semantic, and intentional levels of any text.

Morality or ethics does not offer any clear set of rules or guide for the translation process. As translators, we end up with a few ambiguous general principles subject to open interpretation. What seems ethical for one might seem unethical to another. The flexibility in interpreting the ethical rules, in one way or another, may push the translator to take advantage of the grey zone positively or negatively and, may result in double-edged effects.

It can be inferred that the assessment of the translated text is to be done through values of “le bien” and “le vrai de la traduction”. The big issue for the translator, however, is to know what is socially “le bien” and what is socially “le vrai de la traduction”, since these unclear concepts are yardsticks whereby the quality of the translated text is gauged. In the same line, Gouanic states that “le texte traduit est alors censé produire un discours homologue au texte source, transportant le lecteur cible dans l’altérité du texte cible, homologue à l’altérité du texte source” (2001: 38).

To rely on the good and the true about translation is to be defined as universals to all existing cultures. The purpose is to allow a friendly exchange of “Otherness” and “Sameness” to break down the cultural barriers and make of the translated text a “citizen of the world”. Concepts such as universality and globalization were expected to help homogenize all cultures, but resistances emerged to fire-back the process under the so-called hegemony of one culture/language.

It is idealistic to believe that translation is about reproduction or recreating (total) homologies between texts. Homologies are possible when cultures are of the same position and where the world is conceived of in the same way. All professional translators know that, most of the time, (total) homology is hard to achieve, if not impossible. For this reason, a particular attention is to be paid to the translator who can inform their reader appropriately or mislead them purposely.

The translator deals with inter-connected constraints: content, language, and culture. In his/her attempts to overcome these constraints, the translator’s role changes not only into a communication facilitator, but also into a mediator between two or more cultures. In fact, translation facilitates access to the source text, helping readers to move towards the Other (as a text).

**Analysis of a Case Study*****Data Presentation***

For the sake of our argument and demonstration, this study starts from data taken from a diploma written in Arabic.

الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلاة والسلام على خاتم النبيين وقائد المجاهدين حبيبنا محمد وعلى آله وأصحابه  
أجمعين ومن دعا بدعوته وعمل بسنته إلى يوم الدين.

The translation into English is as follows:

Praise to Allah, Lord of the worlds, prayers and peace be upon the last prophet and Commander of Al-Mujahidin, our beloved Muhammad, his family, companions and all who subscribe to his cause and follow his traditions to the judgment day.

The translation into French is as follows:

Louange à Dieu Seigneur des mondes, et prière et paix soient sur le dernier des prophètes et commandant des Moudjahidines, notre adoré Mohammed, et sur sa famille, ses compagnons et ceux qui appellent à sa cause et suivent sa tradition jusqu'au jour du jugement dernier.

Another sentence that is of note to this study is the following:

ورئيس الجامعة إذ يمنحه هذه الشهادة يوصيه بتقوى الله عز وجل وأن يتعاهد القرآن الكريم بتلاوته أثناء الليل وأطراف النهار.  
وأن يعمل بتعاليمه وأن يعلمه غيره. والله الموفق وبه نستعين.

The translation into English is as follows:

The president of the university conferring the diploma recommends that the candidate be pious towards Allah, maintain the holy Koran recitation (day and night), follow its precepts and teach it to others. May Allah grant us success and help.

The translation into French is as follows:

Le président de l'université lui décerne ce diplôme et lui recommande d'être pieux en vers Allah, de lire le Coran tout le temps (jour comme nuit), d'appliquer ses préceptes et de l'enseigner aux autres. Qu'Allah nous octroie réussite et nous accorde son assistance.

The French translation is to provide the reader with an idea about the genre of the document under study. It is admitted that these sentences were not retained in the translated text since they

are, in the view of the author, semantically void when it comes to the translation purpose (Skopos) or the process to be achieved. The reason for dismissing the sentences mentioned above is two fold. First, because the document is intended for a secular French administration that denies any religion in the administration sphere. The second reason is that these sentences, if maintained through translation, will negatively affect the value of the text, since the Other (the reader) will, for sure, misinterpret the intended meaning in a way that, perhaps, would demonize the text, simply because the reader is not able to capture the real cultural meaning of these sentences. Some words/expressions pose real problems with regard to the political context prevailing in recent years in Western countries.

### ***Context of Production***

To help the reader understand the context of this translation, this document was translated as a requirement for the client's application to the Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (OFPRA) for asylum in France. OFPRA is a public institution whose task is to scrutinize dossiers submitted by refugees to have a *carte de séjours* (residency permit). The institution is under the tutelage of the Ministry of Interior, which is, in one way or another, supposed to be bound to follow the immigration policy set up by the French government. The social and political situation in this country is so critical that immigration is seen as blight to combat at any cost. The daily news we receive from different channels show how difficult it is to be a refugee nowadays, especially with the Syrian Crisis (not to mention Libya, Sudan, and Afghanistan).

The West considers immigration, especially Arab and Muslim immigration, a threat to Western identity. The happenings in recent months denote that there is a serious problem between Islam and the West. Terrorist attacks in the heart of Europe such as those of Bataclan, *Charlie Hebdo*, and Zaventem Airport are symptoms of the cultural malaise that contributes to rejecting the Other.

It is a fallacy to believe that these tragic events and, under mass pressure, pushed the government to harden its immigration policy to meet the expectations of the voters. The policy shift was operating years before and toughened during French Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy's mandate. For sure, all European governments are tending to renegotiate the Schengen Agreement to allow the implementation of a national policy for immigration and avoid Brussels' directives on the matter.

### ***Discussion***

The document suggests that it belongs to a typical register conveying a religious discourse. It opens with "in the name of Allah most gracious most merciful" and includes other sentences and expressions that can be interpreted in different ways in the eyes of an alert and wary French audience—particularly when it comes to Islam. As a reminder, *Charlie Hebdo's* cartoons presented the prophet, wearing a turban with a bomb on his head, a fact that reveals the extent to which Islam is associated with violence and thought to be the manifestation of threat and discomfort. Taking into consideration these tragic events, it is possible to deduce that these incidents and events show that there is a serious conflict between the West and Islam.

The choice of this translation is to demonstrate the impossibility of establishing equivalence between the source text and the target text. The translator/agent is somehow torn

between keeping “fidèle” to the text or to manipulate it to meet the expectations of the would-be audience, taking into consideration the general context of the textual production.

Put simple, the document was to be produced by a client for his application as asylum seeker in France, a country where immigration is no longer welcome, as was the case in the 1970s. To the French, Muslims’ immigration is the origin of all social problems the country is facing. With this context in mind, translation, as a process, needs to find a *consensus* between the textual content, which, it is convened, is untranslatable as it is without any modification considering the political context; and the receptor audience who look upon Islamic reference with much suspicion.

The first reading of the document suggests that it is more like a preaching text rather than a diploma. The document covers a register that brings in a very typical discourse. It includes terms and expressions that, if translated literally, as Berman recommends, would be interpreted differently from that intended in the source text simply because the receptor culture is not ready to accept the foreigner.

Terms and expressions like قائد المجاهدين (literally: “the Commander of Al-mujahidin) and الأخ البار المجاهد (literally: “the brother, the pious, Al-mujahid”) are, from a Western perspective, concepts denoting violence that Islam encourages. Words pertaining to Islam are most of the time decontextualized and interpreted in a different way. The interpretation may seem distant from the real meaning. In the eyes of a very suspicious French audience, the word “mujahid”, for instance, means a potential *terrorist*, a fact that will affect the purpose of the translated text and subsequently jeopardize the client’s interest. Terms or expressions like these are just “flattering words” with no real effect on meaning in an Islamic context.

The main question that should be posed here is the following: Is it ethical to reproduce some kind of discursive homology, knowing in advance that the French administration’s cultural background does not recognize any religious reference? To remain ethical to a certain extent one crucial homology is focused on: the function of the translated document. All of the problematic words that are detrimental to the client were weeded out. Knowing that the receptor culture is secular, all of the religious words were deleted. A format commonly used in writing such documents was also adopted, so as to make the text accepted to the French audience. Only the essential information to duplicate a diploma resembling as much as possible the design of a French diploma was retained. To this effect, the most important components were reproduced, such as:

- Name of the university delivering the diploma
- Name, date and place of birth of the candidate
- Title of the diploma
- Date of the deliberation
- Jury (signature)
- Seal of the university

Rewriting the translated text the way described above complies with the neutrality any official document is to convey and, at the same time, clearly announces the framework wherein the document is meant for: a secular French administration. The homology in translation becomes an exclusively functional one. What is problematic for us as translators is not only the religious discourse to which we need to find homologies if we want to keep “fidèle”, but also some terms that have a particular signification in the Western collective memory. Words like “Jihad”, “Al-

mujahid”, and “Albar, Taqwa” were given completely different meanings from those in their original culture. In returning back to the text, “Qaid Al-mujahidin” is to be translated as the Commander of terrorists; an image corroborated by *Charlie Hebdo*’s cartoons, where the prophet appears with a grenade under his turban. This “semantic shift” is symptomatic in this case.

It is hard, and even impossible, to find a total textual equivalence that allows the kind of homology desired. To this effect, Nord talking about Reiss’s experience as professional translator, asserts that “she [Reiss] knew that real life presents situation where equivalence is not possible and, in some cases, not even desired” (1997: 9). This is exactly what translators face when dealing with some types of texts—and this is the case of the document under study. The term used in the text to translate will have a different sense: “Qaid al-mujahidin” will be understood as “the leader of Terrorists” when relying on Berman’s theory that says translators are to respect the original—that is, the letter not the spirit. The receptor, as far as we know, would not accept the Other (the foreigner).

This situation poses a double-edged ethical problem. As a translator, we are deeply convinced that if we approach the text the way Berman suggests, the result will, for sure, be a rejection of the text content. This will induce a rejection or blockade in the text’s purpose. This means that the client, as an applicant, will be refused asylum simply because the content of the document is unacceptable to the receptor culture. However, as Arab, Muslim translators, we know that the words contained in the document are not as culturally charged and sensitive as they are for a Western reader. They are used just to flatter the holder of the certificate. The grey zone we referred to earlier lies in this conflict situation in understanding the effective purposes of the language use. Translators are needed to be “bicultural” to understand the process in order to handle the problem appropriately within those grey zones. The grey zone appeals to the translators’ ethics rather than the ethics of translation, since as Vermeer says, “the ethical obligation of the translator consists of trying to fulfill in good conscience the goal (of the translation)” (cited in Pym, 2012: 94).

Good conscience is an intricate concept, a fact that accentuates its vagueness. There is no clear definition of “good conscience” all around the globe, but an appreciation and an evaluation of what seems fair with regard to all the cultural elements and factors that help us, as individuals and groups, to classify an action and to regard it as being rather good or rather bad. The subjectivity in appreciation and evaluation through “the cultural binoculars” adds more difficulties to the process of translating and subsequently trap the translator in a “quicksand”.

However, and in order to alleviate the burden for the translator, we agree that the ultimate goal of translation is to achieve communicative purposes. Içoz argues that “depending on their aim and circumstances, translators can take decisions and in order to achieve communication across cultures, they can deviate from a faithful rendering of the original text” (2012: 132), but the translator is also “a mediator whose responsibility is to work to achieve cross-cultural understanding” (Ibid: 133).

The freedom given to the translator and the imbricate and complex factors s/he has to manage within the grey zone impose a way of conduct with clear ethical guidelines. Ethics is a set of malleable abstract principles the individual is liable to interpret and deal with the way that fits his/her desires. Accordingly, Pym maintains, “ethics is only there to help or direct the choices that arise from the translator’s thoughts processes. It is there to help conceptualize relational issues, to foresee possible contradictions, to find and propose satisfying solutions, to facilitate debate and decision” (2012: 69).

The translation process relocates the translator at the centre of translation (as a process and a product). S/he is the one to assume responsibility in case of failure to achieve the communicative purpose of his/her text. S/he has to engage his/her moral and ethical convictions in making decisions and dealing with constraints. Rao asserts that “ l’original appelle un certain nombre de décision de la part du traducteur si bien que la traduction finit par être le produit conjugué de l’arbitraire du praticien et des conditions (historiques, politiques, sociales, etc.) (2004: 17)”.

The nature of translation makes the translators’ production a biased one. In other words, all translations are subjective since translators try to capture the intent of the writer or speaker to overcome the inherent difficulties of the language and the culture. “Given certain pragmatic constraints, the interpreter [translator] may look beyond the words and their combined meaning and rely upon a third message component, i.e., the underlying speaker’s [writer’s] intent” (Seeber & Zelger, 2007: 293).

The translator resembles a physician in their duty; for fear for his/her patient health, s/he tries to provide the best medication, assumes failure of the treatment and affords counselling. In this respect, Pym (2012) says:

As a linguist, the translator could become a sort of counselor on the matter of communication. Instead of asking the client for all the specifics (what to translate, why translate it, how to translate it), the translator could take a large number of these decisions on behalf of the client.

(Pym, 2012: 79)

Yet, s/he is held responsible for the effects and consequences of his/her decisions.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that ethics in translation is very problematic in many respects. The elements that intervene in the process of translation make it hard to find a common ground to allow for an open debate on ethics, starting with clear, non -ambiguous definitions where the terms are easily identified. Relying on concepts like “good” and “bad” in ethics is of no interest, since they strengthen the subjectivity of the translator who may produce a biased product even if, as stated above, the translator is looking for equivalence, accuracy, and exactness—which are themselves unclear and misleading due to the translation substance (language and culture).

The main goal of this paper is to set the stage for an open debate on ethics as rules of conduct the translator has to observe. The risk translations face is the manipulation with the effects that emerge from orienting the text, through the translator’s compass, to the direction s/he wants. For Boulanger, “traduire n’est donc jamais neutre. Par ailleurs, la sociologie de la traduction montre que la langue neutre est une fiction en raison de l’événementialité de la parole (ou l’impossibilité de dire deux fois la même chose)” (2004: 61). The absence of neutrality is due to the lag existing between cultures that affects the way language describes the cultural realities to which each speaker or writer refers.

The purpose of this paper is to pinpoint that the cultural disparities are directly responsible for the grey zones referred to in this analysis. Nevertheless, the argument cannot be taken for granted to mask (or justify) any kind of manipulation. Translators are aware of the

difficulties and the challenges they need to overcome for the sake of communication between cultures through the channel of translation.

Dans le climat de recours nécessaires à la médiation- interculturelle que connaît ce début du troisième millénaire par ses nombreux conflits et l'incompréhension que masquent paradoxalement ses réseaux d'interconnectivité infinie: la posture du traducteur semble ne pas être en mesure d'échapper au politique.

(Basalamah, 2004: 82)

In the same vein Tymoczko (2000) asserts that:

Translations are inevitably partial; meaning in a text is overdetermined, and the information and meaning of a source text is, therefore, always more extensive than a translation can convey. Conversely, the receptor language and culture entail obligatory features that limit the responsibilities of the translation, as well as extending the meaning of the translation in directions other than those inherent in the source text. As a result, translators must make choices, selecting aspects or parts of a text to transpose and emphasize. Such choices in turn serve to create representations of their source texts, representations that are also partial. This partiality is not merely a defect, a lack, or an absence in a translation- it is also an aspect that makes the act of translation partisan: engaged and committed, either implicitly or explicitly.

(Tymoczko, 2000: 24)

Considering the complexity of translation as a process and the moral responsibility of the translator as a mediator, an elaboration of clear ethical rule(s) is necessary to avoid the blur that interpretation can afford. That is why, as translators, we urgently have to explicitly redefine the ethical rules (or to specify the red line(s) not to trespass under any pretexts or circumstances) to alleviate the burden that heavily weighs on the translator. This, in no way, exempts him/her from moral responsibility in contexts where translating becomes suspicious.

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### ***Citing this paper:***

El Amari, Abdelkarim. (2016). The question of ethics: What options for the translator? *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition*, 9(2), 83-98.