

Arabic

تهجيبات

كنا ساعة عصارى، و الغريرات النشيقات
بتدور وتلفح على أرضية جنب التلعة
وبغبايات بوروجوف عديانة
وخناظير بيتى خضرا بتصفخر بفلزيات:

“خد بالك يا بنى من الهجاص”
وحش التهجيص بفكوكه العضاضة، ومخالبه الصيادة
آه واحذر طير الجوب چوب البغصاص!
والوحش الخطاف أبو نهاشة مجصانة”

مسك الواد سيفه القشتال ببسالة ود
ور كثير على عدوه الرخيب ريح
له شوية جنب الشجرة الطبالة
وفكره عمال بيودى وبيجيب

وفجأة وهو واقف أنان
استهجص وحش التهجيص م الغابة
وعينيه بتطق شرار طول ما هو جاي
وبينفخ و بيرماو بشغابة

طاخ، طوخ، إطاخ، طوخ!
سيفه القشتال حامى ومسنوخ
قتل الهجاص وقطع راسه
إوجاب الراس ورجع يرمح ويظوخ

انت اللي قتلت الهجاص؟“
تعالى ف حضنى يا ابنى يا نور الغين
”إده يوم الجرعة إمين قدنا إمين قدنا
ومن فرحته كان بيهاها و يشن

كنا ساعة عصارى، و الغريرات النشيقات
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Siham Abdel Salam

“Jabberwocky” in Arabic

Nadia El Kholy

There are several translations of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* into Arabic but there is only one translation of its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872) translated by Siham Abdel Salam in 2013 and published by Dar al Tanweer. The rendering of the fantastical nonsense poem “Jabberwocky” into Arabic is quite successful because Arabic is an ideal language for this type of poetry: it is replete with flowery expressions and fanciful synonyms. The morphological structure of Arabic, with three-consonant roots and fluid vowels, makes inventing words equivalent to the original creations an exceptionally rewarding task.

The Arabic translation has preserved the identity of the poem’s nonsense genre while maintaining the intended meaning of the poem by creating a balance between nonsense words within the parameters of poetic license so that the words are not utterly gibberish. An example of that is the use of the concept of portmanteau in the poem which combines two meanings in one word. This works very well in Arabic where this linguistic blend of words is commonly used.

The opening verse in the poem is a good example showing the use of portmanteau words (“al nashiqat/النشيقات,” “tulahfer/التلعة,” “tel’ah/تلف,” “betsafghar/بتصفخر”) and nonsense words (“abdanah/عبدانة,” “khanateer/. ”):
”خناظير/ befelizyaat,” بفلزيات

It was early afternoon and the slender badgers
Kona sa”it “asary wa al ghareerat al nashiqat

كنا ساعة عصاري و الغريرات النشيقات

Were twirling and digging beside the stream
Betdour wa tulahfer ‘ala ardiyya gand al tel’ah

حو على أرضي تجنب التلعة
فلتورودُ تب

While the worn out borogroves were snoring and whistling
Wa baghbaghayat burougoufes ‘adbanah

وبغبايات بوروجوف عبانة

And the green house bred pigs were snorting
Wa khanateer beiti ghadra betsafghar befelizyaat

وخناظير بيتي خضرا بتصفخر بفلزيات

The poem has many original words as Lewis Carroll was quite brilliant in his way of forming, coining and inventing new expressions. He used syntactically familiar structures so readers can intuitively recognize which words mark nouns, verbs or adjectives. For example, Carroll is using both “slithy” and “mimsy” as portmanteau words: “slithy” is a blend of “slimy” + “lithe”; its Arabic equivalent is “al nashiqat” which is an adjective that blends the meaning of “slim” and “versatile.” However, the actual word would read as al “rashiqat,” so by changing the first letter the translation reads like the non-existent nonsense word in the original. The same goes for the terms “tulahfer” (“digging”), “tel’ah” (“stream”), “adbanah” (“worn out”), “khanateer” (“pigs”), “betsafghar” (“snoring and whistling”).

The Arabic translation has the equivalent of the nonsense words and expressions found in the original. In the opening stanza the neologism “slithy toves” is translated into “al ghareerat al nashiqat.” “Al ghareerat” (“toves”) is a term that refers to the weasel and badger family and “al nashiqat” (“slithy”) is a portmanteau word combining “thin” and “slim”.

Both verbs “gyre” and “gimble” are translated as “betdour” meaning to twirl and “gimble,” to dig a hole. In addition to that, “tulahfer” (meaning “to dig”) as explained by Humpty Dumpty, should be “tuhfor”, so we realize that although the letters have been jumbled but the meaning can still be easily guessed. The “wabe” is translated as “al tel’ah” which means a small stream, but again one letter was changed so that it became a neologism. It should be “al ter’ah” so the letter ‘r’ should have been used instead of the letter ‘T’ to make it grammatically correct.

“Mimsy” translated as “adbanah” is a coined nonce word. The correct form is “admanah.” So, by changing one letter, the nonsensical mood of the poem is maintained and the meaning gets closer to the original, indicating unhappiness due to extreme exhaustion. The “borogoves” are simply transliterated as “burougouf,” but another word was added “baghbaghayat” which means parrots. The last line of the opening stanza has other neologisms like “khanateer,” meaning pigs, but

the right spelling should be “khanazeer.” This is a replacement for “raths” in the original. These pigs are green in color and they produce a sound that is a combination of snoring and whistling in the portmanteau word “betsafghar.” The last word “befelizyaat” is absolute nonsense.

In the second stanza “Bandersnatch” is rendered in two words: “al wa’sh” (“the beast”) al “khattaaf” (“snatcher”), and “frumious” by “abu nahasha,” which means to snatch violently “megnassa” which is a neologism; the correct form would be “maganess”:

The lad held his sword valiantly
Mesik al waad seifouh al qashtal bebasalah (a)

And searched for his fearsome enemy
Wa dawar keiteer ‘ala ‘adewouh al rakheeb (b)

He rested for a while next to the tum tum tree
Reiyahlu shewayah ganb al shagarah al tabalah (a)

Wa fekruih ‘amaal yewadi wa yegeeb (b)
And was totally engrossed in thought

The translation keeps the basic rhyming scheme of a-b-a-b in addition to other sound patterns. It reproduces the style and format of the original poem, as well as its childlike atmosphere. Parallel to the linguistic structure, the translation faithfully conveys the main theme of the poem and preserves its sense of danger when a young boy faces the Jabberwock, an evil dragon-like creature, and is brave enough to kill him to return triumphantly with its head in his hand. On seeing this, the father praises his son and celebrates his victory.

In general, the translation successfully captures the essence of “Jabberwocky” and is in line with the author’s intention. It recreates the playful, whimsical language of the original source-language text. The nonsense words in the translation do not actually mean anything, but through context and sound clues, we can imagine what the words are describing – especially when Humpty Dumpty explains the meaning of some of the words to Alice. Nonsense words also provide a great demonstration of post-structuralist theoretical considerations: the relationship between the signified and the signifier is not only arbitrary, but nonexistent, readers can create their own linguistic code, which adds to their perception of the setting, action, and meaning within the poem. All the words have meanings which

have a tenuous connection to reality. As a result, the translation reads quite well in Arabic and the poetic diction suits both the nonsense genre of the original poem and appeals to the child audience.

Tahgissatt

(back-translation)

It was early afternoon and the slender badgers
Were twirling and digging beside the stream
While the worn out borogroves were snoring and whistling
And the green house bred pigs were snorting

“Beware the Tahgissatt my son:
With his biting jaws and
snatching claws Beware the
vicious Jubjub bird
And the well built snatcher beast.”

The lad held his sword valiantly
And searched for his fearsome enemy
He rested for a while next to the
tum tum tree And was totally
engrossed in thought

Suddenly as he was standing
The Tahgissatt emerged
from the forest His eyes
were fiery as he
approached And he was
bellowing and muttering

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!
With his sharp-edged sword
he killed the Tahgissatt and
cut off its head and jumped
around groaning loudly

“It is you who killed

the Tahgissatt? Come
let me hug you my
dear boy This is our
victory! We are
overjoyed” He was
laughing and snorting
with joy

It was early afternoon and the
slender badgers Were twirling
and digging beside the stream
While the worn out borogroves were snoring
and whistling And the green house bred pigs
were snorting

Translations into Arabic

- Carroll, Lewis. *سلياً في دلاب بئاجعلا و سيليأ ربة أرملا انامو تدجو كانه* [Alis in the land of wonders, Alis through the Looking-Glass and what she found over there]. Transl. Anon. Ill. anon. Beirut: 1983.
- Carroll, Lewis *المرأة العجائب بلاد في أليس و العجائب بلاد في أليس المرآة* [Alis in the land of wonders and Alis in the mirror]. Transl. Sihaam Abdul Salaam. Ill. anonymous. Cairo: Dar al Tanweer, 2013.