The Situation of Translation in Morocco: 
For an overarching vision and an integrated action

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Abstract

Translation plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between different cultures and nations to attain a better mutual understanding and to be inclined to tolerance and compromise. For many decades, translation of books in Morocco seemed to be an undeclared exclusive concern of individual translators and editing houses. But, in a developing country like Morocco, individualized translation activities proved to be inadequate to meet the growing needs of book translation in so many fields. Fundamental changes became inevitable in order to adapt to the rapid metamorphosis taking place in the cultural landscape, under the pressure of both the information and communication technology revolution and the economic/cultural globalization. A well-done translation, is not only a matter of transferring the contents of a source text. It goes far beyond and implies the interaction of a multitude of factors.

Given the significant and swift cultural and social transformations in Morocco, translation activities are facing increasing difficulties to fulfill their role in bringing closer different cultures. In the region of Arab States and particularly in Morocco, several reports (UNDP, Arab Human Development Report 2003, The Situation of Translation in Morocco by A. Amid, 2012...) indicate that translation performances remain very much short of the minimum expectations, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The main reason is that translations are mostly the product of individual initiatives. In order to remedy to this situation, an increasing number of specialists call for the institutionalization of the “translation sector”.

It is hoped that, if properly conceived and managed, new institutional translation projects will contribute both to bring Moroccan readership closer to the ever-changing cultural and literary situation in the world, and to a better visibility of our country and culture abroad.

Keywords: 
Books translation – Literary translation- Culture- Translation studies in Morocco- The institutionalization of the “translation sector”- The development and the improvement of the ‘translation movement’ in Morocco.
Introduction

Translation is generally considered to be a lasting mediator between cultures. But it could also be seen as a sort of “language at the service of languages” and a communication tool as widely disseminated as the so called “globalization language”. If we consider English as an international communication tool in today’s markets, then we may as well consider internet as a space where translation is playing a crucial role that is as important for communication as is English.

Translation is a practical “linguistic”, scientific, cultural and economic activity involving numerous dimensions, aspects and areas of application. It is an independent work, although it can be traced in multiple fields.

Translation issues and problems have been addressed in many ways and published in articles or books. A growing number of conferences and meetings are dedicated to translation studies in many countries over the world. In Arab countries, the “movement of translation” is usually thought of as restricted to the unique field of “book translation”. In fact, translating books is only one of so many other translation activities in a great variety of fields.

Related to the vast field of translation practice are other main fields such as the one where translation teaching and translator training takes place. A third field is that of translation studies, connected to and interacting with the first two. The fourth and last field is where translators organize themselves in associations for the defense of their professional interests and for the promotion of the translation sector¹.

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¹See in سبيل إقرار الخطة الوطنية للترجمة، عبد الله العميد، مطبعة بالماريس، الرباط، 2012، ص 45.
A Brief History of translation in Morocco

Translation history in Morocco is not written yet. All we have are some rare glimpses scattered in articles and books. But it may be divided into three main periods as follows:

- **The first period (before 1912)**: starts from time immemorial in history, and goes up to the beginning of the French colonization period.
- **The second period (1912-1956)**: the colonization period comprising 44 years.
- **The third period (1956-2016)**: the most recent period lasting for 60 years.

In addition to that, the number of translators and interpreters was relatively small and they may be divided into two main categories:

- The 1st category: non-professional translators, who had some translation experience, in parallel with their professional work, because they had enough grasp of two or more languages.
- The 2nd category is made up of professionals whose only job and means of income is translation, either as free lancers or as translators at service of various institutions and administrations.

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2 For details see: سعيد علوش؛ عبد الله العميد؛ حسن البحراوي؛ محمد المنوني: أوضاع الترجمة في المغرب، مطبعة بالماريس، الرباط، 2012، p 11.

3 Suggested by A. Amid in his book entitled: The Situation of Translation in Morocco.
A glimpse over the situation of translation since the 50s

Before the independence and up to the end of the 60s, translation was taught in a series of schools created by the nationalist movement, where all the subjects were thought in Arabic, including natural sciences, mathematics, physics and chemistry. This course was similar to the “thème et version” course in French schools during the colonization period. Translation teaching gradually lost its original importance until it was abandoned.

During a relatively long period (from the end of the 60s until the beginning of the 90s), the situation did not change, until translation teaching in schools was approved again. But this time it was for new purposes and with a new concept: high school students with an Arabic background had to be prepared to continue their university studies in French.

In the field of translation practices, after a slowdown during the 70s, essentially due to the two gas world crises of 1973 and 1978 and other major economic and political factors, there was a transition period with a relative improvement, namely in conference interpreting and business translation, especially during the second half of the 80s.

Starting from the 90s, there was a remarkable diversification and increase of translation activities, again due to major world events and a series of positive changes in political and economic affairs at the national lever. As of 1989, the first group of graduates, with a professional diploma in translation from the ESRFT in Tangier, was able to meet the ever growing national needs in this connection.

As for the translation of books, there are still no final and reliable statistics concerning their numbers. A few attempts were made at creating a data basis of these books, but without success. Nevertheless, UNESCO statistics (Index Translationum) give a relatively good idea about at least three decades as follows:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Number of translated books</th>
<th>Average of TB per year</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>9 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1999</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>12 - 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2009</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>11 - 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data show clearly how limited is the number of books translated each year. Some of the main reasons behind this may be summarized as follows:

- Predominance of individual taste and preferences in the choice of books to be translated;
- Subjectivity and limitations of such a choice;
- Absence of any planning of translation activities or vision of the whole sector;
- Quality of translations, which, in a great number of cases, are not up to the expected level;
- Inexistence of collaboration between Arab countries.

**The translation of books today**

Statistics of translated books have always been used to evaluate the importance of translation in a given country. This applies to Morocco as well. In this connection, the following questions need to be answered in order to know how to proceed further:

- What kinds of books have been translated in Morocco? For what purpose?
- What are our needs? Who can answer this question?
- What institutions should be responsible for the translation sector?
- How should translation activities be oriented and managed to serve development goals in educational, cultural and scientific fields?
- What are the government tasks in this connection?

In 2002, the UNDP Report on the Human Development in the Arab World came out with exaggerated statistics about the translated books in the Arab World, but no one could contradict it since no statistics were available.
Nevertheless, no one can deny that the report was not fair in criticizing Arab countries in this connection, especially that Morocco is not one of the top 10 Arab countries producing translated books.

It should also be mentioned that some attempts were made to create a specific data base at the Ministry of Culture, but they did not yield any concrete results.

A statistical Survey was done by Professor Fatima El-Jamei El-Hbabi, which concerned published books in Morocco during the period 1992–1997.

She found that the total number of translated books over that period was 125. They represented 8.3% of all published books. Needless to say that these data are concrete proof of the weakness of book translation in Morocco.

There is an urgent need for a complete and up to date data basis on translated books in order to know if the ‘translation movement’ in our country satisfies real needs, and to be able to put translations at the service of communication, in general, an enhanced cultural dialogue, in particular, in addition to other fields of activity.

The Contribution of Moroccan Researchers to Translation Studies

Up to the middle of the 80s, the number of Arabic books about translation was still relatively limited and not easily accessible. Moroccan researchers who needed pertinent and up to date information in this field had much difficulty to get it unless they could check what was available in foreign languages. The scope of knowledge about translation studies was restricted to the production of this knowledge in the West.

In Morocco, like in other Maghreb countries, reference books and journals were in French. Such theoreticians as Mounin, Vinay & Darbelnet, Seleskovitch, Ladmiral, Berman and others began to be known all along the 80s. But very few could read English books by theoreticians like Eugene Nida, John Catford, Peter Newmark, Jeorge Shteiner… Still fewer had access to Garcia Yebra, Ayora and, more recently to Hurtado Albir.
In Morocco, not a single TS book was published since the independence (1956) until 1989. In 1990, Saïd Allouche was the first to publish a book addressing translation issues. After that, individual and collective books were published.

By the end of the 20th century, Morocco succeeded to reach the 3rd position among Arab countries (after Egypt and Lebanon) publishing books of translation studies. In one decade (1990-1999), 15 books were published. By 2016, some 64 TS books in Arabic, 5 in English and 2 in French make up the Moroccan contribution to translation studies in the Arab World.

**The future of translation in Morocco**

Today, we need to develop translation activities so much more than we needed in the past, because it is the most efficient way to modernity and a tremendously helpful instrument for mutual understanding with other societies and a guarantee against isolationism and extremism.

It is high time to consider translation in Morocco as a sector with a tangible economic dimension. We are in a huge need of a central institution which deals with all translation aspect and issues, e.g the prospective and theoretical studies, practical researches in translation sector.

Improving the translation situation in Morocco requires the adoption of an “integrated” approach taking account of all the components of the sector as follows:

- To acknowledge the strategic importance of translation in a country at the crossroads of continents and countries that must cooperate.
- To recognize the usefulness of translation in so many fields.
- To enlarge the framework of the financial support and moral appreciation to the translation work and translators in general, starting by the translated book award.
- To improve the conditions of cooperation with the specialists in the fields of translation teaching, studying and practicing.
- To provide adequate conditions for the organization of the sector’s activities.
- To sponsor the researchers and the professionals who are carrying much work and enriching translation studies.
In addition to the previous requirements, improving the translation situation implies taking a certain number of concrete actions such as:

- To re-consider the translation teaching programs and method both at high school and university levels;
- To establish departments of translation services in various public administrations;
- To organize periodic activities in universities where translation is taught;
- To organize more study days, conferences, workshops and meetings dedicated to translation in all its aspects.

**Toward a National Strategy of Translation**

In order to implement the above mentioned measures:

**First: fields of national strategy implementation**

The national strategy of translation should cover the four following fields:

- Translation teaching and translator training;
- Translation practice in all fields;
- Translation studies; and
- Organization of the translation profession and promotion of the translation sector.

**Second: goals and purposes of the strategy**

**Short term goals:**

**Translation teaching**

- To re-examine curricula and teaching methodologies.
- Training of a new generation of translation teachers.
- To give a special attention to the modern teaching technologies in the translator sector.

**Translation practicing:**

- To sponsor the translation of books within the framework of a national translation project.
Research and development (translation studies)

- To have a data basis of translated books in Morocco by collaborating with the UNESCO.
- To finance studies aimed at following up the development of the translation movement in the world and to make use of the latest achievements in the development of translation politics.
- Launch university research programs, which will help establish the foundations of modern translation studies in Morocco, like in foreign universities and institutes.

Professional organization

- To support activities of professional associations.
- Impose the respect of ethical behavior in conference interpreting.
- Enhance translation in the audiovisual sector.

Long term goals

- Use translation as a strategic instrument, giving Morocco the possibility to play the role of intermediary in diplomatic, political and many other areas.
- To strive to reach the highest levels in the area of translation studies.

Third: Ways and Means of Implementing the National Strategy

- To establish a national committee for translation issues which can cooperate with the concerned ministries.
- To scrutinize the projects and the programs that need to be implemented, and to point out the national strategy priorities.
- To dispatch the tasks between the national education ministry, the higher education ministry, cultural affairs ministry and other members of the government related to translation.
- To establish a schedule for the implementation of the national strategy.
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