

*Voices and Silences: Exploring Signs of Ideological Subversion in  
Media Translation in the Arab World*

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**ABSTRACT:**

Translation and interpreting studies in the new millennium started to benefit from the advancements in sociology to account for the translators' and interpreters' subjective agency. As human actions and reactions are not always predictable, the agency can play a decisive role in the degree to which translators and interpreters intervene in the tasks they are assigned to accomplish. Different economic, social, political, and ethnic factors may lead them to consciously or sub-consciously involve to prioritize certain interests. The present study assumes that they can actively participate in ideologically subverting the 'other' group or community. They can make use of any textual tools at their disposal to feed their institutionalized knowledge and beliefs or ideologies into the texts or utterances they are rendering. They may not hesitate to delete, add, or replace the messages that struggle with them or their group or community's ideological stands. Actor-network theory is the conceptual framework on which this study is based to disclose and justify possible occasions of subversion. The data are taken from Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya live simultaneous interpreting of three political speeches: Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi's English speech at the 2017 Munich Security Conference and American President Barack Obama's two speeches entitled 'A New Beginning' (delivered June 4, 2009, in Cairo) and 'A Moment of Opportunity' (delivered May 19, 2011, in the Department of State). The findings prove that ideological subversion in the interpreting process is inescapable.

**Keywords:** *Ideological Subversion; Arab Media Organizations; Actor-network Theory; Political Discourse*

**1. Introduction**

Media is an effective conduit for conveying events to a wider audience, however, it may play a negative task, as it could be used as a weapon in open or hidden conflicts. Media organizations in the Arab world have directly or indirectly participated in fueling socio-political conflicts, spreading hate speech, and inciting violence, especially in the Middle East. That is to say, despite the positive aspects and uses of media in crises, such as reflecting the daily humiliation and suffering of the Palestinian people, the past years have shown several examples proving its ability to be manipulated as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, media platforms

provide alternative spaces for expressing opinions and reporting, and covering the facts such as those that have led to the Arab Spring. However, there is a harmful aspect in which media has been used to fuel discourses that embrace violence, incite hatred and perpetuate sectarianism. For example, our exposure to certain doses of information, whether true or false, may change or consolidate our vision of the ‘other’. Regardless of the opposition of that ‘other’ to us in social, ethnic, or religious identity, or even just our political or artistic views, this influence is of great importance in shaping our contemporary societies that sometimes seek to integrate cultures and break down barriers and borders. Recent studies have shown that exposure to inflammatory speech can reduce our sensitivity to the other and increase the distance between us, reinforcing our prejudices. Moreover, Arab media has played an important role in controlling not only the masses but mainly the conceptions and reactions of its employees and collaborators. As the process of controlling minds has become a systematic process, it is not limited to governments and their security institutions but includes any individuals and political institutions, especially the media. Without any doubt, influencing minds these days has become much easier as it can change the convictions of millions at one time, and without additional effort by the mind-washing party, where repetition is the main key in the process of brainwashing.

Individuals working with Arab media institutions are therefore not immune to this ideological manipulation. Like sponges, they absorb these deformed convictions and then reflect on the audience by feeding them into the products of the tasks they are assigned to accomplish: they are consciously or unconsciously recruited to take part in subverting the ‘Other’s’ rights and freedoms. Translators and interpreters working in media are no exception. They can play the role of ideological subverters. An in-depth investigation of the texts and utterances they render can clearly reveal occasions where their subversion is active. To illustrate the assumption on which the present study is based, examine Al-Jazeera’s live simultaneous interpreting of an excerpt from Donald Trump’s speech at the Arab Islamic American Summit held in Riyadh on May 21, 2017.

**Donald Trump:** *I also applaud the Gulf Cooperation Council for blocking funders from using their countries as a financial base for terror, and designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization last year.*

**Al-Jazeera Interpreter:**

*انا اثني طبعاً على مجلس التعاون الخليجي لمنع الممولين من استخدام اراضيهم كمراكز للإرهاب وايضاً وضع حزب الله على لائحة المنظمات الارهابية وحزب الله طبعاً منظمة ارهابية وقد فعلوا ذلك في السنة الماضية.*

The ideological tendency of the interpreter is crystal clear. He reflects his view of Hezbollah by inserting the statement ‘حزب الله طبعاً منظمة ارهابية’ (and Hezbollah is, of course, a terrorist organization). Actor-network theory is the foundation on which the above argumentation is based, as it can provide the theoretical background that justifies such ideological subversion. According to this theory, the focal actor, i.e., the interpreter, is driven to embrace and reflect the ideological stands of his community, i.e.

Al-Jazeera. This will be detailed below after presenting some relevant theoretical considerations.

## 2. Ideology, Language, and Translation

Ideology is an English coined word comprising two parts: *idea* and *logy*. It has been offered as a translation for the original French word *ideologic* proposed by the French philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy in 1796 to mean ‘the science of ideas’ as opposed to ancient metaphysics. Marx, Engels, and Napoleon have used this word too. They did not use it the same way as de Tracy’s; on the contrary, they have charged it with negative connotations. Napoleon has abusively called his political opponents as *ideologues*. By calling them so, he thought that he might insult as well as show their pettiness. He relates ‘all the misfortunes which have befallen our beautiful France’ to ‘the doctrine of ideologues’ (Williams, 1983:154-155). Marx and Engels, as Heywood (2003:6-7) confirms, have connected it with the working-class delusion, mystification, and false consciousness of the reality of the ruling, upper-class beliefs. In his definition of ideology, Engels (in Williams, 1983:155), regards it as ‘a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously indeed but with a false consciousness.’ Over time, particularly in the twentieth century, more objective insights into the nature of ideology have been proposed. Bourdieu and Eagleton (1992:112) hypothesize that ideology refers to a ‘spontaneous belief or opinion ...that seem unquestionable and natural.’ Fairclough (1992:9) emphasizes that ‘ideologies built into conventions may be more or less naturalized and automatized.’ Bretons (2001:84-85) thinks that ideology ‘makes us experience our life in a certain way and makes us believe that way of seeing ourselves is neutral.’ Wooffitt (2005:140) accepts this and entertains that ‘ideologies ensure that events, ways of acting and relationships can be regarded legitimate or appropriate’.

There is a plethora of evidence showing the everlasting connection between language and ideology. This has been touched upon by many scholars on different occasions. Fairclough has commented on this in many of his works. He (1995:73) postulates that ideology, as a concept, needs a material medium through which it can be recognized. This medium is language. Ideology, then, ‘invests’ language. He (1992:88) comments on the ways of this investment. He suggests that ‘ideology invests language in various ways at various levels that we do not have to choose between different possible ‘locations’ of ideology, all of which seem entirely satisfactory.’ He (1995:2) surveys the levels of language that ideology makes use of. Grammar, vocabulary and metaphor, and many others, are among the features that can carry different ideological meanings. He (2001:2) emphasizes that ideologies are ‘common-sense assumptions’ that are ‘embedded in the forms of language used.’ Others have identified this relationship too. Woolard and Schiefflin (1994:55) maintain that in recent anthropology, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies, the two terms (i.e., language and ideology) have been so often used with each other. They were separated by and, other times by in, and with a comma at others. Heynes (1989:119) affirms the flexibility that language offers to express ideology

through the use of ‘the same material situation in different ways.’ This has also been confirmed by Fowler (1991:4). He sustains those miscellaneous ways can be used to express the same situation and this difference, therefore, ‘carry ideological distinctions and thus difference in representation.’ Simpson (1993:6) maintains that ‘it is language which tries to retrieve the shape of ideology.’

Not a few of those who know translation agree with Lefevere (1992:4) that ‘translations are not made in a vacuum.’ Translation is a human activity. As it is with other activities, it affects and is affected by human experiences. Hence, the translator’s ideology, whatever the source, has its pressure on *his* performance with differing degrees. Generally speaking, there are many linguists as well as translation theorists who underline the impact of ideology on translation such as Bassnett and Lefevere (1992: vii) who accept that translation, as a form of rewriting, ‘reflects certain ideology and poetics as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way.’ With the rapid developments in translation studies, especially the cultural and social turns, by the end of the twentieth century, different contributions to the nature and influence of ideology on translation emerged. The relationship between translation and ideology has been looked at from different angles. Lefevere (1992), for example, impinges on the role of the translator as a rewriter of literary texts motivated by his ideology or poetics. As far as English literary translation is concerned, Niranjana (1992) focuses on the effect of colonialism in constructing an inaccurate image of the East. From a gender perspective, Simon (1996) introduces a feminist approach to translation studies in which ideology plays a subtle role.

### **3. Actor-Network Theory**

Actor-network theory is an empirical approach to social theory where the terms actor and network stand for agency and structure. It started in the mid-1980s and is associated with Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law. It is based on the assumption that heterogeneous powerful human and non-human elements or actors engage in networks of relationships around certain controversy ‘wherein their identity is defined through their interaction with other actors’ (Cressman, 2009). Latour (2005:142) proposes that actor-network as ‘a theory, and a strong one I think, but about *how* to study things or rather how *not* to study them- or rather, how to let the actors have some room to express themselves (emphasis is original). Callon (1986) treats the emergence of these networks as a ‘translation’, where ‘the word translation now takes on a somewhat specialized meaning: a relation that does not transport causality but induces two mediators into coexisting’ (Latour, 2005:108) and is used to refer to ‘all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts or persuasion, and violence thanks to which actor takes or causes to be conferred on itself the authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor’ (Callon and Latour, 1981:279). Callon (1986) divides the sociology of this translation process into four stages: Problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization.

1. Problematization describes the product of alliances, or associations between actors wherein a focal actor strives to be indispensable to other actors and starts to convince them to accept the proposal of a network.
2. Interessement indicates the focal actor's attempts to elevate other actors' interests to impose and stabilise their identity in the proposed network.
3. Enrolment designates the focal actor's adoption of a set of strategies that allow other actors to enrol throughout implementing a 'group multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks that accompany the interessements and enable them to succeed'(Callon, 1986:211).
4. Mobilization implies the focal actor's set of mechanisms exploited to maintain its position as a legitimate speaker of the group as well as the other actors' commitment.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

In light of actor-network theory, our social and natural world is made of a web of networks of relationships. The actors are both human and non-human and are assembled to perform a certain objective. The driving force that guides the actions and reactions of these actors is negotiation. Media organizations are meaningful examples of these networks. Policy designers or sponsors ensure that each organization is constructed on a set of economic, social, political, or ideological interests that focal actors or employees such as writers, composers, journalists, artists, designers, interactants, translators, and interpreters consciously or unconsciously subscribe to in terms of the four-stage negotiation or translation process. Gradually, these focal actors embrace the sponsor's knowledge and beliefs, i.e., ideologies, and start to reflect on the audience through their performance. In monolingual contexts, the audience can directly assess the degree to which these actors have been ideologically mobilized. In bilingual contexts, however, the only medium through which the audience can obtain messages is the translation and interpreting provided. So, it is likely that the translator and interpreter invest his/her power position and intrude to circulate and strengthen his network's ideological stands. This ideological subversion can be unveiled by tracing the textual modifications that the source texts or utterances have undergone. The data to be investigated are the versions of the simultaneous interpreting of selected excerpts broadcast by two prominent media outlets which are Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.

#### **5. Data Analysis**

To prove that Arab translators or more specifically interpreters in the media invest their powerful position as actors in networks and play the role of ideological subverters, the live simultaneous interpreting provided by Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya to selected political speeches is qualitatively investigated. The first sample is taken from Al-Jazeera's interpretation of the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi's English speech at the 2017 Munich Security Conference on February 18, 2017, in Munich, Germany (This is the only English speech he delivers at such an international gathering). The second sample is taken from Al-Arabiya's interpretation of the American President Barack Obama's two speeches entitled 'A New

Beginning’ (delivered June 4, 2009, in Cairo) and ‘A Moment of Opportunity’ (delivered May 19, 2011, in the Department of State).

Al-Jazeera interpreter’s interventions reflect his ideological bias towards his networks. As can be identified in excerpts 1&2 in Table (1), he interrupts Al-Abadi’s seemingly criticism of the Gulf States. In excerpt 1, for example, he replaces ‘the Gulf States’ with ‘*دول المنطقة*’ (i.e., states of the region), which diverts the audiences’ attention to an unspecified destination that will depend on their perception of where Da’esh fighters come, such as Syria, Turkey, Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or any other Gulf states. In other words, he does not want to embarrass his sponsor, the Qataris, by transferring the speaker’s clear declaration that the Arab Gulf States are deeply involved in acts of terror against the Iraqi people (cf. Zayani, 2005:17). In excerpt 2, the speaker’s hint that the collapse of oil prices will have its harsh influence on the Gulf States is deformed, as the interpreter replaces ‘the Gulf States are going to be taken’ with ‘*هناك التداعيات ستتضاعف على الاقتصادات الأخرى*’ (i.e., the effects on other economies will be doubled). This systematic avoidance of attaching responsibility to the Arab Gulf States stems from the interpreter’s sense of belonging to his sponsor’s network, and therefore, he subverts the ideological stances occupied by the speaker. Another occasion that shows the interpreter’s engagement in his networks beliefs is when he offers ‘*تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية*’ (i.e., the Islamic State Organization) as an equivalence to Al-Abadi’s use of ‘Da’esh’. The term Da’esh in Arabic (*داعش*) was first introduced as an acronym to (*الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام*) (i.e., the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham or the Levant), but gradually adopted to refer to the bloody acts of this organization. That is to say, the use of ‘Da’esh’ evokes negative connotations. For this reason, such use has been banned by the organization. It has also been adopted by the French government which asked journalists and media organizations to do the same. On September 17, 2014, France 24 editor Wassim Nasr quotes the French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius’s justification of such a decision: ‘[t]his is a terrorist group and not a state. I do not recommend using the term Islamic State because it blurs the lines between Islam, Muslims, and Islamists. The Arabs call it ‘Daesh’ and I will be calling them the ‘Daesh cutthroats’. Since the inception of the Qatari channel, it has been accused of being the official media platform for extremist organizations (Karlekar and Marchant, 2007). It has also been involved in promoting radical ideology (Lahlali, 2011), as the Qatari screen was keen to broadcast videos of ISIS terrorist acts and its operations in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and several Arab countries. There is no doubt, therefore, that the interpreter negotiates his network’s perspective by rejecting the term ‘Da’esh’ and replacing it with what his network’s view as natural even if it subverts the speaker’s intended perception.

**Table (1) Al-Jazeera Simultaneous Interpreting of the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi's Speech at Munich Security Conference**

No. of Excerpt	Al-Abadi	Al- Jazeera Interpreter
1	“At the moment, a lot of people may look at <b>Da'esh</b> as an internal Iraqi problem, but it is not. We have many foreign fighters, a lot of them from <b>the Gulf States</b> .”	حالياً قد ينظر البعض الى تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية على إنه مشكلة عراقية داخلية هذا ليس الواقع. فتتظيم الدولة الإسلامية يضم الكثير من المقاتلين الأجانب وكثير من المقاتلين من دول المنطقة.
2	“The collapse of oil prices may lead to other collapses. It is so harsh, so hard on the oil-producing countries, it can affect things. I think of it like a domino effect. Once you start that, <b>the Gulf States</b> are going to be taken.”	ينبغي أن نحذر، انهيار الأسعار قد يؤدي إلى انهيارات أخرى. فهو انهيار قوي وتداعياته كبيرة على دول منتجة للنفط والنتيجة مثل انهيار حجيرات الدومينو إذا ما سقطت أو انهارت دولة فتتهدد الأخرى وبالتالي فإن التداعيات ستتضاعف على الاقتصادات الأخرى

Al-Arabiya's interpreter is not less biased. His ideological subversion can be systematically situated. One aspect that is worth mentioning is the negotiation of his network's sectarian solidarity. Al-Arabiya is a Saudi-funded satellite channel (Lahlali, 2011). The cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran extended to other countries in the region such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. Regardless of who is the oppressed or oppressor, the conflict between Saudis and Iranians transformed into a bloody struggle between Sunnis and Shia on neither's soil (Karlekar and Marchant, 2007). Al-Arabiya's antagonism to Iran is therefore well-known (Feuilherade, 2003). It makes use of all available resources to strengthen the propaganda against Iran and its Shia allies (cf. Al-Maryani, 2016). Hence, as powerful actors in the sectarian-based networks, Al-Arabiya interpreters are indulged in this kind of ideological subversion as can be seen in Table (2). In the first excerpt, Obama clearly states the legitimacy of the Iraqi Shia-led government by his emphasis that it is 'democratically- elected'. This description has not been transmitted to the target audience, because the interpreter, motivated by his network's rejection of the process through/the conditions under which this government has been established, decides to provide zero equivalence. The same sectarian tendency can be observed in excerpt 2 when he directs the audience's attention to Iran's vile actions against civilians by reframing Obama's evaluation of Iran's involvement in 'acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians' into 'في أخذ الكثير من الأسرى' (i.e., capturing many civilian Americans as prisoners), where reference to US troops is disregarded to foreground Iranians' hostility against civilians alone. The same inclination can be sensed in the rendering of Obama's second selected speech, which is 'A Moment of opportunity'. Though the interpreter here is not the same for the first speech, the channel's or rather the network's ideological dispositions are

also preserved by him in the product. In excerpts 3&4, he is keen to overemphasize the illegitimacy and cruelty of the Shia-led Syrian government's acts. In excerpt 3, this is materialized in the target texts by deleting the speaker's call for the Syrian government to 'allow peaceful protests' and inserting the interpreter's own evaluation of the demonstrates whom he describes as 'الَّذِينَ يَبْحَثُونَ عَنِ الدِّيمُقْرَاطِيَّةِ' (i.e., who are looking for democracy). In excerpt 4, this is realized in deleting 'stop unjust arrests', as the transformation of allowing arrests, not the unjust ones, can decriminalize some of the government's apprehensions.

**Table (2) Al-Arabiya Simultaneous Interpreting of Barack Obama's Selected Speeches**

No. of Excerpt	Title of Speech	Obama	Al-Arabiya Interpreter
1	A New Beginning	"That is why we will honor our agreement with Iraq's <b><u>democratically-elected government</u></b> to remove combat troops from Iraqi cities by July...."	ولهذا فإننا سوف ننفذ اتفاقياتنا... بسحب القوات في مطلع جولاى....
2		"Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in <b><u>acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians.</u></b> "	ومنذ الثورة الإسلامية إيران لعبت دورًا أيضًا في أخذ الكثير من الأسرى الأمريكيين من المدنيين.
3	A Moment of Opportunity	"The Syrian government must stop shooting demonstrators <b><u>and allow peaceful protests.</u></b> "	الحكومة السورية عليها أن تتوقف عن إطلاق النار على المتظاهرين الَّذِينَ يَبْحَثُونَ عَنِ الدِّيمُقْرَاطِيَّةِ.
4		"It must release political prisoners <b><u>and stop unjust arrests.</u></b> "	ولا بد لها أن تقوم بإطلاق كافة السجناء.

## 6. Conclusion

The argumentation presented above motivates the study to offer some touchable conclusions:

1. Translation and interpreting of media texts and utterances are so valuable as the products can reach a very wide audience in a timely fashion, especially in the simultaneous mode. However, the agency of the conduit can negatively impact the transference of these communicated messages in different ways by the use of different textual means.
2. The overt and covert bias of Arab media organizations such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya has dangerous consequences on translators and interpreters as their roles may shift from bridging the cultural and linguistic gaps into active participants in the ideological subversion of the other group or community.



3. Translators' and interpreters' ideological subversion in the Arab media organizations is a natural outcome of the set of economic, social, political, and ethnic interests negotiated by the human and non-human actors in the ideologically-constructed networks such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.
4. It is agonizing for the other members of the profession that the list of negative attributes and descriptions attached to Arabic translators and interpreters seems to be open-ended, especially in zones of conflict. Out of the previous discussion, they have been proved to be ideological subverters which is something innovative in comparison to the previously identified labels such as interventionists, manipulators, spies, or collaborators.
5. Textual indicators of translators' and interpreters' ideological subversion require an immediate move towards the re-planning of training programs in a way that lessens the impact of the network's influence.
6. The credibility of Arab translators and interpreters who are proved to act as ideological subverters should be questioned and disclosed by active monitoring institutions sponsored by the United Nations or European Union.

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أصوات وصمت: استكشاف اشارات التخريب الأيديولوجي في الترجمة الإعلامية في العالم العربي

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المستخلص

بدأت دراسات الترجمة التحريرية والشفوية في الألفية الجديدة بالاستفادة من التطورات الحاصلة في علم الاجتماع وتوظيفها لتفسير الأفعال التي تتبع من الوكالة او الذات غير الموضوعية للمترجم. ونظرًا لأن الأفعال وردود الفعل البشرية لا يمكن التنبؤ بها دائمًا، يمكن للوكالة او للذات غير الموضوعية أن تلعب دورًا حاسمًا في مدى الدرجة التي يتدخل فيها المترجمون التحريريون والشفويون في المهام الموكلة إليهم. وقد قد تؤدي العوامل الاقتصادية والاجتماعية والسياسية والعرقية المختلفة إلى دفعهم للمشاركة شعوريا او لا شعوريا في تفضيل مصالح معينة أو التقليل من شأنها.

تفترض الدراسة الحالية أن بإمكان المترجمين المشاركة بفاعلية في التخريب الأيديولوجي ل "الأخر" من خلال الاستفادة من الأدوات النصية تحت تصرفهم لتغذية معرفتهم المؤسسية ومعتقداتهم أو أيديولوجياتهم في النصوص أو الأقوال التي يترجمونها. اي انهم قد لا يترددوا في حذف أو إضافة أو استبدال الرسائل التي تتعارض مع مواقفهم أو مواقف مجموعتهم أو مجتمعتهم. ان نظرية الفاعل- الشبكة هي الإطار المفاهيمي الذي تستند إليه هذه الدراسة وتستخدمه للكشف عن مناسبات التخريب المحتملة وتبيريها.

اما البيانات فهي مأخوذة من الترجمة الحية المتزامنة لثلاث خطابات سياسية نشرت في قناتي الجزيرة والعربية وهي: خطاب رئيس الوزراء العراقي حيدر العبادي باللغة الإنجليزية في مؤتمر ميونيخ للأمن ٢٠١٧ وخطابين للرئيس الأمريكي باراك أوباما أحدهما بعنوان "بداية جديدة". (٤ حزيران ٢٠٠٩ في القاهرة) اما الاخر فهو "لحظة من الفرص" (١٩ مايس ٢٠١١ في وزارة الخارجية). تثبت النتائج أن التخريب الأيديولوجي في عملية الترجمة لا مفر منه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التخريب الأيديولوجي. المنظمات الإعلامية العربية؛ نظرية الفاعل -

الشبكة. خطاب سياسي