

Analysis of Itamar Even-Zohar's Strategies in Majedeh Anani's Translation of Nun wa al-Qalam

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ABSTRACT:

This article, drawing on Itamar Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory, examines the translation strategies employed in the Arabic rendering of *Nun wa al-Qalam*, a work by Jalal Al-e Ahmad. The study aims to investigate how the stylistic, cultural, and discursive elements of the source text are represented within the target literary system, and to explain the relationship of this representation with the concepts of "center" and "periphery" in the translation system. The research method is descriptive-analytical and based on qualitative data analysis. To this end, selected samples from the Persian text and their Arabic equivalents were extracted and analyzed according to strategies such as preservation or alteration of structure, controlled borrowing, cultural interpretation, rationalization, attenuation of emotional load, and omission of cultural layers. The findings indicate that the Arabic translation, in most cases, operates in accordance with the dominant norms of the target literary system and avoids fully reproducing the stylistic and emotional features of the source text. This has led the translation, rather than playing an innovative role, to function primarily as a stabilizing agent of the central norms of the target system. Rationalization of the narrative, neutralization of emotional and social discourse, and reduction of the cultural load of indigenous elements are among the most significant indicators of this orientation. The overall conclusion of the study shows that the Arabic translation of *Nun wa al-Qalam*, rather than conveying the stylistic and ideological challenges of the source text, serves to absorb and integrate the text into the established structure of the target literary system and, consequently, assumes a centralizing and conservative position within the translation polysystem.

Keywords: *Polysystem Theory, Itamar Even-Zohar, translation strategies, Nun wa al-Qalam*

INTRODUCTION:

Literary translation is a process that goes beyond the mere substitution of words and linguistic structures; at a deeper level, it is considered a cultural, social, and systemic act. In this process, the translator engages not only with language but also with a network of norms, literary expectations, cultural values, and the position of the text within the literary system of the target language. Therefore, literary translation can be regarded as a form of "text production" that acquires meaning within the context of the target literary system, and its function can only be analyzed in light of that system (Hosseini, 2003: 35).

Among various types of translation, the translation of narrative works holds a special position due to the presence of stylistic, figurative, idiomatic, and cultural elements. Such works often carry multiple layers of meaning, the transfer of which requires the translator to make conscious strategic choices. Idioms, figurative expressions, and fixed phrases are among the most significant challenges in translating narrative texts, as these elements are deeply rooted in the culture of the source language and often lack direct equivalents in the target language (Ghorbani Madavani, 2019: 78).

The story *Nun wa al-Qalam* by Jalal Al-e Ahmad is a prominent example of Persian narrative texts written in

a critical, figurative style rich in colloquial and cultural expressions. These characteristics have translated this work into other languages, particularly Arabic, which is especially challenging. The Arabic translation of this work by Majedeh Anani is among the translations that have attracted the attention of scholars in the field of literary translation (Ghorbani Madavani, 2019: 204).

From the perspective of modern translation theories, the examination of such translations cannot be sufficiently addressed through purely linguistic or semantic approaches; rather, it requires a framework that analyzes translation within the context of the target literary system. In this regard, Itamar Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory, with its emphasis on the dynamism of the literary system and the role of translation in shaping or stabilizing literary norms, provides a macro-level and structural analytical framework for literary translation (Safavi, 1992: 51).

According to this theory, translations may occupy either a central or peripheral position within the literary system of the target language, and their position determines the type of translation strategies employed. Translations that hold a central position tend to show a greater inclination toward innovation, preservation of the source text's features, and transmission of cultural elements. In contrast, peripheral translations often move

toward simplification, domestication, and conformity with the dominant norms of the target system (House, 2001: 63).

Therefore, analyzing the translation of Nun wa al-Qalam within the framework of Even-Zohar's theory makes it possible to examine the translator's strategies not only at the level of sentences or expressions but also at the systemic level of the text's position. This approach can reveal the extent to which the translator has sought to preserve the features of the source text and the role that the translation plays within the Arabic literary system.

1. Research Background:

Literary translation is a process that goes beyond the mere transfer of meaning and is intrinsically linked to the cultural, social, and ideological layers of the source text. In this regard, the translation of idioms and figurative expressions, as culture-bound elements, constitutes one of the most significant challenges for the translator; this is because such elements, in addition to their surface meaning, carry implicit and context-dependent connotations, and any omission or transformation of them may lead to a change in the function of the text within the literary system of the target language. Therefore, analyzing the translator's strategies in dealing with these elements plays a fundamental role in evaluating the quality and function of the translation (Fahm and Sabzin, 2003: 92).

The story *Nun wa al-Qalam* by Jalal Al-e Ahmad, due to its figurative language, critical satire, and extensive use of colloquial expressions, provides a suitable case for examining the challenges of literary translation. The Arabic translation of this work by Majedeh Mohammad Ali Anani has been the subject of several studies in translation, the most notable of which is the study by Ghorbani Madavani (2019). This research, adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, demonstrates that the translator has generally attempted to produce a comprehensible translation by preserving meaning while altering linguistic form; however, in some cases, due to misidentification of idioms, literal translation has led to inaccurate transmission of meaning (Ghorbani Madavani, 2019: 208–210).

Alongside these studies, translation criticism research has emphasized the necessity of paying simultaneous attention to meaning, style, and the position of the text in the target language. Hosseini (2003) considers translation as an independent text within the target language system, arguing that its evaluation should not be limited to lexical equivalence (Hosseini, 2003: 121). Fahm and Sabzin (2003) also maintain that any change in the style or function of a text can alter its role within the literary system of the target language (Fahm and Sabzin, 2003: 245). Moreover, systemic approaches indicate that translation strategies are directly related to the position of translation within the literary system of the target language, and peripheral translations tend to gravitate toward simplification and conformity with dominant norms (House, 2001: 247).

Despite these studies, most previous research on the translation of *Nun wa al-Qalam* has adopted a micro-level approach and has primarily focused on case-by-case analysis of idioms. In this context, the relationship between translation strategies and the systemic position of translation within Arabic literature has received less attention. This research gap highlights the necessity of a study that analyzes the Arabic translation of *Nun wa al-Qalam* within the framework of Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory. This theory regards translation as an active force in shaping and transforming the literary system of the target language (Safavi, 1992: 44).

Accordingly, the present study seeks to systematically analyze the translation strategies employed in the Arabic rendering of *Nun wa al-Qalam*, to determine the position of this translation within the Arabic literary system, and to demonstrate the degree of alignment between the translator's strategies and this position.

2. Theoretical Framework: Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory:

2.1. Principles of the Theory:

Polysystem Theory, proposed by Itamar Even-Zohar in the 1970s and 1980s, conceptualizes literature not as a static collection of texts, but as a dynamic, multi-layered network of interrelated systems that are in constant interaction with one another and with other social systems (Safavi, 1992: 44). Within this framework, each literary system consists of two poles: the center (dominant norms, canonized genres) and the periphery (emerging genres, experimental or imported forms), which compete for legitimacy and position within the overall system (Hosseini, 2003: 125). This competition intensifies during periods of emergence or crisis within the system (such as the absence of strong indigenous genres or the need for literary renewal). Under such conditions, translation can move from the periphery to the center and function as a source of innovation and transformation in the target system (House, 2001: 248). Therefore, the analysis of any translated text requires an understanding of its position within this dynamic network and an examination of the systemic orientations (centralizing or peripheral) that shape the translator's linguistic and stylistic choices.

2.2. The Position of Translation in Even-Zohar's Theory:

In Even-Zohar's theory, translation is not considered a marginal activity but rather an active, system-forming force within the target literature. Translation can perform two opposing yet complementary roles: on the one hand, it may function as an innovative element, introducing new forms, styles, and themes, thereby strengthening the peripheral system and challenging central norms; on the other hand, it may serve as a tool for stabilizing norms by conforming to dominant patterns and reinforcing their central position (Safavi, 1992: 45). The choice between these two roles is directly related to the systemic position of the target text: if the target system is in a state of stability and

dominated by central norms, translations tend to follow those norms; however, if the system is in crisis or in an emergent phase, translations often become more daring and move toward innovation and disruption of the existing order (Fahm and Sabzin, 2003: 246). Therefore, the analysis of the translator's strategies in rendering culture-bound elements (such as idioms and figurative expressions) becomes meaningful only when examined within this dialectical relationship between linguistic choices and the systemic position of the text.

3. Systematic Analysis of the Translation Data of Nun wa al-Qalam within the Framework of Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory:

3.1. Preservation of Narrative Function through Substitution with a Central Cultural Formula:

Persian text: "Yeki bud, yeki nabud, dar ghadim al-ayam..." (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 15)

Arabic text: "Marratan thaniyatan kana ya ma kana fi salif al-'asr wa al-awan..." (Anani, 2010: 21)

Strategic analysis: The opening formula of the story in Persian is an established marker within the system of Iranian folk narrative, functioning beyond mere meaning by immersing the reader in the allegorical-critical space of the text. Instead of a literal translation, the translator has employed a fully conventionalized Arabic narrative formula.

From Even-Zohar's perspective, this strategy indicates that the translation at this point has been integrated into the center of the target literary system; the translator adheres to the dominant narrative norms of Arabic literature and restructures the text according to the expectations of the target audience. This choice does not signify weakness but rather reflects the strength of the target system in absorbing the translated text. Consequently, in this example, the translation functions as a "cultural mediator" rather than a "formal transmitter."

3.2. Controlled Borrowing and Movement along the Center/Periphery Boundary:

Persian text: "Har kodam qalamdan-e charmi-ye khodash ra dasht" (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 43)

Arabic text: "...ya'mal kullun minhum qalamahu min al-jild" (Anani, 2010: 22)

Strategic analysis: In this example, the compound structure "qalam min al-jild" is clearly influenced by the conceptual structure of the Persian text, while at the same time being adapted to the Arabic syntactic system. The translator avoids fully transferring the cultural element ("qalamdan" as a specific historical-cultural object) and reduces it to a more general element.

Within Even-Zohar's theoretical framework, this type of translation can be regarded as a controlled movement within the periphery of the target system, where translation is allowed limited innovation, but not to the extent that it disrupts the system's center.

This example demonstrates that the translation is neither entirely norm-breaking nor fully norm-adhering; rather, it occupies an intermediate position.

3.3. Cultural Interpretation and Rationalization of the Source Text:

Persian text: "Ba ham dar maktab bozorg shode budand va khatt-e-shan shabih-e ham bud" (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 21).

Arabic text: "Nasha'a ma'an fi al-kuttab, wa kana mutaqaribayn fi al-khatt" (Anani, 2010: 23).

Strategic analysis: The word "maktab" in Persian carries specific cultural, historical, and social connotations and is not limited merely to a place of education. By rendering it as "al-kuttab," the translator preserves the referential meaning but reduces and rationalizes its implicit cultural layers.

From Even-Zohar's perspective, this strategy indicates that the translation has been produced within a system that tends toward clarification and simplification of cultural concepts. In such a system, translation functions as a means of message transfer rather than the reproduction of the cultural complexities of the source text. This example shows that the translation, in this instance, performs a homogenizing role.

3.4. Attenuation of Emotional Load and Movement toward Neutral Discourse:

Persian text: "ammā Āqā Mīrzā 'Abd al-Zakī bache-dār nemi-shod va īn barāyaš dardī bī-darmān bud" (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 21).

Arabic text: "Lakin al-sayyid Mirza 'Abd al-Zaki lam yurzaq waladan..." (Anani, 2010: 24)

Strategic analysis: In the Persian text, infertility is not merely a biological condition but an emotional and identity-related issue emphasized through the expression "an incurable pain." The Arabic translation removes this emotional load and settles for a neutral statement.

According to Polysystem Theory, such a choice indicates that the target literary system, within this genre, does not tolerate exaggerated emotional expression, and the translation is compelled to align itself with the stylistic norms of the system's center. As a result, the translated text distances itself from the emotional periphery of the source text and moves closer to the rational center of the target system.

3.5. Preservation of Narrative Function through Simplification of Descriptive Structure:

Persian text: "Dar-e bozorgi bud ba mikh-haye gol-manand-e berenji" (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 63).

Arabic text: "Bab kabir bihi ru'us masamir 'ala hay'at wurud nuhasiyya" (Anani, 2010: 62).

Strategic analysis: By recognizing the descriptive function in shaping the narrative space, the translator preserves the core image ("flower-like nails"). However, the more complex syntactic structure of the Persian text (with the descriptive suffix "-like" and the adjective "brass") is transformed into a more linear and direct structure in Arabic ("in the form of brass flowers"). This syntactic simplification, while preserving meaning, aligns the text with the narrative

norms of contemporary Arabic prose, which emphasize clarity and conciseness.

This strategy exemplifies the preservation of meaning with structural modification, indicating that the translation operates within the center of the target literary system. The translator's choice to reduce ornamental language and emphasize propositional clarity suggests that the norms of acceptability in the target system prioritize linguistic economy and transparency over the aesthetic elaboration of literary description. This positions the translation as a stabilizing force within the central norms of the target system rather than as an innovative agent challenging the source style.

3.6. Performative Interpretation instead of Reproduction of Colloquial Style:

Persian text: "Yadet naravad dastash ra bebusi" (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 61).

Arabic text: "Wa la tansa an tuqabbili yadaha" (Anani, 2010: 63).

Strategic analysis: The Persian sentence appears within a maternal, intimate, and instructive discourse, characterized by an informal and emotional tone. Although the Arabic translation preserves the main action (kissing the hand), it removes this tone and transforms the expression into a socially normative instruction ("do not forget to kiss her hand"). This discursive shift transfers the act from the private, emotional sphere to the public, ritualized domain.

This example clearly demonstrates the dominance of the stylistic norms of the target system over the discursive features of the source system. Emotional and informal speech likely occupies a peripheral position—or falls outside the domain of "standard text"—within the hierarchy of the target literary system. By normalizing this tone, the translator directs the text toward the standard and accepted discourse of the system's center. This choice not only reaffirms the authority of central norms but also shows that a translation seeking acceptance at the center must distance itself from the peripheralizing elements of the source system.

3.7. Rationalization of Narrative and Elimination of Emotional Repetition:

Persian text: "Madar va dokhtar az do kuche va az bazar gozashtand" (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 23).

Arabic text: "Marrat al-umm wa al-ibna min haratayn dakhiliyyatayn wa suq" (Anani, 2010: 61).

Strategic analysis: The repetition of the preposition "az" ("from") in the Persian text is deliberate, creating a slow rhythm and conveying a sense of temporal sequence and anticipation in the narrative. This repetition constitutes a stylistic and sensory element. The Arabic translation omits this repetition and presents the statement in a condensed, linear form ("from two alleys and a market"). This change transforms the narrative from a sensory and reflective mode into a functional and report-like mode.

This strategy serves as important evidence of the preference for functional narrative over aesthetic-sensory narrative in the target system. From Even-Zohar's perspective, when a translation disregards stylistic innovations of the source system (such as emotional repetition) and adopts more direct narrative patterns, it functions as a stabilizing force. This translation weakens the innovative norms of the source system while reinforcing the conservative narrative norms of the target system. This may indicate a peripheral position close to the center for the translation, where radical stylistic experimentation is not permitted.

3.8. Shift of Narrative Focus from Mentality to Action:

Persian text: "Vaghti dar baz shod, Zarrin-Taj Khanom ru be Hamide kard" (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 24).

Arabic text: "Fi an futiha al-bab, iltafatat Zarrin Taj Hanom ila Hamida" (Anani, 2010: 62).

Strategic analysis: In the Persian text, the compound verb "ru be ... kard" carries a strong psychological dimension, indicating a shift in attention, intention, or internal state of the character. The Arabic translation uses the verb "iltafatat" ("turned toward"), which, although equivalent, in this context emphasizes the physical act of turning more than the accompanying mental state. This subtle shift changes the focus of the narrative from introspection to external representation. This example shows that, for smoother reception in the target system, the translation tends toward objectification and externalization of mental elements. In Polysystem Theory, this may indicate the dominance of realist norms at the center of the target system. A translation that simplifies complex mental elements aligns itself with narrative patterns that are more familiar and predictable for the target audience. This reinforces the stabilizing role of the translation and its tendency to remain within the secure domain of the system's center.

3.9. Omission of Ritual-Cultural Layer:

Persian text: "Anha ra be otagh-e pazira'i bordand" (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 63).

Arabic text: "Udkhilata ila ghurfat al-kursi" (Anani, 2010: 63)

Strategic analysis: The term "otagh-e korsi" in Persian refers not merely to a physical space but to a cultural signifier associated with a warm, communal, and ritualistic environment related to winter, carrying connotations of intimacy, tradition, and togetherness. The literal translation into "ghurfat al-kursi," although transferring the word, leaves this rich socio-cultural layer unexplained and reduces it to a "room with a chair."

This strategy represents a classic case of marginalization of a cultural element from the source system within the target system. From Even-Zohar's perspective, when an element is perceived as "foreign" or unnecessary for the target system, the translation may neutralize or omit it. The translator's choice to transfer

the term without its cultural load indicates that this element lacks the symbolic capital necessary for integration into the center of the target system. This reflects the conservatism of the target system regarding the acceptance of foreign cultural elements and positions the translation in a marginalizing stance.

3.10. Standardization of Narrative Tone:

Persian text: “Kolfat-e sefidpoost anha ra bord” (Al-e Ahmad, 2004: 76).

Arabic text: “Istahabat-huma al-khadima al-bayda” (Anani, 2010: 63).

Strategic analysis: The word “kolfat” in contemporary Persian carries class-based, derogatory, and critical connotations, reflecting the narrator’s perspective or the social context of the text. The Arabic translation replaces this term with “al-khadima” (“servant”), a neutral, formal term lacking explicit evaluative connotations. This substitution removes the socio-critical tone of the source text and shifts the narrative tone toward neutrality and standardization.

This choice clearly demonstrates the power of ideological and stylistic norms at the center of the target system. The target system appears to have little inclination to reproduce the class-critical discourse present in the source system. By normalizing this tone, the translator aligns the translation with the dominant norms of formal discourse. This not only highlights the stabilizing function of translation but also shows that translations accepted at the center often avoid challenging the ideological norms of the target system. This example also reveals the marginal status of direct critical discourse within the center of the target literary system.

CONCLUSION:

The systematic analysis of the translated samples from *Nun wa al-Qalam*, based on Even-Zohar’s Polysystem Theory, demonstrates that the dominant norms of the target literary system directly influence the translator’s linguistic and stylistic choices. In most cases, the Arabic translation of this work distances itself from reproducing the emotional, cultural, and critical elements of the source text and, through simplification, rationalization, and neutralization of the narrative, aligns it with the discursive expectations of the Arabic-speaking audience. The examination of strategies such as the substitution of indigenous narrative formulas, reduction of emotional load, elimination of stylistic repetitions, normalization of critical tone, and minimal transfer of culture-bound elements indicates that the translation in this work does not function as an innovative force but rather as a stabilizing instrument of central norms. This situation suggests that the target literary system, at the time of the translation’s production, was relatively stable and did not feel the need to incorporate new or challenging models.

From Even-Zohar’s perspective, such a translation, while it may be considered successful in terms of

readability and social acceptance, simultaneously leads to the marginalization of the critical and stylistic potential of the source text. Thus, *Nun wa al-Qalam* in its Arabic translation is represented more as a conforming text aligned with the center of the target system than as a problematic or transformative text.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the analysis of literary translation, without considering the systemic position of the text and its relationship to the normative power structure of the target system, will remain incomplete. Even-Zohar’s Polysystem Theory, by providing a dynamic and holistic framework, enables a more precise explanation of the role of translation in reproducing or transforming literary norms and clearly demonstrates its effectiveness in the analysis of Persian Arabic translations.

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