

Vernacularism as an Essential Research Methodology in Translation Studies

المحلية كمنهج بحث أساسي في دراسات الترجمة

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ABSTRACT

الخلاصة

This paper examines the transformative role of Vernacularism as introduced by Nasser Hajjaj in Arab Vernacularism (2024) (المحلية العربية) and its fundamental contributions to translation studies. As a newly coined term in the field, Vernacularism reshapes translation theory by offering an alternative to prescriptive linguistic approaches. By redefining the term "vernacular" and introducing new terminologies such as Tantīq (تنطيق) (transliteration), Shawārid (شوارد لغوية) (idiomatic expressions), and His'Chah (حسجة) (witty, symbolic, and enigmatic expressions in Iraqi vernacular), Hajjaj foregrounds the integration of cultural and linguistic nuances into translation. This methodology enhances the translation of creative works, particularly poetry, while simultaneously resisting cultural homogenization and preserving local identities. The paper argues that Vernacularism is indispensable in ensuring that translations maintain linguistic accuracy and cultural resonance, offering a framework for bridging cultures while counteracting hegemonic linguistic forces.

تناقش هذه الدراسة الدور التحويلي للمحلية (Vernacularism) كما قدمها ناصر الحاج في المحلية العربية (2024) ومساهماتها الأساسية في الدراسات الترجمية. باعتبارها مصطلحاً مستحدثاً في هذا المجال، تعيد المحلية تشكيل نظرية الترجمة من خلال تقديم بديل واقعي للمناهج اللغوية التوصيفية. ومن خلال تعريف مصطلح "المحلي" Vernacular وتقديم مصطلحات جديدة مثل تنطيق Tantīq النقل الصوتي للكلمات الأجنبية (لفظاً ومعنى)، شوارد لغوية Shawārid بدلاً من مصطلح "التعابير الاصطلاحية"، وحسجة His'Chah وهو التعبير الإشاري المرمز الذكي والغامض في اللهجة العراقية)، يبرز الحاج دمج الفروق الثقافية واللغوية في الترجمة. تعزز هذه المنهجية ترجمة الأعمال الإبداعية، لا سيما الشعر، مع مقاومة التجانس الثقافي في الوقت نفسه، والحفاظ على الهويات المحلية. وتجادل الدراسة بأن المحلية ضرورية لضمان أن تكون الترجمات دقيقة لغوياً ومتوافقة ثقافياً، مما يوفر إطاراً لردم الفجوات بين الثقافات مع مواجهة القوى اللغوية المهيمنة.

Keywords

الكلمات المفتاحية

المحلية، دراسات الترجمة، الفروق الثقافية، النقل الصوتي (التنطيق)، الشوارد اللغوية، ناصر الحاج، المحلية العربية، المقاومة الثقافية، علم المصطلح.

Vernacularism, Translation Studies, Cultural Nuances, Transliteration, Idiomatic Expressions, Nasser Hajjaj, Arab Vernacularism, Cultural Resistance

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1. INTRODUCTION

Translation, as both an art and a science, extends beyond mere linguistic equivalence; it demands a profound understanding of cultural, historical, and sociolinguistic nuances. It applies to a wide range of fields, from literary translation to audiovisual translation, news translation, and the translation of nonfiction works. Whether adapting a novel, subtitled a film, translating breaking news, or localizing a historical text, the translator must navigate cultural and linguistic complexities to ensure fidelity to the source while making the content accessible to the target audience.

Nasser Hajjaj, in his seminal work *Arab Vernacularism* (2024) (المحلية العربية), introduces Vernacularism as a paradigm that not only enriches language studies and discourse analysis but also revolutionizes translation studies across multiple domains. Through the establishment of a new lexicon and methodological framework, Hajjaj highlights the importance of incorporating vernacular elements into translation, ensuring that cultural depth is preserved in both creative and informational texts. His approach resonates with Jakobson's classification of translation modes while challenging prescriptive norms in Arabic linguistics, offering a more dynamic and culturally embedded translation practice that extends beyond traditional frameworks.

2. VERNACULARISM IN TRANSLATION: BRIDGING CULTURES THROUGH NUANCE

A. Vernacular as an Adjective

In *Arab Vernacularism*, Hajjaj redefines the term "vernacular" (المحلي، الشعبي، العامي), expanding its application beyond language to include music, architecture, agriculture, literature, and more. He further introduces the verb *Vernaculate* (يوطّن لغوياً) as an alternative to the term "localize," emphasizing a deeper linguistic and cultural adaptation rather than a mere substitution of terms. By employing "vernacular" (محلي) as an adjective and advocating for *Vernaculation* (توطين لغوي) in translation studies and productions, Hajjaj underscores the significance of culturally immersive expressions that go beyond standard localization practices. His approach ensures that translations do not merely conform to target linguistic norms but actively incorporate vernacular depth, making them culturally authentic. This aligns with Bassnett's assertion that translation must account for cultural systems beyond language, ensuring vernacular expressions retain their originality and resonance.

B. Vernacularism as a Methodology

Hajjaj positions Vernacularism as a methodology that integrates vernacular languages and cultural elements into translation. This approach serves as a form of cultural resistance against globalized linguistic hegemony, ensuring that localized identities and expressions are preserved. To achieve its objectives, Vernacularism necessitates the use of thematic analysis, retrospective methods, and field research. Thematic analysis enables translators to identify recurrent cultural motifs and linguistic patterns that must be preserved to maintain authenticity. The retrospective method allows scholars to trace the historical evolution of vernacular expressions, ensuring that translations remain contextually appropriate and aligned with their cultural origins. Field research further enriches the process by engaging with native speakers and cultural practitioners, providing firsthand insights into the dynamic and evolving nature of vernacular expressions.

Moreover, Hajjaj emphasizes *Vernaculation* (توطين لغوي) as a crucial methodological tool in translation studies, reinforcing the need to deeply embed vernacular elements into the translated text rather than merely localizing it. Unlike traditional localization, which often smooths out cultural specificities, *Vernaculation* ensures that the richness of linguistic and cultural identity remains intact. By employing these methodologies and utilizing *Vernaculate* (يوطّن لغوياً) as an active process in translation productions, Vernacularism not only preserves the authenticity of source texts but also expands the creative potential of translators. By prioritizing vernacular voices and employing these methodologies, Vernacularism rejects homogenization, much like Nida's dynamic equivalence prioritizes receptor cultures (Nida, 1964). Additionally, Vernacularism echoes Venuti's critique of domestication, advocating for the preservation of source-text authenticity (Venuti, 1995).

3. KEY CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARAB VERNACULARISM TO TRANSLATION STUDIES

A. Introduction of New Terminology and Contributions to Arabi-English Translation

Hajjaj establishes new terminologies that are essential to translation studies, including newly coined terms that contribute to the Arabi-English translation field. As a revolutionary theory, Vernacularism opens new horizons for translation studies worldwide, offering an alternative to rigid linguistic frameworks.

- **Transliteration as *Tantiq*** (تنطق): (Hajjaj, 2024, p. 40) refers to articulating foreign words as they are pronounced in their original language. Unlike the term *Nafḥa* (نقحرة) (romanization) used in dictionaries such as *Al-Mawrid* by Baalbaki, *Tantiq* is intrinsically linked to spoken vernacular, emphasizing phonetic fidelity and cultural soundscapes. This concept parallels Jakobson's interlingual translation strategies.
- **Idioms as *Shawārid*** (شوارد لغوية): Hajjaj replaces the misleading term *Kinayah* (كناية, metonymy) with *Shawārid* (Hajjaj, 2024, p. 122) to describe idiomatic expressions that cannot be translated word-for-word. This concept

highlights the nuanced and symbolic nature of linguistic "outliers," aligning with Baker's emphasis on idiom flexibility (Baker, 2001).

- **Witty Vernacular Expressions as *His'Chah* (حسجة):** (Hajjaj, 2024, p. 12) refers to symbolic and enigmatic expressions deeply rooted in Iraqi vernacular. Influenced by Sumerian, Aramaic, and Nabatean linguistic traditions, *His'Chah* conveys coded meanings rich in cultural and historical significance.

B. Nuances of Vernaculars in Poetry Translation

Hajjaj underscores the importance of vernacular nuances in poetry translation. He examines Saadi Yousif's immersion in Saint Lucia to understand the English vernacular of Derek Walcott before translating *Omeros* (Hajjaj, 2024, p. 270). This experiential approach parallels Venuti's foreignization strategy, reinforcing the necessity of translator visibility in cross-cultural dialogue. Hajjaj argues that vernacular sensitivity allows translators to capture the cultural and emotional depth of a poem, rather than merely conveying its literal meaning. By engaging deeply with local linguistic traditions, translators can reproduce the rhythm, tone, and thematic weight of the source text more faithfully, making the translation resonate with its new audience while preserving the spirit of the original.

C. Vernacularism as Cultural Resistance

Hajjaj critiques the limited scope of English departments in Arab universities, where vernacular poetry and literature are often excluded in favor of works originally written in English. He argues that incorporating local literary expressions into academic discourse enhances translation studies. This perspective aligns with Hatim & Mason's (1997) call for context-aware translation pedagogy, advocating for the inclusion of vernacular literature in curricula. Hajjaj's approach challenges the long-standing dominance of Standard Arabic and Eurocentric literary traditions in translation studies, emphasizing that cultural authenticity in translation is achieved through active engagement with local linguistic forms. By employing *Vernaculation* (توطين لغوي), translators reinforce the presence of regional linguistic identities in global discourse, counteracting linguistic imperialism and fostering a pluralistic approach to translation.

4. APPLICATIONS OF VERNACULARISM IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

A. Enhancing Literary Translation

- Retaining idiomatic expressions in their vernacular form while providing contextual explanations preserves authenticity.
- Understanding local vernaculars enables translators to convey the rhythm and tone of poetry effectively.
- Translating idioms like *Shawārid* requires cultural substitution strategies, balancing authenticity and clarity (Baker, 2001).
- Applying *Vernaculation* to literary translation ensures that culturally specific expressions are maintained rather than neutralized for global readability.

B. Expanding Creative Horizons

Vernacularism encourages translators to view their work as a creative bridge between cultures. This approach is particularly valuable in translating folklore, songs, and oral histories, where linguistic expression is inseparable from cultural context. Hajjaj's framework offers translators the tools to ensure that oral traditions and regional dialects are preserved in literary works. This methodological expansion aligns with the increasing global recognition of the importance of intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that minority linguistic expressions are safeguarded within translation practices.

C. Reimagining Translation Pedagogy

Incorporating Vernacularism into translation education fosters:

- Greater emphasis on vernacular languages in translation training.
- Deeper analysis of the cultural and historical contexts of texts.
- Experimentation with transliteration and idiomatic translation to develop linguistic agility.
- Encouraging students to engage in *Vernaculation* rather than mere localization, fostering sensitivity to linguistic identity and cultural nuance.

5. CONCLUSION

Nasser Hajjaj's contributions to linguistic and translation studies extend beyond traditional confines of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and its prescriptive grammatical rules. He pioneers the study of the bilateral verb within the Arabic morphological scale, challenging conventional linguistic frameworks. This innovative perspective fosters a more inclusive understanding of language and its applications.

Vernacularism, as introduced by Hajjaj, provides a transformative approach to translation studies. By prioritizing linguistic and cultural nuances, this methodology ensures translations maintain both accuracy and resonance. Whether through transliteration, idiomatic interpretation, or cultural immersion, Vernacularism empowers translators to bridge cultures while

honoring unique expressions. Furthermore, by advocating for *Vernaculation* rather than mere adaptation, Hajjaj sets a new standard for translation practices that preserve vernacular integrity while making texts accessible to global audiences. In an era of globalization, this paradigm serves as a vital tool for safeguarding cultural diversity and fostering cross-cultural understanding. Vernacularism, as a revolutionary theory, challenges existing translation methodologies and expands the boundaries of linguistic studies. As translation increasingly becomes a tool for intercultural dialogue, the principles of Vernacularism offer a roadmap for future scholarship and professional practice, ensuring that language remains a vibrant and evolving medium of expression across cultures.

To further strengthen the application of Vernacularism, corpus linguistics resources such as *A Frequency Dictionary of Arabic* (Buckwalter & Parkinson, 2009) play a crucial role in supporting research and practical translation efforts. Such dictionaries provide valuable insights into the frequency and usage of words across different dialects, reinforcing the importance of data-driven approaches in vernacular translation. Integrating corpus-based linguistic research within Vernacularism enhances its effectiveness in translation studies, providing translators with empirical tools to ensure both accuracy and cultural fidelity.

Conflicts Of Interest

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