Standard Intertextuality in Colloquial Settings: A Discursive-Event Analysis  
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Introduction

Communication is a complex transaction shaped by a varied host of factors influencing how people use messages to inform, persuade, relate, and influence each other in various contexts and cultures. Yet, communication is basically incomplete and inferential since it is rather not possible to say everything about anything at any point in time, as Winter (1994: 47) puts it. Context-based inferences are unavoidable on the part of the recipient to derive the intended meaning from a spoken utterance or text. This context or background is referred to by Winograd and Flores (1986:57) as the space of possibilities that enables us to listen to both what is spoken and what is unspoken and thus, meaning is constructed in an active process whereby linguistic forms prompt interpretation rather than passing on information. Moreover, in this respect, Gutt (1991:26) describes a recipient’s entire cognitive environment formed by the space of possibilities as one which comprises information that can be perceived externally, knowledge stored in memory, and information drawn from previous utterances or texts. Intertextuality is what represents this part of information derived from earlier texts which embody shared cultural backgrounds.

Intertextuality, which is a precondition for the intelligibility of texts according to Hatim and Mason (1997:219), is viewed to be a device through which a text refers backward or forward to previous or upcoming texts. This is carried out by alluding to, adapting, or invoking meanings embedded in those other texts. In order to retrieve the full range of intended meaning in a given text, recipients should be able to recognize and understand such intertextual networks. Unsuccessful endeavors to do so will certainly end with partial understanding, or incomplete recovery of the actual meaning intended while producing the concerned text.

Intertextuality is defined as the actual presence of one text in another. Generally, this standard of textuality is a strategy profusely employed by and associated with literary genres. Quite many literary texts rely heavily on thematic and character delineation allusions, which are considered intertextual networks. Such networks built up by a writer encompass a host of texts that are in one way or another embedded into a text, or texts referred to in it and even the texts that are somehow rejected from a text's own standard or norm. Allusion can be defined as a reference, often covert or indirect, to another text in a way that brings into the text some of the associations of that other text. A text in this context is perceived broadly, and therefore, sources of allusions include all cultural texts from literature, history and many other sources. Allusions are culture specific, and thus each culture tends to allude to its own cultural products.

In addition to being a textuality standard, it is also relevant and applied in semiotic analysis as it refers to those characteristics known to the reader because s/he has
encountered them in other texts before. This semiotic notion of intertextuality as introduced by Julia Kristeva (cited in Chandler, 2003) is associated primarily with post-structuralist theorists. Texts are framed by other texts in various ways. For example, within a film, being one frame, an advertisement, another frame, of a product can be shown, such as a billboard in scene. The film, in turn, is part of the genre film or movies. Within semiotics, genres can be seen as systems or codes. According to Chandler (ibid), each example of a genre utilizes conventions that link it to other members of that genre.

Statement and Purpose

Quite many texts, spoken or written, rely heavily on thematic allusions, and thus form intertextual networks. Such networks built up by a speaker or writer encompass a host of texts that are in one way or another embedded into a text, or texts referred to in it. As is the case in other speech communities, Arabic discourse utilizes the communicative strategy of intertextuality, the deployment of which in both the formal and informal discourse constitutes generic links. It is noticed that in order to establish intertextual relations to carry out social activities, recourse is made to Koranic, poetic, cultural and poetic resources. The present paper lends itself to identifying a sample of these salient embedded texts, analyzing them and investigating how this generic intertextuality can illuminate questions related to issues like ideology, perception of the world of experience, and social power. Looked at as discursive events, which are culturally bound, their translatability is an inevitable challenge due to elements of generic ambiguity maximizing gaps of incomprehensibility for an alien recipient.

Intertextuality and Discourse

Discourse, from the critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective, is a form of social practice viewing the context of language use a crucial factor in this social activity or event, as expressed by Wodak (2001a). Taking into consideration the relationship between language and power, some linguists in the field like van Dijk (2001), Fairclough (2001), and Wodak (ibid), claim that cultural and economic dimensions are significant in establishing and maintaining power relations. Viewed as an approach consisting of various perspectives and methods for studying the relationship between language use and social context, critical discourse analysis adopts a host of tenets and principles. In this respect and as a main principle, the linguistic characteristics of social, cultural and political processes are highly emphasized. The power relations within this multifarious context are seen as discursive in that social relations of power, as Fairclough & Wodak, (1997) describe them, are exercised and negotiated in and through discourse. Thus, discourse plays a central role in the reproduction and transforming of society and culture. Moreover, discourse can have an ideological contribution since ideologies are often produced through discourse. Hence, in order to understand how these ideologies are created, text analysis is not enough; the discursive practices like how the texts are received and interpreted in addition to what social effects they may have, must be closely scrutinized.

Furthermore, adopting the view that discourse is history, this analytic approach holds that reference to their historical context can help a better understanding of the various types of discourses. That is, the extra-linguistic factors of culture, society and ideology have to be
addressed within their historical framework. Another important principle is that the text-society relationship is mediated through establishing connections between the sociocultural processes and structures on the one hand, and the properties of texts on the other, as stated by Wodak & Meyer (2001) and Scollon (2001). Besides, the interpretative and explanatory functions of discourse are of paramount importance in critical discourse analysis. The ensuing interpretations and explanations are dynamic and open, and may be affected by new readings and new contextual information. Meyer (ibid) calls this process a hermeneutic process and maintains that compared with the analytical-inductive process employed in some other fields, hermeneutics can be understood as a method of grasping and producing meaning relations by understanding the meaning of one part in the context of the whole. Discourse from the foregoing point of view is thus seen as a form of social action.

The examples provided later in the analysis, which display intertextual relations, are drawn from a variety of sources, all of which are Arabic culture specific. These include a poetic, Koranic, historical or proverbial source. Since used in everyday informal or formal exchange, such intertextuality-embodying discourses are conceived as forms of social practices, and looked at here as ways of signifying experiences from particular perspectives relevant to their sources. The source variation, thus producing different discourses, provides different ways of representing and viewing the world of experience utilizing the power of intertextuality to carry out a host of social functions. Seen as a discursive event, intertextuality represents different forms of social practices that can be situational, institutional, and societal as a whole. Considering Halliday’s (ibid) notion of the multi-functionality of language in discourse, language use can be constitutive of social relations, identities, in addition to systems of knowledge and beliefs as aspects of society and culture.

Translating Intertextuality

As stated earlier, intertextuality is approached as a social practice, e.g., Bazerman & Prior (2004); in that intertextual networks are more or less constant conventions of a particular discourse community. Analysis of such relations can help uncover how a speaker or writer consciously constructs the intertextual field to present his/her view or argument as effectively as possible. With this in mind, translation across contexts or re-contextualization is not easy a task since the implications of this for translation can include the likelihood of failure to recognize intertextual reference between languages and across cultures, which is considerably greater than within them because of the social knowledge required on the part of the translator.

As stated earlier, intertextuality relies heavily on allusions of various types. Translating allusions can be a demanding task because they are likely to have specific meanings in the culture and language in which they arise but not necessarily in others. This can constitute a challenge to the translator’s endeavor to be as faithful as possible to the source text if the translation strategies used result in a relative loss of the intertextually constructed allusive connotations.

Being culture-bound, allusions involved in intertextuality evoke thoughts in the source discourse recipients pertaining to that particular culture as depicted in reference to
historical events, poetic, religious or proverbial settings. Hence, allusions can be potential translation problems. Therefore, in order to convey the same thoughts evoked by the allusions in source discourse recipients to the target text audience, translators are likely to interfere and add some guidance to the translated discourse. When guidance is not provided, this can result in changes in handling the themes under question, which are clearly present in the source text but confusing or incomprehensible in the target text. Yet, norms in certain target cultures may constitute obstacles for translators to produce a comprehensible rendered text.

Understanding utterances is not simply a matter of knowing the meanings of the words uttered and the way in which they are combined. It further entails drawing inferences from intertextual relations based on non-linguistic information and the assumption that the speaker has aimed to meet certain general standards of communication. For communication to be proper, it is has to take place in a situation where a speaker, transmits a message to a hearer who gets the message the same way as the speaker had in mind. When there is a serious mismatch between the configuration of concepts and relations expressed via intertextual networks and the receivers’ prior knowledge of the world, this inevitably leads to misinterpretations or disfigured representations of the original in the minds of the target receivers, as De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:84), put it.

As far as coherence established by intertextual relations is concerned, Blum-Kulka (1986:304) views it as the realizations of the text's meaning potential and assumes that texts are likely to lose their meaning potential through translation. In this respect, she differentiates between two types of shifts in coherence: text-focused and reader-focused. Writers may have certain types of readers in mind when they write their pieces, and accordingly they may sometimes seek to make their messages complicated by loading them with intertextual allusions in order to convey certain implications and create certain impressions. This consciously done violation of Grice's (1975) cooperative principle and its maxims can pose a challenge to the translator. Based on this general principle are the other maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. The problems that these maxims may create in the translation act could be predicted in light of what Baker (1996:238) claims in that these maxims are not universal, and thus the interpretation of a maxim or the maxims themselves can differ from one linguistic community to another. Yet, what can be a universal is the phenomenon of implicature, referring to what the speaker implies, rather than what s/he literally says.

Languages display different preferences for coherent devices mainly used to convey meanings and impressions that are not literally stated in the text. As stated elsewhere, Arabic discourse, written as well as spoken, profusely employ metaphoric, poetic and intertextual implicatures. These devices are not necessarily the same in both the target and source languages. The multifold duty of the translator is not confined to comprehending what the source text says literally, but also figuring out what is implied by these expressions or stylistic devices. The next challenging task is to choose equivalent preferred devices to transmit those implications in the target language, i.e. to convey the sense that the original writer or speaker wanted to show. In short,
intertextuality as centered around a given discourse is an important level of inference that helps in figuring out messages and realizing successful communication.


