

## Book review

### **Chakhachiro, Raymond (2018) *Translating Irony Between English and Arabic*, Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.**

Chakhachiro's monograph deals with irony, probably one of the most intriguing types of humour. In addition, it also aims to discuss its transfer across languages and cultures, which appears equally fascinating. Proposing to compare irony translation between two such distant languages and cultures as English and Arabic further piques readers' curiosity.

Considering that it is based on such solid premises, this book could potentially appeal to a broad range of scholars and students in Humour Studies, Translation Studies (TS), Pragmatics, Stylistics and so forth. Unfortunately, it does not meet these expectations, mainly because by now both its theories and data are partly outdated. As stated on the copyright page, this volume was first published in 2011 by Sayyab Books Limited, which is not a problem *per se*. Repackaging and relaunching a valuable piece of research is not unusual and at times desirable. Nonetheless, this practice also involves partially revising or updating the text with, let's say, more recent examples or research in order to advance the theory and practice of the discipline (cf. Bessnett 2013/1980; Munday 2016/2001; Baker 2018/1992). Chakhachiro's study was republished by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2018, only seven years after its first edition. Although the time span between the two editions is not significant, this book's main weakness is its dated bibliography and data. Even a cursory look at the references reveals that the most recent references date back to 2009, and incidentally the latter is one of the author's articles (i.e. Chakhachiro 2009). Similarly, the data under scrutiny dates back to 1992 and 1993. This information is not explicitly reported in the text but can be retrieved from the explanation provided by the author (pp. 140-141) and a quick Internet search. Some updating would have been more than appreciated to ensure that the book be embedded in the present-day, especially because the author seeks to investigate corrective irony translation in argumentative texts which are mainly news articles about politics.

In terms of content, this book comprises six chapters, excluding the introduction that offers an explanation of the rationale behind the study, its approach and outline. Chapter 1 sets out to offer a detailed discussion of irony from a literary theory standpoint. Chakhachiro refers to the literature to provide a definition of irony, although other scholars have considered it as a "vain attempt" (Bara 2010: 176, quoted in Colston 2017: 234). Although pinpointing exactly what irony is or is not is certainly difficult, it is useful to try and distinguish irony from other types of humour. Drawing on Gibbs (1994), Chakhachiro explains that sarcasm is a "negative" form of irony (p. 12). This view is also supported by Colston (2017: 236) who calls it a "nasty, mean-spirited or just relatively negative form of irony". In Chakhachiro's opinion, sarcastic irony is more overt than irony, but it is also covert in its content. In other words, the mechanisms used to express sarcasm may be less linguistically elegant than irony but, like irony, the receiver must make a good deal of effort to process and understand it.

This clearly adds to the fascination of irony, especially when it aims to correct others' behaviour or actions. For this reason, Chakhachiro concentrates in particular on verbal corrective irony. The author refers to Booth (1974) and Muecke (1969) to describe different

types and functions of irony. The most important distinction for the purpose of this book is probably between observable (unintentional) irony – as may be found in art – and instrumental irony (i.e. using language purposefully), as put forward by Muecke (1969). Language-based instrumental irony is therefore linked to the idea of corrective irony in argumentative texts and analysed in argumentative texts in this book. That said, Chakhachiro reviews irony in the English language and within different disciplines (unfortunately, including the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard in his list; p. 12). He also debates irony in literature and offers some interesting analyses of examples taken from works by Jane Austen, Jonathan Swift and George Bernard Shaw. By the same token, he discusses Arabic literature by focusing particularly on works by the ancient literary writer Al-Jaahiz, as they contain a good deal of corrective irony (pp. 35-41). Notwithstanding the value of the theories and literary works taken into consideration, the reader cannot help but hope for some more contemporary sources. However, this never really happens as you continue reading.

The same pitfall may be found in Chapter 2, which is devoted to the discussion of irony in linguistic and stylistic terms, thus serving as the basis for the analysis of its markers. When addressing irony from a pragmatic point of view, the author quotes Attardo (2000) and Simpson (2004) as his most recent sources. In addition, he considers literary criticism and the modern linguistic approaches to irony, which help to shed light on its function(s) within a text, as well as how it is created and perceived by interlocutors. In this light, texts are seen as a process (i.e. discourse) rather than a product (p. 50). Hence, they can be also analysed pragmatically by using Grice's (1975) *Cooperative Principle* and its four conversational maxims (i.e. quality, quantity, manner, or relevance). Most importantly, Chakhachiro shows how such maxims can be broken, violated or flaunted to convey irony. The discussion proceeds with a review of seminal works such as Jakobson (1960), Flower (1981), Halliday (1970) and van Dijk (1977), which is certainly necessary to understand how the study of irony in linguistics has developed over the years. However, in this case, the whole argument appears frozen in time, since it is almost entirely limited to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whereas much more has been said and done on this issue in recent years (see Averbeck 2015; Burgers & van Mulken 2017; Colston 2017, just to name a few).

Chapter 3 offers a thorough, albeit brief, review of the most prominent studies in TS and the frameworks that have been postulated to tackle translation issues, which generally refer to the notion of equivalence in source and target texts. As Chakhachiro rightly observes, “[t]ranslation is a contrastive stylistic exercise resulting from a careful analysis and assessment of the source text’s message and function versus its function in the target language and culture” (p. 43). Hence, well-known works by Catford (1965), House (1977), James (1980), Vinay & Darbelnet (1995/1958) are debated in general, and in relation to irony translation. In particular, Chakhachiro considers how all such studies have contributed to the advancement of TS, and how many approaches based on comparative stylistics and contrastive analysis developed in the Western world have also been inspirational for Arabic scholars such as Emery (1987), Sa’addedin (1987), etc. Curiously, when mentioning TS scholars of Arabic origin who have contributed to the advancement of the discipline, the author only refers to Basil Hatim (p. 88), thus neglecting to mention Mona Baker, one of, if not the most important Egyptian scholar in TS whose book *In Other Words* (2018/1992) is still essential reading for students and scholars alike.

That said, Chakhachiro seeks to demonstrate how an interdisciplinary approach that includes insights from pragmatics, stylistics, sociolinguistics and translation studies can be fruitfully applied to the study of corrective irony in translation. He claims that specifically for irony translated between English and Arabic, its transfer has to overcome important cultural and linguistic differences, which are caused by significant variations in the style of irony for each culture (p. 84). In this light, in Chapter 4, Chakhachiro proposes a model for the contrastive analysis of translated corrective irony in argumentative texts. He suggests that translators first

detect the ironic devices used in the text (e.g. rhetorical, lexical, grammatical, and/or paralinguistic). Subsequently, they should examine the communicative function of such devices within in the text, thus considering stylistic variation in terms of field, mode, and tenor, the situation (i.e. context) within which these devices are uttered and which of Grice's maxims they break, violate, or flaunt to convey irony.

This allows the translator to create a 'textual profile' (i.e. the text's rhetorical meaning) and decide which strategy to use for its transfer (pp. 106-117). Since some ironic mechanisms in English and Arabic are similar (e.g. parallel structure, repetition, rhetorical question etc.) while others differ substantially (e.g. double shift, circular address, use of circumstantial accusative, etc.), Chakhachiro categorises them as rhetorical, grammatical, lexical, and paralinguistic devices. All explanations are coupled with examples that are sometimes accompanied by acronyms, for which unfortunately no explanation or list is provided beforehand (e.g. ET1 stands for English Text 1, but this has to be inferred while reading).

Before moving on to his data analysis in Chapter 5, Chakhachiro describes the textual and contextual features of English and Arabic argumentative texts in light of the social and cultural factors that are likely to influence both. Once again, the author refers to authoritative yet outdated sources such as Edgar (1980) to explain how argumentative texts, such as news pieces, manipulate readership (p. 130). Unfortunately, no mention is made of, for instance, Brexit or the present frightening spread of fake news and the major influence they may have on people's voting decisions and/or their perceptions of politics. Chakhachiro also describes the multifaceted Arabic world in very general terms, considering the republics (Egypt, Syria, and Libya), the monarchies (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Qatar) and other types of governments (Lebanon, Kuwait, and Morocco; p. 132). The way information is conveyed and/or manipulated is convincingly discussed, but no mention is made of recent events such as the Arab Spring or the war in Syria. This is one of the main weaknesses of Chakhachiro's work, even if his analysis solely refers to the translation of English texts into Arabic for the TT receivers living in Australia.

The dataset comprises a series of articles regarding John Fahey's mismanagement of the state of New South Wales in Australia. As mentioned earlier, since no specific date is provided by the author, I had to search the Internet to find it: most probably, these articles were written in 1992 and translated in 1993. The author presents the Arabic and English versions side by side for the sake of understanding and comparison. He identifies and examines the ironic devices in each text according to the model given in Chapter 4 to find that both English and Arabic texts feature similar language usage but differ in the way irony is sequentially presented. In other words, the English texts tend to use rhetorical devices such as antithesis and ellipsis while the Arabic texts prefer binomials and synonyms (pp. 247-248). This is also likely to depend on the tradition developed within each language and culture to create argumentative texts: more progressive for English texts and rather circumlocutory for Arabic texts (p. 249).

Chapter 6 elaborates on the results of this study in more general terms. Chakhachiro's statistical analysis offers interesting insights into the way rhetorical, lexical, and grammatical devices have been used in the English data that has been translated into Arabic. The author shows that the former displays a higher level of sophistication, covertness, economy, complexity, etc. (p. 251). However, his analysis of the instances of violated maxims in the two datasets shows that the Arabic texts tend to flaunt the maxims more often, which also means that the translator has been more explicit in conveying the covert irony of the English source texts (pp. 251-257). The use of more overt irony in Arabic is further demonstrated by Chakhachiro's comparison of the use of shared rhetorical devices. Arabic scores higher than English in the use of rhetorical questions, overstatements, etc. while English scores high in understatements and semotactic anomalies, which covertly convey irony (pp. 257-275). Generally speaking, Chakhachiro's investigation confirms that English and Arabic irony differ

in terms of form and function, as may be expected of two such divergent languages and cultures. In conclusion, the author contends that conveying the rhetorical meaning of irony is facilitated by the translator's creative use of language, which also strives to retain the original author's idiosyncratic irony and persuasive style (p. 288). Therefore, it goes without saying that neutralising the original corrective irony is the least desirable approach in translation.

All in all, this full-length volume on the translation of irony convincingly shows that such a complex phenomenon can highly benefit from the application of a multidisciplinary approach that draws insights from linguistics, stylistics, pragmatics, etc. The quality of the research carried out is undisputable and Chakhachiro shows his in-depth understanding of the issues connected to processing and translating corrective irony. Nonetheless, this work suffers from significant weaknesses, as demonstrated above. It should have included a more up-to-date literature review and discussed more recent data. In addition, the contextual framing of English and Arabic cultures overlooks important historical events, such as Brexit or the Arab Spring, that may influence the translator's decision-making process and the source and target text receivers. In theory, this study may be suited to a large readership but, as it stands, can only be used to understand irony translation between English and Arabic in very broad terms.

**Margherita Dore**

Università di Roma "La Sapienza"  
[margherita.dore@uniroma1.it](mailto:margherita.dore@uniroma1.it)

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