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AUTHORS: Lovisa BERG

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Translating the Cover – A Comparative Study of the Covers of Arabic Novels and Their English Translations

Lovisa BERG*

Translation studies have traditionally focused on the textual aspects of a work. This article, instead, concentrates on the multimodal translation practices involved in the translation of covers. When a novel is introduced to another linguistic and cultural sphere, its cover and paratext usually change. The cover is one of the prime factors that influence the first view of a literary work. This article applies content analysis to examine the specific features of the cover imagery and design of 55 contemporary Arabic novels and compare them with the covers of their English translations. The comparison is based on paratextual features such as position of the title and author's name as well as content-based elements like the selection of cover motive and cultural aspects of that choice. The analysis shows that there are significant differences between the Arabic and English covers regarding color, motive, and design and that whereas the Arabic novels often carry signifiers of a clear cultural identity, that is not the case with the English translations of the same novels. The translated covers are shown to be domesticated versions that are appealing to the target culture, using target culture aesthetics, rather than clear representatives of the source culture. Keywords: translation studies; Arabic literature; cover design; translated covers; comparison

1. Introduction

Regardless of the source and target languages involved in the transition of a novel from one language to another, the cover design is almost always changed to appeal to the new market it is introduced to (Lau 2015). This change is significant in many ways since it gives an idea of the target customer that the publishing house is imagining for the book. It further shows how the publishing house attempts to introduce the source culture of the novel in question. "To reach its potential public, every book has to communicate its contents to the right target group," as Ingela Johansson and Marianna Smaragdi (2021, 215) conclude. The question to start with is which part of the novel's content publishers want the cover to communicate since the dust jacket design affects the reception of the novel in the target culture, as Malin Podlevskikh Carlström (2020) shows in a study on the covers of translated novels. Gudrun Held (2005) categorizes

* Senior lecturer at Dalarna University.
E-mail: lbg@du.se; ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9343-1878.
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covers as 'contact-establishing texts' whose main function is to attract attention through a mixture of old and new information. A cover therefore needs to allude to the well-known while simultaneously introducing something unknown. This becomes particularly pertinent with the covers of translated novels where the publishing houses need to balance between prevailing book design fashion and the (re-)presentation of another culture. This balancing act between design, representation and marketing, and how that might affect book cover designs is the focus of this article. The article examines the process involved when Arabic novels, and their covers, are translated into English. It discusses if there are what can be described as distinctive changes made between the covers of Arabic novels and the covers of the translated English versions and explores to what extent domestication and foreignization practices are used in the process of creating the cover for the English version of the Arabic novel.

In addition to representativity and cover fashion Podlevskikh Carlström (2020) points at the marketing side of cover design, the target group or potential buyer the publishing house has in mind when commissioning a cover design will affect the outcome. At a later state, the sales numbers of the novel will be seen as a reflection of the cover's suitability (Lau 2015, 5) because, as Marco Sonzogni notes, for a publisher, the success of a cover is measured in sales (2011, 15). Helen T. Frank further argues that commercial imperatives are stronger than cultural ones when it comes to the covers of translated children's books (2005, 111). It is more important that the book sells well than that the cover image is culturally representative of the content. At the same time, if the book, or indeed the book cover, is not culturally acceptable, the book will most likely not sell. Long Li, Xi Li, and Jun Miao (2019) have shown that ideology plays a part in the choice of cover for a translated book and that a dust jacket of a translated work might change over time due to ideological changes in the target culture. According to Gérard Genette (1997), this is one of the advantages of the paratextual features of a book, of which the cover is one. The text itself is not changeable as such whereas the cover can be adapted to new circumstances.

One ideological aspect of translation is the question of whether one should work with 'domestication' or 'foreignization' as discussed by Lawrence Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995). 'Domestication' is, in a layman's terms, when a translator takes care to adjust the source text to read seamlessly in the target culture without any distractions such as foreign words, complicated sentence structures, or other signifiers that tell the reader that it was originally a foreign and translated text. 'Foreignization' is the opposite of

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'domestication' and allows for the specificalities of the source text to shine through the translation. Several studies have shown that during the twentieth century the cover designs of translated novels from Asia, India, and the Arab world were often constructed in a way that can be seen as foreignization since the covers make use of stereotypical images and exoticization (Lau 2015; Pears 2015; Serra Vilella 2021; Carbonell i Cortés 2003). In this article, I argue that the two terms 'domestication' and 'foreignization' are useful when the cover of a translated novel is studied, in particular the front cover design and the visual semiotics at work on the different covers.

Sonzogni (2011, 4) points out that the cover design of any novel is in itself a translation of the novel's text into another medium, that of imagery which is culturally encoded. Podlevskikh Carlström (2020, 102) comments on this and says that in the case of translated novels this step is taken even further because it is either the translated text that is the source for the cover or the original cover—in both cases a new interpretation in a foreign culture is undertaken. Valerie Pellatt holds that "the non-verbal components of the paratext are powerful tools in the presentation and manipulation employed by the translator or the commissioners of a translation" (2013, 3). The cover and packaging of a book when it is sent to a new culture can therefore not be seen as something to be left to chance but must be clearly thought through. Pamela A. Pears adds that the covers constitute a dialogue between the visual paratextual representation and the written textual one and that it will affect the readings of a particular author's works (2015, 1). The design chosen for a translated book's cover is hence of great importance for how the author and the novel will be received in the target culture.

1.1 Sample Material

The analysis is based on 55 novels that have either won or been long- or shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) between the years 2007 and 2021 and subsequently translated into English. A list of these novels is provided on the IPAF webpage,[1] and I have used that as my sample. In some cases, there is more than one cover of the Arabic novel, published in different regions and by different publishing houses.[2] There are also cases

[1] "Translations," *International Prize for Arabic Fiction*, accessed 12 12, 2022, https://www.arabicfiction.org/sites/default/files/Translations%20Eng_Dec%20update.pdf.
[2] Six of the Arabic covers come in two versions.

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where the British and American versions of the cover vary,[3] so the actual number of covers analyzed is 129. Of the authors of the 55 novels, 13 are women and 42 men, and they are from various Arab countries. There are 24 publishing houses involved in the publication of the English translations, the most active ones being American University of Cairo Press (AUCP) (8 novels), Hoopoe, which is an imprint of AUCP, (12 novels), Interlink (9 novels), and Syracuse University Press (4 novels). The Arabic novels are published by 15 different publishing houses, and the most active ones are Dar al-Adab (9 novels), Dar al-Saqi (9 novels), and Arab Scientific Publishers (7 novels).

1.2 Method and Coding Procedures

The sample material has been analyzed in three steps. The first step consists of an analysis of the paratextual features of the cover based on Genette's (1997) outline of the function of the cover. The second step has been to use content analysis as a basis for comparison. Content analysis was chosen since it allows for the processing of a large number of visual artefacts (Rose 2016, 86), in this case front covers. In this study, I work on the premises outlined by Klaus Krippendorff (2013), suggesting that content analysis assumes that the front covers refer to the wider cultural context of which they are a part and further tries to analyze those references in a replicable manner. Catherine Lutz and Jane Lou Collins (1993) write that the usefulness of content analysis applied in this fashion is that it enables researchers to find patterns that are too subtle to be visible on casual inspection. They add that the large number of images also protects against an unconscious search for only those images that confirm a preconceived idea of what one is looking for (Lutz and Collins 1993).

After having collected the cover images for the selected novels from the various publishers' websites, the images were coded. The images of the Arabic and English covers were coded separately, and the results were then compared. Coding in this analysis means to attach a set of descriptive labels to the images (Rose 2016, 92). This can be done in numerous ways, but the process should result in codes that are exclusive and enlightening—i.e., categories should not overlap, and they should be analytically interesting and coherent (ibid.). The coding focused on the component parts of the cover imagery and grew organically from the material as it was analyzed. For example, the first cover featured a house. 'House' then became a

[3] Eleven of the English translations' covers come in two versions and two covers exist in three versions.

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category. The next cover also featured a house but with people in front. This cover was then labeled with the code 'house' but also with the additional code 'people.' 'People' was then added to the coding schedule. This very meticulous coding practice, which took into account all aspects of the images, was then itself divided into six codes, which are: (i) people, (ii) buildings and cities, (iii) specific symbols and references to Arab culture, (iv) no specific cultural symbols, (v) abstract art, (vi) references to violence.

The third step of the analysis focuses on the colors used and is based on Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's (2002) work on a grammar of colors where the use of certain colors is understood to carry specific, culturally embedded meanings.

2. Results

In this section, I will present the results of the analyses carried out on the sample material. I will begin by outlining the paratextual analysis, followed by the content analysis and finally the analysis of colors.

2.1 Paratextual Analysis

In his seminal book *Seuils* (1987) translated into *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Genette outlines a framework for the analysis of what he calls "the accompanying productions" of a text (1997, 1). By this, he means anything outside a text that might affect its reception such as the author's name and fame, the font, the title, the cover, the prologue and epilogue, and even interviews with the author, among other aspects. The paratextual aspects I will focus on are connected to the front cover only, cover 1 in Genette's terms (23). The aspects are the position of the title and the author's name, information about prizes, quotes and recommendations, and how visible the publishing house is on the cover. For Genette, the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and it is also the factors that invite or reject a possible reader. According to Genette, the author's name has become a selling point in modern days and therefore has a prominent position on the cover (38). It is a position that can well change depending on the cover design. Looking at the sample material, there seems to be a culturally specific difference in the position of the author's name. On the Arabic covers, in 45 out of the 55 books, the author's name can be found at the top of the page in the middle of the cover, looming above the title. This position makes sure that the author is noticed before the title is read, consequently making

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the author the primary reason to read on and find out the title. On the English covers, the author's name is usually placed at the bottom of the page, underneath the title and, if mentioned, above the translator, focusing the viewers' gaze on the product before the producer. A few of the English covers have followed the Arabic style. Elias Khoury has his name in capital letters and in a large font at the top of the cover of *The Broken Mirrors* (2016). Jabbour Douaihy's name is placed at the top of the cover of *The King of India* (2022) as is Said Khatibi's on *Sarajevo Firewood* (2022) and Hammour Ziada's on *The Longing of the Dervish* (2016). The top part of the covers in English is instead the place where information on prizes won is positioned whereas the Arabic covers prefer to put this at the bottom of the cover. Although all the novels analyzed in this study have been either long- or shortlisted for the IPAF prize, one of the most prestigious literary prizes in the Arab world, only 22 of the translated novels mention this on the cover. Looking at the Arabic novels, only six mention the prize.

The Arabic covers feature information about the publishing house on the front cover, often but not always in the right-hand side corner but always in a very visible way, as if the publishing house works as a guarantor for quality. The Arabic novels are all marked with the word 'novel' since it is common in the Arabic publishing tradition to mark the literary genre on the cover. Some of the English covers feature the logo of the publishing house, but many have left this information to the back cover or first page. Interestingly, quite a few, 18 out of 55, of the translated covers carry the word 'novel,' a feature not usually seen on novels originally published in English. Perhaps this is just a case of translating, and then accommodating, everything on the cover or it could be a strategy to help potential customers to identify the genre. Another difference in the publishing tradition is that Arabic novels do not usually have quotes by critics on the front cover but rather on the back. It is therefore not possible to make a comparison between the Arabic and English covers here; however, only 11 of the translated novels carry quotes on the cover. It is also noteworthy that only 38 of the translated novels have put the name of the translator on the cover.

2.2 Content Analysis

In this section, I will analyze the images used for the covers. Table 1 gives an overview of the number of covers under each code. The discussion that follows explains and analyses the different codes.

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Table 1. The cover imagery

Code	Arabic Novels	English Translations
People	31	17
Buildings and cities	6	15
Specific symbols and references to Arab culture	24	8
No specific cultural symbols	8	17
Abstract art	12	9
References to violence	2	7

2.2.1 Main Motive. The covers in both languages are varied in their design; however, there are two themes that stand out in a comparison: cities and people. The English language covers seem to favor views of cities and streets. Of the covers analyzed, 15 of the English covers are of this kind. Most of them seem to be photographic pictures; however, they are all presented at a distance and slightly blurred. *Cairo Swan Song* (2019) by Mekkawi Said has a grey cover, and towards the bottom is a hazy city view, presumably Cairo. The cover of Shahla Ujayli's *Summer with the Enemy* (2021) features a silhouette of a faraway city with a minaret. The cover is in grey and black except for an orange circle, a sun perhaps, in the middle, and the title in the same orange shade. The other city and street views of the English covers follow the same pattern of grey or maybe beige colors, with a city seen from afar. The covers allude to an unknown and unclear place that can, or should, be viewed from a safe distance. There are no roads leading up to the cities on the covers; on the contrary, many of them are sealed off from the viewer by water. One of the novels, *Confessions* (2016) by Rabee Jaber, features a bombed-out city view, and some other novels present a view from above, an angle many recognize from news reportages from war zones. With the exception of Shukri al-Makhbout's novel *The Italian* (2021), where two people can be seen walking away on the cover, which shows an Arabic street in a black and white photo, the English covers with cities and streets are void of any human contact, and there are no traces of life in the cities portrayed.

Out of the Arabic novels, six carry views of cities and streets. Except for the Arabic cover of *Sarajevo Firewood* (2022) by Said Khatibi, which presents what seems to be a view of Sarajevo during the civil war, the covers with cities are both clear and colorful. Omaima al-Khamis's Arabic version of *The Book Smuggler* (2021) has a vivid scene from an old Arabic city with horses and people at front in bright colors. The Arabic version of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018) by Ahmad Saadawi presents a street with light shining from the end and a

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person walking away from the viewer. Except for Jana Elhassan's Arabic version of the *Ninety-Ninth Floor* (2016), which features a mix-up between an Arabic and an American city in morning light, all the Arabic covers of cities and streets have a human being or an animal present on the cover showing traces of human life. The street views used start at the bottom of the covers and lead the reader into the picture rather than cutting him/her off as the English covers appear to do.

Another main motive that reoccurs in both the Arabic and English covers is people. Thirty-one of the Arabic covers include a human body compared to 17 of the English covers. Earlier, criticized covers of translated Arabic novels often carried a photographic picture of the eyes of a veiled woman (Serageldin 2015). This trope can be seen in two of the translated covers; although the women are not veiled, the montage of photos is made to resemble a woman wearing a niqab. In Inaam Kachachi's novel *The American Granddaughter* (2020), the cover shows the eyes of a young girl looking towards the viewer, but the lower part of her face is hidden behind a scene of palm trees, evoking the look of a woman wearing a niqab. Except for Kachachi's cover and the cover of Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Lantern of the King of Galilee* (2015), the heads and faces on the English covers either look away or look beyond the viewer; they do not look the viewer in the eye. On the Arabic covers, on the other hand, there are a few faces without facial features, as if the painting is not yet complete, but a majority of the faces look at the viewer, again, forming a connection between the cover and the viewer, as in the case with the cities and streets. Kachachi's cover mentioned above makes use of a photograph for the eyes on the cover; otherwise, the English cover faces are made of art. Of the Arabic covers featuring people, seven are made of photographic pictures. It is interesting to note that the English covers preferred photographs for cities whereas the Arabic covers chose artistic renderings of cities, and the opposite for faces.

2.2.2 Culturally Specific Motives and the Lack Thereof. Regarding the sample in this analysis, the Arabic covers make use of culturally specific signifiers in 24 of the covers. It could be the design of the buildings, the use of Arabic text as a design other than the paratextual features, a particular clothing, and a specific type of artistic expression. Raja Alem's Arabic cover for *The Dove's Necklace* (2016) displays Arabic letters taken from a mosaic, and Rasha Adly's Arabic cover of *The Girl with the Braided Hair* (2020) fronts a twirling dervish. A few of the Arabic covers, such as *June Rain* (2014) by Jabbour Douaihy, where a little boy looks out from the

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cover, *In the Spider's Room* (2018) by Muhammad Abdelnabi, which features unicorns on a turquoise background, and Ezzedine Fishere's *Embrace on the Brooklyn Bridge* (2017), which is a modernist painting of a man and a woman, display no Arabic culture specific markers. What is interesting to note is that even in the cases where the original Arabic cover is clearly grounded in the Arabic culture, this is taken away on the English cover. Of the English covers, eight can be said to show specific Arabic cultural motives. Some of these covers are the earlier mentioned city views where one can see the far-off views of minarets which here has been taken as an Arabic cultural motive, but which could as well refer to any other Muslim country. The historical novels by Ibrahim Nasrallah feature traditional historic clothing, and the novel *Praise for the Women of the Family* (2018) by Mohammed Shuqair features women in traditional Palestinian clothing, although not in the more common black and red but blue and white. Of the English novels, 17 can be said to have no specific cultural signifiers; the reader cannot count on the cover to guess where the book is from. However, the interesting number is the 30 novels where there are culturally specific features but they do not necessarily refer to Arabic culture and thus also leave the reader undetermined as to the origin of the novel.

2.2.3 Violence. A theme that is open to interpretation and where the references are placed outside the picture is the symbols for violence used on the covers. Two of the Arabic covers refer to violence; incidentally, it is the two different covers of Khalid Khalifa's novel *In Praise of Hatred* (2014), where one cover features a knife and the other a grenade. The English cover of *In Praise of Hatred* features a door. But there are other English covers where symbols of violence can be found and where the designers have decided to focus on another interpretation of the content than the Arabic designer did. These images range between cartridges, guns, victims of torture and bombed-out houses, none of which can be found on the Arabic covers.

2.2.4 Abstract Art. As shown in table 1, twelve of the Arabic covers and nine of the English translations have used abstract art or color compositions as their cover design. The color aspect of these covers will be discussed in section 2.3.

2.3 Analysis of Colors

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2002), colors function as a semiotic resource and as such can be used to transmit messages. Sometimes this is done within a specific context, like

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the green or red line in the London Underground system or within the navy where a color represents a command (347), and other times a color or a color scheme is taken to represent an era, or even a continent. Kress and van Leeuwen further note that colors are used in marketing and home decor to influence behavior or instill a particular feeling in a viewer (348). Looking at the other aspect of the cover, that of presenting an idea of the book to its potential reader, the colors used suddenly possess a different power. Arūnas Gudinavičius and Andrius Šuminas (2018) have shown that different age groups and genders are attracted by different colors on book covers, which is a result that is of importance if a book is to be marketed to a certain target group. A bright red book might be visible to a customer between several other books but what impression does it give of the book's content? In a later book, van Leeuwen notes that colors have 'meaning potential' rather than specific meanings and that they are in need of cultural and contextual aides in order to be interpreted correctly (2011, 58).

In the discussion of colors, the concepts introduced in Kress and van Leeuwen's (2002) attempt to lay down a grammar of colors will be used. They argue that colors "carry a set of affordances from which sign-makers and interpreters select according to their communicative needs and interests in a given context" (355). The two types of affordance in colors are 'association' and the 'distinctive feature' of a color (ibid.). Association leads to questions of where the color comes from historically and culturally, whereas the distinctive feature has to do with the value of a color as seen on a scale from dark to light or high energy to low energy (ibid.). Combined together, the distinctive features of a color and the association it leads to create meaning for the interpreter. Amongst the distinctive features are (i) value, the scale from white to black, (ii) saturation, which is the scale from intense to soft or dull and is used to analyze emotive temperatures (356), (iii) modulation, the scale from modulated colors to flat colors, and (iv) hue which is the scale from red to blue where red remains associated with warmth and energy and blue with cold and distance (357). It is not the color in itself that is a signifier but the combination of hue, saturation, value, and modulation which means that a clear bright red might be understood very differently from a dark and dull red color, although both are by definition 'red.'

When looking at the covers of the 55 novels translated into English, it is clear that the color scheme of the covers has changed from the original Arabic covers. As discussed above, a city skyline is a favored motive for the English covers. These covers are all in grey and beige colors, far from the colorful city evoked by the Arabic version of Ibrahim Nasrallah's novel *The*

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Lanterns of the King of Galilee (2015). One of the more drastic changes of the cover design is that of Muhammad Abdelnabi's *In the Spider's Room* (2018). The Arabic cover is turquoise with the title and author's name written in fuchsia, across the novel is an arch in dark yellow and fuchsia and two white unicorns, flanked by four men in white, are jumping towards the viewer. The English cover is dark grey and black and features two hands holding on to bars across a prison cell door or window, and in the middle of the cover appears a large spider. Abdelnabi's novel has undergone a change in the distinctive features regarding light, saturation, and hue far from all novels, but the overall impression is that the translated covers are duller and darker. Even in the four cases where the cover design is the same or similar in the two languages, the distinctive features of the color have been altered. *Otared* (2016) by Mohammad Rabie shows the same undistinctive face appearing above a muddled picture of a city in both versions, but whereas the Arabic cover has shades of white and light yellow in the middle, the English version has opted for grey. The man on Ibrahim Essa's *The Televangelist* (2016) has gone from a blue shirt and brown beard in the Arabic cover to black shirt and beard in the English cover. The cover of Rabi al-Madhoun's *Fractured Destinies* (2018) is still very colorful in its English version, which involves a turquoise door with the title in yellow, but saturation of the color in addition to the brown used for the ground and the windows give a dull impression in comparison with the bright blue door on a white background as is used in the original.

Bright blue is used as the main color or as a main feature color in eight of the Arabic covers, but the color only appears twice in the translated covers and only as a feature color. Similarly, bright green appears three times in the Arabic covers and not at all in the English versions. Bright red is, on the other hand, used as a flat color on Aziz Mohammed's *The Critical Case of a Man Called K* (2021) in the English version whereas the Arabic cover is grey and black with yellow and pink embellishments. *A Muslim Suicide* (2011) by Bensalem Himmich has a cover in modulated red with a yellow title whereas the original Arabic cover is brown and light orange. Red is used in the Arabic covers too, but as an accent or together with pink and white which gives a softer impression. It seems that red has been saved for titles and author names on the Arabic covers; 17 of them use red as the font color of the titles whereas only six of the English novels use red as a text color. The English covers instead favor black and white as the colors used for the textual features of the book jackets.

With a few exceptions, such as Hoda Barakat's *Voices of the Lost* (2021) and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2014), which both exhibit the color scheme of chick lit, the English

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covers seem to prefer either high value and saturation, meaning darker, duller colors or very low value, meaning white or beige colors, mainly avoiding intense colors and pastels. This choice makes many of the cover designs appear bland and, as noted above with regard to motive, also culturally unspecific. Except for Mahmoud Shukair's novel *Praise for the Women of the Family* (2018), where the cover features painted women in Palestinian folk costume, the colors used on the covers do not form associations to any Arab country in particular, nor to Arabic culture in general. Even the Palestinian folk costumes are recognized mainly from the style and not from the particular color scheme associated with Palestine, since the dresses on the cover are blue and red/orange whereas the more well-known dress colors are black and red or white and red.

Van Leeuwen writes in his book *The Language of Colour: An Introduction* that when interpreting the use of color, the range of colors used in a specific domain and the meanings and associations attached to them in that domain need to be addressed in addition to the cultural and historical contexts of the codes. The way they were created, introduced, and defended needs to be taken into account (2011, 3). As an example, he notes that bright and saturated primary colors were seen as close to the human instinct in nineteenth-century Europe and therefore liked by children, and later on this was picked up by Western educators who were keen to introduce a culture of childhood, resulting in bright blue, green, red, and yellow to be seen on children's toys and as markers for children's books (4). When the Arabic covers, many using bright colors, are moved into the English market, their color scheme needs to change in order to signify that they are indeed serious books for adult readers. Other colors, such as soft pastels, which can also be found on the Arabic covers, are also mainly avoided, since they are shades that have come to be associated with so called chick lit and romance novels in the English and American book markets.

3. Discussion

Held argues that front covers are complex texts where "three codes, viz. picture, (typo-)graphy and language equally and simultaneously [are deployed], the interaction of which results in a unique meaning" (2005, 174). The meaning created by the combination of text and visual art on the English covers is quite different from that of the Arabic covers, as can be seen from the results. Regarding the paratextual features, many of the differences, such as the choice

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of where to put the author's name and if the publishing house should be on the front or back cover, can be traced to the publishing tradition of each culture. However, it is interesting to note that the English covers do not make more use of quotes from famous authors and critics, something that is meant to be a way of introducing unknown literature and legitimizing it in a new culture, and many of the translated authors are new to an English-speaking public. The same can be said for the few mentions of the IPAF prize on the translated covers since this is also a paratextual feature that solidifies the author's position and proves him/her as worthy of reading (Genette 1995). Many do mention the translator on the cover, hence signaling to the reader that it is a novel written in another language; however, roughly a third of the covers do not mention this.

Moving on to the main motives of the covers, Held notes that "a striking feature of this well-composed text type (the cover) is the relevance of the visual" (2005, 174); it is the image and the visual design that a reader first notices and which attract us to a book. Luís Leitão, Suzanne Amaro, Carla Henriques, and Paula Fonseca (2018) further add that the greater aesthetic value a book has, the better it sells and that a well-designed book signals high standard also when it comes to the content. They continue and say that in addition to the title, the cover art is what attracts customers (95). But, as noted in the introduction, the images are not only there to sell the book; they also sell an idea of the novel's content and, in the long run, of the Middle East. So, what is the image we are sold? At a first glance, the images used on both the Arabic and the English covers include the same topics: people, city views, abstract art, and a few nature scenes. However, at a closer look, the vantage point and the organization and presentation of the motives vary in the two categories. In the introduction, Held's (2005) categorization of covers as contact-establishing texts was used; however, following the rules for photographic composition, many of the English language covers seem to avoid establishing a contact with the reader, and it is as if they want to be looked upon rather than engaged with. This is true for the covers with people who look away from the viewer or beyond him/her on the English covers but most often straight toward the viewer on the Arabic cover. The Arabic covers seem to use the few city and street views to invite and involve the viewer whereas the English covers present the cities as void of humans, cut off and to be watched from afar. This interpretation can be seen as just an interpretation; however, by applying content analysis, the patterns and commonalities between the images appear, and it is clear that it is a shared feature among the covers analyzed. Pears (2015) argues that cover designs are never innocent; they are

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created to form a particular frame of reception for the novel in question and should therefore not just be passively consumed. When it comes to the translated novels analyzed here, it could be the result of a conservative Anglo-American book market which prefers to downplay the cultural otherness of the source text (Podlevskikh Carlström 2020, 105), and it could also be a reaction to the critique of the orientalist visual representations of the Arab world (Said 2003; Kabbani 2008) and a decision to work without stereotypical representations. However, if that is the choice and the cover can be considered as a fraction symbolizing the complete, it is interesting that destruction and violence has been picked as a theme to promote the translated novels in seven cases where the Arabic novels have not referred to this aspect of the novels on their covers.

The final aspect discussed in the article is the colors used on the cover. The colors chosen on the book jacket make up one level of the multimodal message sent out trying to both convene an idea of the book and convince people to buy it. With focus on the marketing aspects, it is important that the books are visible (Leitão et al, 2018), especially if the author is unknown and therefore does not attract attention by him/herself (Podlevskikh Carlström 2020, 116). The Arabic covers are colorful and do stand out; however, most of the authors are known or well-known in their home countries and might not need that marketing help there. The translated novels, on the other hand, are fighting for a position in a new market and might need both visual and colorful help to stand out; yet a majority of the translated novels are in a beige or white color scheme. Although Samia Serageldin (2015, 340) asserts that light colors invite browsing more than dark colors, it might also be a conscious choice to signal that these are serious books rather than chick lit or young adult novels. Either way, it is difficult to conclude that the designs stand out.

4. Conclusion

The current article has only analyzed a select number of novels, and the number of novels published in Arabic every year far exceeds the number of novels used here as samples from 14 years. Also, the number of Arabic novels translated into English is not limited to the ones listed by IPAF, which means that this study is not so much inclusive as it is a beginning to map what happens to the multimodal expression of a text in the transition from one culture to another. Based on the analysis of the covers in this study, it seems that many factors, such as

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marketing desires, fashion, and cultural awareness, are at play. However, to answer the first question asked in the article, it is clear from the sample material analyzed that there are substantial changes made to the Arabic covers before they make their way into the English language bookshops. Whereas a majority of the Arabic covers use the Arabic culture as a form of expression, this is often removed or played down in the English language covers. The color scheme is changed from clear and vivid colors on the Arabic covers to more saturated and darker versions on the English covers, and the main motives on the English covers are more often impersonal, such as city views from above or people looking away. The Arabic covers discussed favor photographs of people whereas the English covers do not provide this closeness with the subjects of the cover.

As for the second question, it seems that the changes made to the translated novels are in most of the cases done in such a way as to support domestication strategies. It is often impossible to guess from a glance on the cover that the novel is originally Arabic without other aides such as texts stating that it is a translation or that it is an Iraqi novel for example. The covers featuring people repeatedly work with silhouettes or non-culture specific characters, and the portrayed cities sometimes feature minarets and other culturally specific signifiers, but they are often blurry or in a small size so as not to attract attention. It appears that the Arabic novels are not to be marketed as culturally specific but instead sold as 'just' literature, or perhaps world literature.

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