

## **VII. Is Translation Halal?**

Iraqi interpreters and translators are dying by dozens, without any statistics or recognition. It is only through interviews in western media that we are able to know the challenges they face every minute. The ontological narratives (concealed and non-concealed) they provide, the public narratives provided by the different segments of the Iraqi society and the conceptual narratives provided by the multinational forces, are believed to help form a picture of the status quo of Iraqi interpreters. The picture can only be complimented when live face-to-face interviews are done with the help of other investigative tools.

Interestingly and ironically enough, the ousted dictator of Iraq –Saddam Hussain– reiterated many times in his almost daily appearances on the state TV channels that "every Iraqi must/will have his own story"! He was absolutely right. As it turned out, all Iraqis had their own stores of stories. Unfortunately, those were stories of sorrow, misfortunes and a lost time. Translators, as far as I can see, were the exception. They had no stories at all. They were not translators in any sense of the word. Their professional opportunities were next to zero. Apart from the few 'lucky' people who used to work in government offices, and whose steps were dogged by security agents, there was no translation life. The few government translation organizations, like Al-M'amun House for translation and Beit Al-Hikma, were quintessentially installed by the

Baathist cultural elite as a means for giving a brighter face. As a matter of fact, Saddam's interest in the storytelling business is no surprise. The man was able to produce in a very short time some five bulky novels; beyond the capabilities of the most productive novelist.

Significantly, the demand for interpreting and translating increased after April 9, 2003 when Baghdad fell to the invading troops. A great many army units, international press agencies and NGOs felt the need for establishing communication with the Iraqi community. For this reason, and mainly because of the harsh economic situation before and after the war, a good army of non-qualified and qualified translators joined in. There were of course translators, of different nationalities, who were recruited from outside the country. Those translators had their own reasons.

Extracted from: Kadhim Al-Ali, Is Translation Halal? Are Translators Traitors? A Study of the Narratives of Iraqi Interpreters and Translators. *Translation Watch Quarterly*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2006.

**Reading Guidelines:**

A second or third reading must be accompanied by note-taking. Note-taking is all what college study is about. It is also a very important skill for the consecutive and simultaneous interpreter.

**Q.I** Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: statistics, recognition, interviews, ontological, face, ousted, reiterated, dogged, elite, NGOs, recruited.

**Q.II** Derive as many words as you can from the following words: dying, segments, complimented, sorrow, misfortunes, lucky, organization, interest, demand, reason, qualified.

**Q.III** Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: different, right, unfortunately, lucky, brighter, bulky, capabilities, increased, mainly, harsh, outside.

**Q.IV** Answer the following questions briefly:

1. What do you think the challenges that translators and interpreters face when working with armed forces or in zones of conflict?
2. What types of narratives are there? Who are the providers of these narratives?
3. How were the stories of Iraqi people before 2003?
4. What was the situation of Iraqi translators and interpreters before 2003?
5. Can you list the titles of Saddam's novels? Do you know of any other dictators writing poetry or novels?

6. What were the reasons which motivated Iraqi interpreters and translators to work with the coalition forces in particular?

Q.V Translate the second paragraph paying a special attention to the restructuring of the complex sentences.

**Research Activities:**

1. Summarize the ontological narratives of Iraqi translators and interpreters.
2. Some of Saddam Hussain's novels have been translated by FBI. What do you think the reason behind this?
3. Were Beit Al-Hikma and Al-M'amun House free from translating some propagandist works for the benefit of the regime? Name some of these works.

**Quote of the Day:**

**Without translation, I would be limited to the borders of my own country. The translator is my most important ally. He introduces me to the world.**

Italo Calvino