Pre-Nominal Titles as a Problem on Translating from Arabic into English

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Abstract

This paper aims to study one of the recurring problems in written translation from Arabic into English especially in the field of political, economic and media translation. We may assume that Arabic language is greatly interested in using Arabic titles before and after names of their kings, queens, presidents, princes, princesses, leaders, sheikhs, dignitaries and celebrities. This linguistic feature was well in practice in the past English political life. Therefore, the study will endeavor to trace these titles in English as well.

In contemporary English, these titles are no longer in use except in very rare formal situations. On translating these honorary Arab titles, conferred on Arab leaders into English, the English reader will find them a little bit strange and may be seen as eccentric and out of context in English. The study will also give examples to show how the English media deals with the names of the Arab leaders. Unfortunately, the examples included have deprived all Arab leaders from the rights endowed to them in their native Arabic language, which were granted through history either out of courtesy or according to royal/presidential decrees.
Introduction

I find myself obliged to go back to the year 1979 in Egypt when and where I was doing my one year compulsory military service at the Electronic Warfare Department that belongs to the Ministry of Defense. Whenever a letter was written, it had been a must to be signed by our commander and it ought to have the following titles before his name in Arabic:

السيد اللواء دكتور مهندس أركان حرب جمال الدين السيد

مدير الحرب الالكترونيه

(Mr., General, Dr., Engineer, Staff, Gamaludin Assayed, Director, Electronic Warfare Department)

But when we translated the same letter into English –addressing the team leader of the American military experts- we had to translate that lengthy title into:

Gen./Maj. Gen Gamal Assayed,

Director, Electronic Warfare Department
Problem of the Study

This paper is concerned with the problem of titles that come before -and sometimes after- the Arabic names of leaders and important personalities in the Arab world. It is also concerned with accepting the discarding of these titles on translating into English.

Discussion

Of the titles that are given to names in Arabic are:

- غيثات الدين (The) Prince
- ركن الدولة (The State Corner)
- The Religion Survivor
- The Khawajah (from Persian)
- السيد (Mister)
- The Imam
- فخر الدين
- The Pride of Religion
- The Sultan
- The Pasha
- The Sheikh
- The King
- The President

We may observe that all titles in Arabic –contrary to what we have in English- have the definitive article the before all of them.

This tradition of writing is given a sharp edge when big names such as leaders, kings or presidents are mentioned. On the following lines, some examples will be given to support this assumption.
1. President Bashar Alasad was given the following titles on different occasions:


2. The prime minister of Egypt was given the title The Mighty of Egypt, Lord of the State, Holder of the Elite Status. These two titles were endowed during Mohammed Ali Pasha’s time (1769-1848), the founder of modern Egypt and its ruler (1805-1848).

3. Ladies were given the titles of Lady of High Social Standing for the princesses and important personalities who were awarded the Decoration of Perfection. King Farouk I (1920-1965) of Egypt and the Sudan (1936-
1952) awarded it to Umm Kalthum (1904-1975). She was, also, given the title of Star of the Orient by her lovers and audience.

4. The title Bey (from Turkish and Persian) was maintained by any man who got a university degree. Pasha was maintained due to a royal decree in the royal times of Egypt till 1952. Although these two titles were cancelled and replaced with حضرة المحترم, the Egyptians have been using them informally for more prestige and to maintain more respect.

5. His/her greatness is given to the sultan. It was entitled to the Sultan Hussein Kamil (1853-1917).

6. King Fouad I (1868-1936) was given the title of His Majesty and his wife Queen Shweekar was given the title of Her Majesty.

7. Saladin Alayoubi (1138-93) was given the titles of The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the Victorious King and Abu Almozafar (Father of the Conqueror).

8. Selim 1 (1470-1512) was given the titles of Ruler of the Two Holy Mosques. In English, he was known as Selim the Grim, the Conquering Sultan, and the Brave. In French, he was known as Selim le Terrible.
9. President Anwar Assadat (1928-81) issued a republican decree to name himself President of the State of Science and Faith. He was, also, given the titles of The Believing President, Father of the Egyptian Family, Head of the Family and Kippur War Hero.

10. According to article 19 of the Moroccan Constitution, His Majesty king of Morocco is The Leader of Believers.


12. His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz (1924-2015) ruled the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the same title.

13. The same title was maintained by their successor His Majesty King Salman Bin Abdul-Aziz Alsaud (1935- ) who took over in 2015.

The question that arises now is: How to translate these titles into English? If they are translated into English, will they be received well and understood? Before answering this question let us look at the history of titles in the English language. Till the year 959 AD through the age of Eadwig (955-959), the English kings were not given any titles. Each one of them was given the title of King of the English till the reign of Henry II (1133-89). Here are the English kings, their given
titles and the years they ruled: Edgar the Peaceful (959-975), Edward the Martyr (975-978), Athelred the Unready (970-1016), Swyen Forkbeard (1013-14), Edmund Ironside (24 April-30 November, 1016), Harold the Barefoot (1035-40), Edward the Confessor (1042-66), William I, William the Bastard, William the Conqueror 1066-87), Empress Matilda (7 April-1 November, 1141), Henry II, Henry Curtmantle (1154-89), Henry, the Young King (1170-83), Richard I, Richard the Lionheart (1189-99), Louis, the Lion (1216-17), Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector (1653-58), Richard Cromwell, Lord Protector (3 September 1658-7 May 1659) and Anne, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland (1702-07).

These titles are post nominal. They are easily translated into Arabic and received well by the Arabic audience especially Richard the Lion-Heart ريتشارد قلب الأسد and William the Conqueror ولليم الفاتح. This may be attributed to the fact that Arabic language, in the past and the present, is teeming and celebrating similar titles.

The English language –especially in the present time- does recognize these titles. Mr. President William Jefferson Blythe III Clinton (1946- ) ruled the United States of America for two terms (8 years). The Americans addressed him using the popular name Bill for William through the eight years. His full name William Jefferson Clinton- was used on introducing him to the congress to deliver the State of the Union Address in January of every year. Here is an example: “Last night,
former President Bill Clinton joined Stephen Colbert on his TV show, The Colbert Report. … An account that many people believe actually belongs to Bill Clinton would be highly valuable.” (<http://abovethelaw.com/2013/04/did-stephen-colbert-and-president-bill-clinton-violate-the-cfaa/>)

The title of ‘president’ is the most attainable one for any American president, “President Barack Obama defeats Romney to win re-election (BBC News US and Canada, 7 November 2012). On another occasion, it is reduced to Mr., “Mr Obama prevailed despite lingering dissatisfaction with the economy and a hard-fought challenge by Mr Romney (Ibid). Also, “Mr Obama congratulated Mr Romney and Republican vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan on their hard-fought campaign” (Ibid).

As for members of the British Monarchy, queen/king and prince/princess are the most commonly used titles. “Britain's Prince Harry will tour the United States for six days in May, his office said on Monday, his first visit since he was pictured naked while partying at a Las Vegas hotel last summer. (<http://www.topix.com/who/queen-elizabeth>) “Britain's Queen Elizabeth II was hospitalized Sunday over an apparent stomach infection that has ailed her for days, a rare instance of ill health sidelining the long-reigning monarch. Elizabeth will have to cancel a visit to Rome and other engagements as she recovers, and outside experts said she may have to be rehydrated intravenously.
Duchess Kate Middleton was even deprived of any title, “Kate Middleton's pregnancy inspired such rapture in Stephen, and it wasn't swayed with the revelation that Princess Kate has been barfing nonstop due to morning sickness. It's absolutely the most regal puking ever.”

How do the Western media deal with names of our leaders? The following examples could give an answer.

- “In March 1979, in a ceremony outside the White House, Sadat and Begin signed a formal peace treaty based on the Camp David Accords. It formally ended the state of war that had existed since 1948 and established “normal and friendly relations.”(<http://www.findingdulcinea.com/news/on-this-day/March/Sadat-and-Begin-Sign-Israel-Egypt-Peace-Treaty.html>)

- “Mr Sadat was assassinated by Islamist militants at a military parade in Cairo, and Mr Mubarak was lucky to escape the shots as he sat next to him. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12301713>)}
• “As he was returning from a trip to France in his Boeing 727, Morocco's King Hassan saw three American-built F-5 jets appear on the right side of the plane. One of the fighters was being piloted by the king's senior air force general. The jets fired, strafing the plane with their machine guns and knocking out one of the engines.”
(http://middleeast.about.com/od/thisdayinmideasthistory/ig/August-14-August-20-in-Mideast/King-Hassan-Assassination.html)

• “Mr Cameron met King Hamad Al-Khalifa during talks at Downing Street, on the king's first visit to the UK since the clashes in which 40 people died.”
(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16134617>)

• “King Abdullah of Jordan has sworn in the smallest government in four decades, to be led by reformist Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour.”
(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21985933>)

• “Egypt's Morsi uses Twitter to talk to youth.”
(<http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/04/10/17693090-egypts-morsi-uses-twitter-to-talk-to-youth?lite>)

• “President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood’s party did not want to get dragged into a total breach with Israel on behalf of Hamas, and instead threw Egypt’s weight into mediating a cease-fire.” (Thomas L.
“In a speech outside the presidential palace on Friday, Morsi argued that he had seized sweeping powers to preserve the transition to democracy. He promised that once full constitutional democracy was established, he would relinquish these powers.”

In the light of this reduction or even annihilation of prenominal and postnominal titles how can a translator translate the present Arabic name titles in the following examples?

- "أدى أمير المؤمنين صاحب الجلالة الملك محمد السادس، نصره الله، اليوم، صلاة الجمعة بمسجد يوسف بن تاشفين بفاس". (فاس، 2013-12-4)

- "عرض سمو الشيخ ناصر بن حمد آل خليفة رئيس المجلس الأعلى للشباب والرياضة رئيس اللجنة الأولمبية البحرينية الرئيس الفخري للاتحاد الملكي للفروسية وسباقات القدرة عن فخره واعتزازه بالاهتمام الخاص من قبل صاحب الجلالة الملك حمد بن عيسى آل خليفة عاهل البلاد المفدى وحرصه على التواجد ومتابعة منافسات سباق كأس سمو ولي العهد للقدرة، مؤكداً أن متابعة جلالته لأبنائه الفرسان هو الانتجاز والفوز الأكبر للجميع، حيث تشرف جلالته لسباق سمو ولي العهد الليلي خير دليل على اهتمام وحرص جلالته لدعم أنشطة الفروسية بصورة عامة والقدرة بصورة خاصة."
We find that translating all titles, whether they are prenominal or postnominal, is not a difficult job. But the reception of these translations may not be welcomed. It may, also, give an impression about the Arab leaders and communities as if they were living in the Middle Ages when leaders were sanctified and glorified as semi-gods. Translation is supposed to give a good image about us, our political life and leaders.

But it will be quite critical and unacceptable, formally and informally, if these titles are dropped while translating into English in the way we find in the quoted examples. Allegations of disrespect may be brought against the press or any other mass media that may behave as such.
We aspire to have more openness as related to this problem. In a globalized world, we expect to get united with the world in terms of usage of language. On translating into English, it may be assumed that translators have to adopt and maintain the rules and etiquettes of the English language as much as maintained and adopted by its native speakers.

Conclusions:

- Titles will never be done without in both Arabic culture and Arabic language.
- They represent a lot of prestige and pride to their users and bearers.
- They will be a major problem in the texts translated into English because the English recipient is not used to them –anymore- in his daily life.
- On translating them into English, we have to reduce them to the minimum or to find equivalences to them in English.
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ألقاب الأسماء العربية: مشكلة عند الترجمة من العربية إلى الإنجليزية

بحث مقدم إلى مؤتمر الترجمة المنعقد في جامعة نايف للعلوم الأمنية، 6-9 أبريل 2015، الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية

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ملخص البحث

تسعى هذه الورقة إلى دراسة واحدة من المشاكل المتكررة في الترجمة التحريرية من العربية إلى الإنجليزية خاصة في المجالات السياسية والاقتصادية والإعلامية. وتهدف الدراسة إلى أن اللغة العربية مهتمة بشكل كبير باستخدام الألقاب العربية قبل وبعد أسماء الملك والملوك والرؤساء والأمراء والأميرات والقادة والشيوخ والشخصيات العظيمة والمشاهير. وهذه الظاهرة اللغوية كانت موضوع ممارسة بشكل جيد في الحياة السياسية الإنجليزية في الماضي. ولهذا فان الدراسة ستسعى لتتبع هذه الألقاب في اللغة الإنجليزية قديماً، أيضاً.

اما في اللغة الإنجليزية، المعاصرة فان هذه الألقاب لم تعد مستخدمة باستثناء مواقف رسمية نادرة. وعند ترجمة هذه الألقاب التشريفية، التي تسبغها العربية على القادة العرب، الى الإنجليزية فإن القارئ الإنجليزى قد يجدها غريبة بعض الشيء وقد تكون شاذة وخارج السياق في اللغة الإنجليزية. وسوف تعطي الدراسة أمتثلة حول كيفية تناول الاعلام – المناطق بالنطق بالإنجليزية - أسماء القادة العرب. ولسواء الحظ فإن الأمثلة المعطاة قد حرمته جميع القادة العرب من حقوق اللقب التي منحت لهم في لغتهم الأم - العربية، وهي التي مُنحت لهم عبر التاريخ اما مجاملة أو بأوامر ملكية أو رئاسية رسمية.