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**Almost a manifesto, or the brief biography of an amateur
revolutionary translator**

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Special notice to comrade Bernadette Daou

Dedicated to Muhannad Abou Al Ghosh

Why dedicate the text to Muhannad? Because Muhannad was the first to suggest (to my knowledge) the idea of improving Google Translate so that it would be of more service to everyone. And because Muhannad used to put his Google Drive links on Twitter so that we could directly follow his translations. And because I wanted to write an article about Muhannad on the day he was arrested by the Israeli occupation military apparatus, entitled “I sat on [Tekhelet](#) rock and imagined,” but that didn’t happen. Hopefully this article will make up for what I didn’t write. Articles are either written or not written; there is no room for half-hearted solutions. Just like Tekhelet rock, it will not go away, it does not expect half-hearted solutions; it awaits us. We shall sit on it one day, as we celebrate the end of the colonial occupation and all dictatorships. We will eat fish and enjoy the sunshine.

We shall commence by noting that, the term revolution/revolutionary stands as no reflection of the glorious popular Fury that spread during past October days. That glorious Fury faltered under the weight of the counter-revolution and was appropriated by liberal, reformist, and reactionary groups. It should also be stressed that this article (and its accompanying translation), do not seek to amaze professional translators, language professionals, expert language editors, and their likes. The main objective of this article is an attempt at guiding the workers in the fields of translation – those workers that have always been exploited by the accomplices of the outgrowing terrains of the dollar market. This article is also an attempt at agitating those exploited workers towards seizing the “knowledge production” machinery and taking over its privately requisitioned processes, a mission that stands integral to the revolutionary battle of the working class – the battle to overthrow capitalism and the bourgeoisie in the path of building a just socialist society.

My driving motives

It is because I know where I am from and what social class I was made to belong to as a function not only of kinship but also of a mindful and wide-awake choice. It is because I knowingly believe in myself and the journey's end I aspire to reach. It is because I am one of the survivors of the exclusionary educational system and an infiltrator behind its bourgeois enemy lines – where the education regime lingers still, plotting the rituals of its self-(re)producing practice. A (re)production that thrives, not merely on the hegemony over and command of material wealth, but also on the multifaceted control over the knowledge production machine in its immense entirety. It is because of all what and where I have come to be, that I chose the practice of translation as a means of learning, reading, and networking with comrades, dispersed all over the world.

Alienating and reductionist: that is one way of describing the “knowledge” bestowed on our masses by the educational regime. Escaping that systemic knowledge hollowness is a choice made by the *revolutionaries* when they notice that their attempts to decipher the first few lines of a book will always be futile, as the others (or the children of the system) have inherited the books themselves. It is a choice made the moment they lay ears upon discussions ornamented with concepts they have not read, and names of writers they have not encountered. The revolutionary/witness is expected to stand bewitched by the agility of those speakers as they navigate between concepts and references, to chew up and swallow-in a cognitive alienation that has been chasing him/her since university graduation. He/she is expected to remember how to embrace that alienation, to deny its presence at times, to be at peace with the hegemonic knowledge that pretends to be an agent of change. It is during these moments, when antagonism morphs into motives, that the witness may well choose to become a revolutionary.

Translation is the cheapest way to visit all countries while sitting on a sofa. You can travel from the frost of Petrograd, through the factories of Germany, and the jungles of Latin America until you reach all the trenches erected to confront colonialism, imperialism, occupation, and tyranny. You can travel across all those lands without the trouble of preparing your papers and groveling in front of countries' embassies and consulates, asking them to allow you the right to travel and the right to drown in the delusions of tourism. Translation, and precisely revolutionary translation, is the process – or rather the historical continuum – of moulding the

letters of another language (Arabic in our case) into words that carry what was drawn by the quills and arms of liberation fighters, what is held against the hearts of billions of people. Building words that are rooted in the belief and the possibility of liberation: here lies our resolve and here lies our hope.

The Reality of language

Up until this present day, we repeat the following phrase unquestioningly: *reading and writing are skills acquired at school*. Just like the “beloved” school grammar teaching phrase: *the boy ate the apple*.¹ Thousands learn it. Days and years pass. The boy still eats the apple. The story ends there. But does a boy learn, say, why he might possibly be unable to buy an apple while learning about it? In a moment of “resourceful sharpness,” the authors of the educational curriculum may try to “turn the tables around” by substituting the archaic phrase with another, for example: *a boy dreams of eating an apple*. But the fact remains that, no matter how much educators try to beautify the system and conciliate the children of the impoverished working class, their attempts at curbing the inevitable drive towards change that lies in the hearts of thousands of people will remain unavailing.

When we write the phrase “reading and writing are skills acquired at school” in its axiomatic sentence structure, we are in practice actively excluding a massive number of children who do not learn to read and write in Lebanon, simply because, in the year 2021, they are not enrolled in school. The documented number is 700,000 children.²

This phrase generates countless thorny questions, such as: which schools are we hinting at? What educational method are we speaking of, and under the rulings of which system?

The capitalist context that controls life in this country has produced an educational system that is exclusionary in nature. The existent system is premeditatedly designed for the destruction of public schools in numerous ways, of which: setting up shabby educational curricula that go unmodified for years on end,³ freezing

¹ When writing about apples, I remembered the day president Emile Lahoud decided to promote apples during a cabinet session (the year 2003), intending to win over the Christian ministers, given that it is mostly cultivated in *Christian areas*. Lahoud offered an apple to Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, but the latter refused, saying that he preferred lemons, cultivated more widely in southern Lebanon, a region with a Muslim majority. If Lahoud had given it to the Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, the latter might have answered that he preferred chewing tobacco. The choice of endorsing the cultivation of apples, citrus fruits, or tobacco had consequences on local agriculture: large agricultural areas that were producing various crops of grain and livestock were eliminated in favor of monocultural production. Thus, as we can see, one sentence, seemingly simple, carries many connotations that vary according to the class position of who is saying it. Keeping that in mind, imagine the complexity of a discussion about a long and broad educational curriculum that does not leave room for things to happen by chance. In other words, the exclusionary character of the curricula is a systematic and planned crime against humanity in general and the working class in particular.

² <https://tinyurl.com/2p89wwsk>

³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20090308114203/http://www.laes.org/PagesArabic/aPublications/aPubSem&Conf/aTextbook/aTxtindex.html>

employment in the educational sector, ending the preparatory and training programs in the teachers' colleges and the Faculty of Education, terminating investment in educational research, adopting a feeble yearly contractual policy to select teachers, relying on the "charity" of international donors, and finally closing⁴ "faltering"⁵ public schools – or rather, those schools that have been deliberately pushed to falter.⁶

The following is the latest development in the neoliberal authority's innovative strategies for the deliberate sabotage of the public sector: after the closure of the Lycée Abdelkader,⁷ the so-called progressive and socialist minister Marwan Hamadeh decided to relocate the Lycée in a public-school building.⁸ In more accurate terms, the minister reallocated the public money that was supposedly assigned for the children of the poor classes, to the benefit of the bourgeoisie. Following that same approach, parliament passed a law⁹ on financing the educational sector, in accordance to which 350 billion LBP were allocated to the private sector, and only 150 billion LBP to the public sector. The latter was part of an overtly shameless distribution scheme tailored for the sole interest of the bourgeoisie.

But what has this educational establishment achieved in terms of language?

Despite the dominance of the private educational sector over the entire establishment, these educational curricula have been implemented for over 20 years. After decades of being taught foreign languages, students' grade-marks in official exams still oscillate¹⁰ around the passing average grade when it comes to the subject of languages. Bear in mind that those exams are only written. Do we want to imagine what would happen if the system was to enforce oral examination as well?¹¹

Of course, the system and its linguistic vulgarity can be damned, as can be: exams, grading structures, average marks, the ministry, its government, and the entire parliament. Damn the gobshite bourgeoisie and

⁴ <https://www.mehe.gov.lb/ar>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/253240121371609/posts/2850548208307441/>

⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/mdc6wcav>

⁷ When the old building of the Lycée Abdel Qader was closed, the state of mourning that spread amongst the activist community was outstanding, as was the fear of destroying a heritage building that carries the memories ... of the heritage of one very particular class. Those same activists went completely silent when the reallocation decision was made. The same silence reigned when Minister Hasan Mneimneh and later Minister Akram Chehayeb decided to close dozens of "faltering" public schools, which had been systematically made to falter. This silence will accompany many of the events that followed the Fury of the October days. In any case, we must stop using the word silence to describe that actionless-ness. It shall be called for what it is: a class bias.

⁸ <https://al-akhbar.com/Community/265549>

⁹ <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/321747>

¹⁰ <https://www.crdp.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/201908300312565.pdf>

¹¹ To our non-Arabic speaking comrades, the Arabic language encompasses an enormous array of largely different dialects (linguistic constructs) and vernaculars that vary geographically (and historically/temporally) between one Arab state and the other, and within the geography of each singular state. There is nonetheless a formal mother Arabic Language shared all throughout the Arab speaking territories. That is the language taught formally in schools. It is the language which comrade Nidal (the author) is using in the writing of his article and about which he is deconstructing the "Reality of Language" in Lebanon (Translation manager).

the damned clergy. But let's also ask: after claiming educational excellence for years, whose interests are served when the system that teaches language is defective?

The answer is rather straightforward.

Revolutionizing Translation Technologies

Revolutionary workers of translation, never be ashamed of using Google Translate and the likes of it. Do not be ashamed of adopting it, and do not be ashamed of disclosing that you do. Let us write it in our professional and personal resumes; let us print it on our summer and winter shirts, and let us contribute to improving this tool that has facilitated the lives of millions of people.

Again, consider this number and what it represents: millions of people – countless people are victims of educational systems, of exclusion, of supremacy, of capitalism. Remember how many times hypocrites glaringly laughed at and ridiculed a fleeting translation, or the way words and letters were pronounced. Remember the sarcasm associated with pictures of food product labels on which workers' mistranslations were printed. The cynics bashing those translations never asked about the educational system that graduated these working people, never questioned it, and most certainly never bothered asking about the workers' labor conditions. If they couldn't bother with a question, how can they be part of the fight against the status quo? The subject matter is crystal clear: this cynical irony is an abhorrent class-based rhetoric that plays into the exclusionary mechanisms of the bourgeoisie. So, let's transform this tool into daggers – let us declare a linguistic-class fight, one of many perilous battles in the course of our wide-ranging class war.

Towards a progressive creolization of language

Although I have taught Arabic for many years, I find it necessary to reassess that teaching, this language, and many other related matters. Despite my opposition to foreign languages imposed from above – read by the bourgeoisie, I am not fond of the forced adoption of the Arabic language. To explain further, I am not fond of an Arab nationalism and the linguistic exclusions of local languages, such as Kurdish, Syriac, and others, that come with it.

On another note, many of us tend to make mistakes often described as *common*. We rush to the *dictionaries of common mistakes*, we check how to write this or that phrase, then soon after go back to repeating the same mistakes. First, let us contemplate the adjective *common*, which is a derivative of its etymological root meaning in Arabic: *communal* and *popularly known*.¹² From that same root, the word *communism* is also

¹² It shall be noted; in Arabic, the triangular taxonomy of the verb structure features a pillar in the etymology of the Arabic words carrying the following meanings: *common*, *commune*, *communal*, *public* (might refer to land), *joint*, *concurrent*, *conjoined*, *popularly spread*, *communism* and others. Comrade Nidal demonstrates the idea to the Arabic

linguistically derived. Communism, a hated word! A word that provokes the derision of the aforementioned “revolutionary” groups. But never mind that, we shall return to our section’s idea: if certain words and phrases have become so *common* in their faulty forms, why do we not adopt writing them as they have become? Because anyway, every time we go back to those dictionaries we soon fall back into our faulty lexicons in a seemingly never-ending cycle. The problem is not limited to the method of teaching, the content of the curriculum, and the method of training teachers, but it is also a question of the language itself.

In a similar context, the account of Editor Conan¹³ on Twitter emerged, a comrade who made his revolutionary politics evident during the Fury of the October days. His best work did not lie in his explanations related to the Arabic language and the common mistakes related to it. His true achievement lies in overlooking the mistakes committed in the texts of some circulating statements – the statements of the trade union committees for example. Regarding those statements, Editor Conan highlights their mistakes, not in an attempt to comment or ridicule, but to assert that the end justifies the means, or rather, the end justifies the language mistake. That is exactly the purpose and drive of language: to be at the service of its speakers, malleable, within their reach, and not the opposite. Language is not a sacred temple for people to pilgrimage to. Speaking of which, may all idols, temples and the idea of sanctity in all its forms be destroyed.

This malleable accessibility of language is possible to achieve over time, particularly that this is what actually happens through the so-called *language of the Internet*. *Internet language* incorporates a mixture of languages in conversation, without adhering to any particular linguistic rule or the like. I tend to adopt the Arabic calligraphy, for its letters and their delineations are beautiful and poetic. But the question remains, what do we want to do with the language? Use it as a tool of acculturation or mobilization? A platform for Intellectual luxury or a means for struggle?

Quick Tips for Non-Professional Revolutionary translation workers

We conclude and return to our dreadful reality. The above is not a fictional fantasy; it includes, to a certain extent, the features of an ambitious revolutionary program, and those of biographies stained by blood, tears, and sweat. Yet, dear comrades, we still have to work; we still have to sell our labor power and get a salary or compensation in return. Accordingly I present these quick tips:

- Look for a job that pays in US dollars, or preferably in Euros.
- Stop using *finality verbs* as a substitute to *action verbs*; nothing is final, and the battle has and will endure.
- Admire neither the donor nor the employer; each one of them will abandon you, and all you will be left with is disillusion.

reader, hence assuming a familiarity with the linguistic system. Therefore the translation you are reading within the text is deconstructionist/editorial, and not directional (Translation manager).

¹³ <https://twitter.com/Grammarpol01>

- Always negotiate with the donor and/or employer to increase the price value for your work – even if by just one cent – and consider it a victory for the working class.
- Lie, but be original with your lies. Do not fake the death of your uncle 20 times.
- Adhere to the deadlines and requested criteria. In other words, build a good reputation for yourself without showing off.
- Always go back to the dictionaries of common mistakes; make sure your language is sound and read Editor Conan's tweets. All of them!
- Do not organize your workplace (a non-governmental organization for example) with your colleagues if this organizing is isolated from the revolutionary working-class movement, because eventually, the funding will simply stop. In other words, no matter how beautiful and “revolutionary” the bubble you might be “organizing” from may seem, the bubble and yourself will not produce change, simply because it is a bubble, and because it is isolated. Remember that it is a united working class that drives change.
- Raise the banner of the class struggle within the text! i.e., leave a single intentional linguistic mistake. If the mistake is discovered, no harm is done because the battle continues and the revolution is permanent. But, if the mistake goes unnoticed, then smile at your small proletarian victory.
- Know that no matter how many texts you translate, be they paid or not, they will only be infused with meaning and effect when they are accompanied by a revolutionary project to overthrow not only the ruling class, but capitalism in its entirety.