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COVID-19 Translated: WHO's and the City of Ottawa English and Arabic Narrative of the Pandemic

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Abstract. Many national and international organizations have constructed and disseminated COVID-19 public narrative and have contributed into the construction of the pandemic meta-narrative. The World Health Organization (henceforth WHO) is the international organization responsible for publishing COVID-19 related information to global audiences and citizens. However, the City of Ottawa is the Canadian federal capital responsible for disseminating information about the pandemic to its citizens who reside in Ottawa. In the light of the evolving events, this paper explores the English and Arabic public narrative of COVID-19 as constructed and published by WHO on its multilingual website and by the City of Ottawa Public Health in Canada. In specific, it scrutinizes how similar or different the communicative messages and meanings are as embedded in the English and Arabic texts of the pandemic public narrative. To do so, this paper methodologically utilizes a qualitative narrative analysis research design guided by narrative theory, types of narrative, and narrative features. Accordingly, the corpus consists of 48 English texts and their 48 Arabic translated texts which were published on WHO's website under two COVID-19 pandemic topics: "Myth busters" and "Q & As on coronaviruses (COVID-19)". As well, this paper analyses 12 English texts and their 12 Arabic translated texts which were published on the City of Ottawa's website. The findings of this paper provide further understanding of similarities and differences in communicative messages and meanings as embedded in the English and Arabic public narrative of COVID-19 pandemic, and as published and represented by WHO and the City of Ottawa.

Keywords. City of Ottawa, COVID-19 Pandemic, Narrative Theory, Narrative Features, Translation, Types of Narrative, WHO

1. Introduction

On December 31, 2019, Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in the Chinese city of Wuhan. These cases were eventually identified as novel coronavirus cases. On January 13, 2020, Thai officials confirmed the first recorded case of COVID-19 outside of China. As of March 2020, COVID-19 was spreading quickly worldwide which led WHO to declare it a pandemic on March 11, 2020. This pandemic has claimed the life of 848,255 thousand people and 25,327,098 million confirmed cases in 216 countries, areas, or territories (WHO: August 31, 2020). The public narrative about this pandemic has been challenged by many factors, and one of these factors is proliferation of misinformation and fake news which can be promoted by translation. In effect, personal and public narratives that we elaborate about any aspect of the world through translation do not have to be linguistically inaccurate in relation to their source or original texts; yet, the cultural

context of these translations and the selection of information and texts to be translated may distort original meanings and messages.

Since the beginning of COVID-19, individuals have sought information about the outbreak, its symptoms, and prevention and treatment. However, communication technology such as smart devices and new media such as social media allow for wide spreading of rumors and fake news around the globe. Accordingly, officials and governments encourage citizens to search for information about COVID-19 pandemic from reliable and trustworthy sources. The majority of citizens rely heavily on information about the pandemic which are published by WHO on its six-language (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) multilingual website; however, most of its web content is still published in English. Whereas the City of Ottawa Public Health “provides accurate, reliable and up-to-date COVID-19 resources to our local communities in many languages” (City of Ottawa website). In addition to English and French, the two official languages in Canada, Ottawa Public Health provides translations in Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Punjabi, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, Urdu, and Vietnamese. However, “Some are translations of resources developed by Ottawa Public Health. Others are resources from provincial or federal organizations” (City of Ottawa website). Given these facts, this paper explores whether information about the pandemic are faithfully transmitted by WHO and the City of Ottawa from English into Arabic. It is worth noting that WHO’s Director General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus confirms that “We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic”. COVID-19 pandemic is currently the worst global public health crisis in recent history due to the number of deaths and confirmed cases.

2. Literature Review

Many social sciences scholars employed narrative theory, types of narrative, and narrative features in their articles and research studies. One of these scholars is Mona Baker who employed narrative theory and the concept of narrative framing in many of her research studies and articles (e.g. 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2014, 2016), especially when the research topic deals with international conflicts, wars, and terrorism. For instance, Baker (2007) examined translations between English and Arabic in the context of the Middle East conflict. To do so, she explored the ways translators accentuate specific aspects of the narrative in source texts and framing strategies used in translations. Baker provided several examples of how the selection of frames such as the manipulation of titles, naming groups or persons, and images with suitable captions can lead to “frame narratives” in a predetermined way. For example, Baker noticed that news translation organization such as the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) and Watching America would change the title of an Arabic text in order to frame a translated narrative of the Arab and Muslim as “extremist” or as “discursively alien”. According to Baker, MEMRI selected these specific frames and narratives as part of “meta-narrative of the War on Terror” (2007, p. 159). She also posited that “[i]ndividual translators and interpreters will continue, as they have done in the past, to make a variety of choices in relation to who or what they align themselves with” (2009, p. 238).

Baker also used the four narrative features (temporality, relationality, selective appropriation, and causal emplotment) and the concept of narrative framing in order to investigate how MEMRI employed translation to construct narratives and knowledge about Arabs and Muslims in the context of the “War on Terror” and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Baker provided many examples which uncover how MEMRI manipulated, replaced, and added its own titles and sometimes images with appropriate captions to translations to represent Arabs and Muslims in negative images and frames such as “extremists”.

Similarly, Sue-Ann Harding (2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c) applied narrative theory in her studies about translating eyewitness accounts of the Beslan hostage-taking in Russia in September 2004. Her research studies revealed how global media employed local informants' translated quotations and eyewitness accounts within the meta-narrative of the event. Accordingly, Harding used the concepts of "narrator" and "temporary narrator", which are rooted in socio-narrative theory in order to examine how personal narratives (temporary narrators) of eyewitnesses were merged into the Russian and English news narrative of Beslan hostage-taking in three different online news media outlets. Harding demonstrated that these media outlets employed translated accounts in order to reinforce, construct, and represent their version of the narrative. Harding considered that eyewitnesses' "stories are arguably the 'raw material' of the news agencies' narrative texts" (2012a, p. 231). She concluded that translations of eyewitnesses' narratives from Russian to English were manipulated, marginalized, and even removed from some articles and news texts in order to reinforce the media's own narrative and framing of Beslan hostage-taking in Russia in September 2004.

Likewise, Fadi Jaber (2016, 2018) utilized narrative theory, types of narrative, and narrative features in his research studies about representing and translating the Syrian humanitarian disaster as narrated by Syrian citizen journalists. In his articles, Jaber scrutinized media responsibility and translation ethics based on *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*' representation of the Syrian humanitarian disaster as embedded in the translated quotations and narratives told by Syrian citizen journalists (residents, refugees, protesters, eyewitnesses, and activists). Jaber's research studies provided better understanding of translation practices in the text, and as represented and narrated by citizen journalists and the media.

As a matter of fact, most of the research studies employed narrative theory, types of narrative, and narrative features in context of wars, conflicts, and disasters. However, a very few scholars and research studies employed narrative theory, types of narrative, and narrative features as a theoretical framework to examine similarities and differences in translating informative narratives that aim to offer facts and information to audiences about health-related issues and topics. Accordingly, this paper explores how accurate the translations are in the English and Arabic narrative of COVID-19 pandemic as constructed and disseminated by WHO and the City of Ottawa Public Health.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Narrative theory

The paper's theoretical framework relies on narrative theory, types of narrative, and narrative features. As a matter of fact, Walter Fisher's notions of "narrative paradigm" and "narrative rationality" (1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1987, 1989, 1997) constitute the theoretical and conceptual basis of narrative theory, types of narrative, and narrative features. According to Fisher, "[t]he stories inform one another and both are necessary to a full realization of the relationship of communication and what humans are and can become" (1985a, p. 76). The main function of the narrative paradigm is to assist in interpreting and assessing human communication and pragmatic effects of texts which "leads to critique, a determination of whether or not a given instance of discourse provides a reliable, trustworthy, and desirable guide to thought and action in the world" (Fisher, 1985b, p. 351). As well, the narrative paradigm is concerned with people and actors who act as storytellers, authors, co-authors, and who also act as main participants in the creation of communicative messages. Thus, Fisher focused on ontological narratives which are told and heard by people who interpret and assess the story and behave in accordance with their interpretation and assessment.

The narrative paradigm also provides a “logic” to assess stories and to determine whether or not audiences should accept these stories and form their decisions and actions based on these stories. The people’s decisions, actions, and behaviors, according to Fisher, take the form of stories and are assessed by narrative rationality that provides the principles of narrative probability and fidelity. He posited that narrative rationality in any event or situation “is relevant as a system for determining whether or not one *should* accept a story, whether or not a story is indeed trustworthy and reliable as a guide to belief and action” (1985b, p. 349, emphasis in original).

Fisher argued that narrative probability refers to the features of the story and the sequence of narrative elements, ideas, and actions. Narrative probability emphasizes coherence of the story, consistency, and harmonizing between narrative elements within the same story, while narrative fidelity stresses “truth qualities” of the story, and whether or not the story agrees with the logic of good reasons or values such as truth, the good, beauty, health, and wisdom. Fisher clarified that the story’s values should be examined in terms of “questions of fact, relevance, consequence, consistency, and transcendent issue” (1985b, p. 350). He argued that a good communication and a good story is the one that fulfills the requirements of narrative rationality, and of a reliable and trustworthy communication which guides one to “belief and action”. As well, the good story adheres to features and principles of narrative probability and fidelity.

It is also relevant to bring up Margaret Somers’s works (1992, 1994, 1997) on narrative theory, which employed the concepts of narrative and narrativity in social sciences research and studies. Somers noticed that social scientists and theorists and historians used to define narrative and narrativity as a “mode of representation”, but scholars today go beyond considering narrative and narrativity as simply a mode of representation. The new definitions of narrative and narrativity are recognized as main concepts of social epistemology and social ontology. It is through narratives and narrativity that “we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities” (Somers, 1992, p. 600). Thus, the concepts of narratives and narrativity in social sciences have shifted from being mere representational forms to ontological condition of narrativity and social life.

On her part, Mona Baker (2006) defines narratives as “public and personal ‘stories’ that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour. They are the stories we tell ourselves, not just those we explicitly tell other people, about the world(s) in which we live” (p. 19). She indicates the importance of using narrative theory as a theoretical framework in translation studies’ academic and professional studies because “[t]ranslation is thus understood as a form of (re)narration that *constructs* rather than *represents* the events and characters it re-narrates in another language” (2014, p. 159, emphasis in original). According to Baker, narrative theory allows us to examine the function of translation and the role of translators in situations of conflicts and wars, and in the elaboration of competing narratives of the same event as embedded in the target text. In fact, translators and interpreters play a significant role in the process of narrative formation because the events of most conflicts, wars, and disasters are communicated by the media to global audiences with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Narrative theory also “allows us to piece together and analyse a narrative that is not fully traceable to any specific stretch of text but has to be constructed from a range of sources, including non-verbal material” (Baker, 2006, p. 4).

3.2. Types of narrative

Baker distinguished four types of social narratives and narrativity: ontological (personal), public, conceptual, and meta-narrative. According to Baker, ontological or personal narratives are interpersonal and social stories in which individuals tell personal stories about their position in the world and their own personal experience and history. Nonetheless, Baker argued that “even a concrete personal story told in one language cannot necessarily be retold or translated into another language unproblematically” (2006, p. 28). Ontological narratives are dependent on collective narratives which are situated in a particular social and cultural context, and are transmitted to audiences through different channels such as the media. An example provided by Baker of personal narratives dependent on collective narratives is the way Germans under the Nazis and white South Africans under apartheid narrated themselves as racially superior.

The second type of narratives, named public narratives are “stories elaborated by and circulating among social and institutional formations larger than the individual, such as the family, religious or educational institution, the media, and the nation” (Baker, 2006, p. 33). Public narratives are stories about national and international events, individuals who become public figures, a movement, or an ideology. These narratives circulate in any society and culture, and can change drastically over time in response to political and social changes. Accordingly, translation plays a decisive role in the survival of public narratives by circulating and articulating these narratives within different cultural and linguistic boundaries and contexts. As an example of how public narrative can change over time, Baker (2006) pointed out that Nelson Mandela was widely represented as a terrorist in the 1960s to the late 1980s but when the international antiapartheid movement gained power in the 1970s and 1980s, Mandela became an international hero and a symbol of resistance. The relationship between ontological and public narratives is crucial in the context of translation. According to Baker, both ontological and public narratives constrain each other interchangeably. On the one hand, personal narratives are constrained by symbols and formulations derived from public narratives. On the other hand, personal narratives contribute to the elaboration and maintenance of public narratives which are circulated by powerful agents such as the media. Baker added that a personal narrative is ignored and not recognized by powerful agents through non-translation if it opposes the mainstream public narratives in a target culture. In some cases, personal narratives are translated and allowed to be circulated within public narratives of a target culture when they are framed in a specific way that undermines them.

The third type of narratives is conceptual or disciplinary narratives. Somers and Gibson (1994) defined conceptual narratives as concepts and explanations that social researchers construct in their studies. Yet, Baker expanded and elaborated more on this definition by include disciplinary narratives. She defined conceptual and disciplinary narratives as “the stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their object of inquiry” (Baker, 2006, p. 39). She believes that translators and interpreters can either promote or challenge any given conceptual narrative, and any conceptual narrative can affect and shape public narratives during a specific time period. Baker (2006) mentioned James Mill’s *History of British India*, which was published in 1817, as an example of a conceptual narrative. As a matter of fact, the history of British India relies on the translations of many British writers such as William Jones and others, who represented Indians as “insincere” and “untruthful”. “Mill uses again and again in connection with the ‘Hindus’ the adjectives ‘wild’, ‘barbaric’, ‘savage’ and ‘rude’, thus forming by sheer force of repetition a counter-discourse to the Orientalist hypothesis of an ancient civilization” (cited in Baker, 2006,

p. 39). This example of a conceptual narrative reveals that the British emphasized their own conceptual narrative about Indians during the British colonial era of India.

The last type of narratives is meta or master narratives, which are shared across different cultures and countries. Meta-narratives can travel beyond geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries of any society because of the media and the direct involvement of translators and interpreters. Meta-narratives can be “the epic dramas of our time: Capitalism vs. Communism, the Individual vs. Society, Barbarism/Nature vs. Civility”, and are those “in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history...Progress, Decadence, Industrialization, Enlightenment, etc” (Baker, 2006, p. 44). She added that the public narrative of the “War on Terror” is a recent example of meta-narrative which travels through the media across national boundaries and impacts every one. According to Baker, the words “terror” and “terrorism” have different features. For example, the word “terrorism” refers to one or more incidents involving violence, while the word “terror” refers to something that can rapidly spread across national boundaries.

3.3. Narrative features

Somers (1992, 1994, 1997) and Somers and Gloria Gibson (1994) proposed four features of narrative and narrativity which are mostly employed in social sciences, and which are useful for this current study. The four narrative features are “temporality”, “causal emplotment”, “relationality”, and “selective appropriation”. The first narrative feature, named temporality, is understood as “constitutive of narrativity” and can be defined as a feature whereby “the elements of a narrative are always placed in *some* sequence, and that the order in which they are placed carries meaning” (Baker, 2006, pp. 50-51, emphasis in original). Indeed, representation of narratives relies on the organization of the sequence of narrative elements in texts and visual materials such as news images and videos. Many institutions, especially media outlets, maintain a specific chronological order of events and impose a specific temporal structure and sequence of narrative elements according to several factors, such as the institution’s policy, norms, gate keeping, and agenda setting. Thus, the meaning of the events and narrative elements vary when the chronological order of these events and the sequencing of narrative elements are changed or modified. Also, the sequence of a narrative and the order of narrative elements in a text can affect and constrain the audiences’ interpretation and understanding of its meaning. In effect, every narrative has a specific temporal and sequential structure, that is, it has a beginning, middle, and end. Temporality also means that people’s narratives of events and the world are “historic laden” (Somers & Gibson, 1994). Thus, historicity is a function of narrativity and “a resource that narrators draw on in order to enhance identification with a current narrative and enrich it with implicit detail” (Baker, 2006, p. 57). For example, a translator can use specific representations and lexical items to imply and arouse certain historical events.

The second narrative feature, causal emplotment, “gives significance to independent instances, and overrides their chronological or categorical order” (Somers, 1997, p. 82). While Baker argues that causal emplotment “allows us to *weight* and *explain* events rather than simply list them, to turn a set of propositions into an intelligible sequence about which we can form an opinion. It thus charges the events depicted with moral and ethical significance” (2006, p. 67, emphasis in original). The use of this narrative feature assists in re-ordering the same events and narrative elements and weaving them into other events and narratives. However, “causal emplotment means that two people may agree on a set of ‘facts’ or events but disagree strongly on how to interpret them in relation to each other” (ibid). Like temporality, causal emplotment can be seen in the narrative through the sequence and temporal ordering of events. But causal

plotment usually marks events and narrative elements with moral and ethical implications. In fact, translators can benefit from casual plotment narrative features, which contribute to the changing of the order of events and narrative elements of an original narrative by choosing particular lexical items in order to produce in the target text a different pattern of causal plotment which fits target audiences' cultural and linguistic norms.

Relationality is the third narrative feature, which means that every event and narrative should be interpreted and related to a larger configuration of events and narratives. Relationality clarifies that "it is impossible for the human mind to make sense of isolated events or of a patchwork of events that are not constituted as a narrative" (Baker, 2006, p. 61). Accordingly, translators choose semantic equivalents that imply relational contexts and lead to specific interpretations in the target culture and for target readers. In effect, audiences and readers interpret each event and narrative within a larger configuration of events and narratives. It is true that a narrative consists of different elements, but these elements should be harmonized with each other in order to construct a coherent narrative. Some of these narrative elements are imported from another narrative, language, or culture. In this sense, Baker indicated that "[i]n the process of importing elements from another narrative, both the original narrative and our own narrative are inevitably *reconstituted*" (2006, p. 63, emphasis in original).

The final narrative feature, named selective appropriation, refers to the selective process in which reality is represented, as well as to which sets of events and narrative elements are selected to be included in the target text and which other aspects of the narrative are excluded. Selective appropriation is an important narrative feature because it determines "where the choice of whose voice, which texts and which extracts from these texts are translated and made to 'represent' the values and ethos of the communities in question" (Baker, 2010b, p. 352). This narrative feature also manifests itself in patterns of addition and omission which serve to accentuate or suppress certain aspects of reality and narrative. Indeed, translators rely on the feature of selective appropriation in order to elaborate a specific narrative of events, groups, and even cultures.

Baker determined that the above-mentioned four narrative features are interrelated and have a significant impact on events and narratives, especially when dealing with translations of events and narratives between different cultural and linguistic contexts and for different target audiences and readers. It is worth noting that "[a]ll of these features can be, and are, manipulated by communicators, including translators and interpreters, either intentionally or unintentionally" (Harding, 2013, p. 106).

4. Methodological Framework

This paper utilizes a qualitative narrative analysis research design. The rationale behind choosing this research design is because the analyzed corpus of the case study consists of English texts about COVID-19 pandemic and Arabic translated texts which were published on WHO's website and the City of Ottawa's website. Following the data collection, a systematic analysis is conducted on the selected English and Arabic translated texts. This analysis is guided by narrative theory, types of narrative, and narrative features. This paper also follows a thematic analysis in which the English and Arabic texts are grouped under specific categories and themes. It separately analyzes WHO's English texts and Arabic translated texts and the City of Ottawa's English and Arabic translated texts, and then a comparative analysis is conducted between WHO's texts and the City of Ottawa's texts to explore how similar or different the English and Arabic narrative of COVID-19 pandemic are.

5. Data Analysis

Narrative theory claims that the unit of analysis is the entire narrative, and in our case, it is the English and Arabic narrative of COVID-19 pandemic as constructed and disseminated by WHO and the City of Ottawa Public Health. In addition, the analysis process compares the original English texts and Arabic translated texts to uncover their relative (in)accuracy of choices at a semantic level, and in terms of their cultural-specific references. The analyzed corpus of WHO's texts consists of a total of 48 English texts and their 48 Arabic translated texts under two categories "Myth busters" and "Q & As on coronaviruses (COVID-19)". In addition, the analyzed corpus of the City of Ottawa's texts consists of a total of 12 English texts and their 12 Arabic translated texts. The analysis process compares the English texts with their Arabic translations. The English and Arabic texts that were published by WHO and the City of Ottawa are categorized under the following six themes: COVID-19 info. sheet (causes, symptoms, spreading), work-related, food-related, mask, shopping etiquette, and prevention and treatment.

5.1. How WHO constructed the English and Arabic narrative of COVID-19 pandemic

The WHO's 48 English texts and their 48 Arabic translated texts include information about the nature of COVID-19 virus, its causes, symptoms, and spreading and transmitting. In addition, WHO's documents include information about wearing masks and the ways people can prevent the spreading of the virus, as well as information about how to shop safely. The analysis of the English and Arabic texts reveals that WHO maintains the meaning of communicative messages and meanings in both English and Arabic languages with minor grammatical and translation errors and inaccuracies. In most of the English texts about "Myth busters", there is an emphasis on negating particles by capitalizing these particles such as NOT, DOES NOT, CANNOT, IS NOT, and WILL NOT. The emphasis in the English texts often happens when the myths are incorrect. However, the Arabic texts rarely contain emphasis on negating particles. For example:

People should NOT wear masks when exercising as masks may reduce the ability to breathe comfortably.

ينبغي عدم ارتداء الكمامة أثناء ممارسة الرياضة لأن الكمامة قد تحدّ من القدرة على التنفس بصورة مريحة.

Thermal scanners CANNOT detect COVID-19

الماسحات الضوئية الحرارية لا يمكنها اكتشاف فيروس كوفيد-19

Adding pepper to your soup or other meals DOES NOT prevent or cure COVID-19

إضافة الفلفل إلى حسائك أو إلى أطعمة أخرى لا يقي من الإصابة بمرض كوفيد-19 ولا يعالجه

COVID-19 IS NOT transmitted through houseflies

كوفيد-19 لا ينتقل عن طريق الذباب المنزلي

In addition, some Arabic equivalents convey different meanings than those of the English original words, and some of the Arabic translated texts contain words that do not appear in the original English texts. For example:

The misuse of hydroxychloroquine can cause **serious** side effects and illness and even lead to death.

كما أن إساءة استعمال هيدروكسي كلوروكين يمكن أن تسبب آثارا جانبية خطيرة وأمراضا وقد تفضي حتى إلى الوفاة.

Hot peppers in your food, though very tasty, cannot prevent or cure COVID-19.

إضافة الشطة إلى طعامك قد يجعله لذيذاً، لكنه لا يقي من مرض كوفيد-19 ولا يعالجه.

Most patients recover **thanks to** supportive care.
معظم المرضى يتعافون بواسطة الرعاية الداعمة.

In the first example, the English word “serious” was translated as خطيرة, and in fact, the back translation of the Arabic equivalent means “dangerous”. However, the accurate translation for the word “serious” should be جادة. The Arabic word خطيرة has more impact on the Arab audiences than the word جادة. In the second example, the English phrase “hot peppers” was translated as الشطة which is a dialect that is used in some of the Arab countries such as Egypt. And in the third example, the translation of the English word “thanks to” as بواسطة instead of the precise Arabic equivalent بفضل.

The following examples reveal that WHO added more words in some of the Arabic translated texts in order to offer more information and details to the Arab audiences. For example:

FACT: The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by a virus. NOT by bacteria.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is in a family of viruses called Coronaviridae. Antibiotics do not work against viruses.

Some people who become ill with COVID-19 can also develop a bacterial infection as a complication. In this case, antibiotics may be recommended by a **health care provider**.

There is currently no licensed medication to cure COVID-19. If you have symptoms, call **your health care provider** or COVID-19 hotline for assistance.

مرض فيروس كورونا (كوفيد-19) يسببه فيروس وليس بكتيريا
الفيروس الذي يسبب مرض كوفيد-19 ينحدر من سلالة فيروسات تُسمى الكورونا أو الفيروسات التاجية.
والمضادات الحيوية لا تأثير لها على الفيروسات.
غير أن بعض الأشخاص الذين يصابون بكوفيد-19 قد تحصل لديهم مضاعفات فيصابون بالتهاب رئوي.
وفي هذه الحالة، قد يوصي مقدم الرعاية الصحية بتناول مضاد حيوي لمعالجة الالتهاب.
ولا يوجد حالياً أي دواء مرخص لمعالجة كوفيد-19. إذا ظهرت عليك أعراض المرض، فاتصل بطبيبك
المعالج أو بالخط الساخن المخصص لكوفيد-19 لطلب المساعدة.

COVID-19 virus can be transmitted in areas with hot and humid climates

The best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 is by maintaining physical distance of at least 1 metre from others and frequently cleaning your hands. By doing this you eliminate viruses that may be on your hands and avoid infection that could occur by then touching your eyes, mouth, and nose.

يمكن أن ينتقل فيروس مرض كوفيد-19 في المناطق التي يكون المناخ فيها حاراً ورطباً
من خلال البيئات المتوافرة لحد الآن، يمكن انتقال فيروس مرض كوفيد-19 في جميع المناطق، بما فيها
المناطق ذات الطقس الحار والرطب. وكيفما كان المناخ، اتخذ التدابير الوقائية إذا كنت تعيش في منطقة
أبلغ فيها عن حالات عدوى بكوفيد-19 أو تنوي السفر إليها. ولعل أفضل طريقة لحماية نفسك من الإصابة
بمرض كوفيد-19 هي المواظبة على غسل يديك. فبواسطة ذلك، يمكنك التخلص من الفيروسات التي قد
تكون عالقة بيديك وتتجنب بالتالي العدوى المحتمل حدوثها إذا لمست عينيك أو فمك أو أنفك.

In the first example, the repetition of the Arabic word مرض in the Arabic translated text without the existence of the English word “disease” in the original text. In addition, the translation of the English phrase “bacterial infection” to التهاب رئوي is inaccurate because “bacterial” means بكتيريا in Arabic and not رئوي. Also, the inconsistency in translating the English phrase “health

care provider”. This phrase was translated into Arabic as *طبيب المعالج* or *مقدم الرعاية الصحية*. The second example shows that the Arabic translated text contains more information and details about the effect of hot and humid climates on transmitting COVID-19 virus. The additional information in the Arabic text can be justified due to the hot and humid nature and climate in the Arab world.

5.2. How the City of Ottawa constructed the English and Arabic narrative of COVID-19 pandemic

The 12 English texts and their 12 Arabic translated texts which were published by the City of Ottawa Public Health deal with the following COVID-19 related themes and topics: info. sheet about the virus and symptoms, workplace safety, food safety and shopping etiquette, mask, and prevention and treatment.

The first document titled “Ontario Ministry of Health’s Info. Sheet” is an informative text that contains information about COVID-19 virus, symptoms, and protection. This document contains some inaccurate Arabic translations of the English source text. For example:

If you return from an affected area, you may need to **self-isolate** for 14 days. You may have been exposed to the 2019 novel coronavirus during your travels **and staying home and limiting contact with others can help prevent further spread.**

إذا عُدت من إحدى المناطق المتفشى فيها الفيروس، فقد يستلزم الأمر عزلك لمدة 14 يومًا. قد تكون تعرّضت لفيروس كورونا المستجد 2019 أثناء سفرياتك ومكوثك في المنزل وقد يساعدك التواصل المحدود مع الآخرين على الحد من انتشار الفيروس.

Wash your hands often with soap and water or **alcohol-based hand sanitizer**
غسل اليدين بالماء والصابون أو مطهر يدين مصنوع من الكحول.

The Arabic translation of the English phrase “self-isolate” is not accurate. As a matter of fact, WHO states that “self-isolation” is “when a person who is experiencing fever, cough or other COVID-19 symptoms stays at home and does not go to work, school or public places”. However, the Arabic translated equivalent *عزلك* means that someone must isolate you. In addition, the sentence “and staying home and limiting contact with others can help prevent further spread” can be accurately translated as *ومكوثك (وبقاؤك) في المنزل والاحتكاك المحدود مع الآخرين*. The Arabic translation means that **only** “limiting contact with others” can help prevent further spread. In addition, the back translation of the Arabic translated sentence *مطهر يدين مصنوع من الكحول* means that the hand sanitizer is fully composed from alcohol. The accurate Arabic translation should be *مطهر يدين يحتوي على الكحول*.

The second English document titled “Employee screening questionnaire” is a questionnaire that consists of questions which should be filled out by employees before they begin work on a daily basis to assess whether or not they suffer from COVID-19 symptoms. In this questionnaire, the following question “Do you have any of the following **new or worsening symptoms?**” was translated into *هل لديك أي من الأشياء التالية.* The back translation of this Arabic translation is “Do you have any of the following things?”. The phrase “new or worsening symptoms” was translated into *الأشياء التالية* which is inaccurate. A suggested Arabic translation for the above question can be *هل لديك أي من العوارض الجديدة أو الشديدة التالية*. In addition, the two questions about whether or not you have two symptoms are missing in the Arabic translations. These two questions are “loss of taste or smell”, and “nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain”. Also, the English phrase “registered nurse” was translated into *ممرضة مجازة*. This

Arabic translation is a gender-biased translation because it assumes that the nurse is a female person which is not the case in all situations.

The third document titled “Food fact sheet for isolated seniors” is a text that offers information about how to provide food for seniors and vulnerable persons. The analysis of this English text and its Arabic translated text reveals that the following English sentence “Human Needs Task Force” and the names of the communities were kept untranslated in the Arabic translated text. Contact information, websites, emails, and phone numbers were also kept in English in the Arabic translated text. The English word “access” was translated into Arabic as “وصل” which according to the back translation, it means “arrived”. Instead, the accurate Arabic equivalent for the English word “access” should be conjugated on a different verb pattern and should mean “الحصول على”. Moreover, some of the dates and time were incorrectly translated into Arabic such as 9 am was translated into Arabic as 8:30 am, Wednesday **and** Friday were translated into Arabic as Wednesday **to** Friday.

The fourth document titled “Putting on and taking off non-medical mask poster” offers information about how safely individuals can put on and take off masks during the pandemic. In this poster, the English sentence “Do not leave it on your neck, forehead, or hanging from your ears” only exists in the English text and there was not any translation in the Arabic text. Also, the English sentence “Wash your hands and clean **any surface the mask touched**” was inaccurately translated into Arabic. The English phrase “any surface the mask touched” was translated as “أي سطح لامس”. The back translation for this Arabic translated phrase means “any surface touch” which does not make sense, meaning wise. A suggested Arabic translation for the English phrase “any surface the mask touched” can be “أي سطح لامسه القناع”. In addition, the Arabic verbs used in the Arabic translated text are entirely gender-biased and exclusive verbs which refer to male audiences (e.g. تخلصه، تقوم، تغسل، لا تلمس، تضع).

The fifth document titled “Shopping etiquette” provides information about how to shop safely by following the shopping etiquette and safety procedures. In this document, the phrase “physical distancing” was translated as التباعد الاجتماعي instead of التباعد الجسدي. The first Arabic translated phrase is problematic because the back translation of it means “social distancing”; how someone could be “social” while staying away from others. In fact, the other Arabic phrase التباعد الجسدي is more accurate and it conveys the same meaning as of “physical distancing”. Furthermore, the English phrase “be patient” was inappropriately translated into مارسوا الصبر. The back translation of this Arabic translated phrase means “practice patience”. In fact, patience cannot be practiced, it is a state of mind. The suggested Arabic translation can be كن صبوراً. Also, in the English text, the verb “helps” in the sentence “controlling the number of people allowed in the store at one time **helps** with physical distancing” was translated as يزيد instead of the accurately Arabic verb يساعد. The use of this inaccurate Arabic verb distorts the entire meaning and message of the sentence. It is also noticeable that some information in the English text are missing in the Arabic translated text.

The sixth document titled “Physical (social) distancing” presents information about the importance of maintaining a safe distance between individuals to avoid spreading of COVID-19 virus. In this document, physical (social) distancing was translated as الابتعاد الجسدي. Yet, the same English phrase “physical (social) distancing” was also translated as الابتعاد المادي and الابتعاد الاجتماعي. These different Arabic translations for the same English phrase “physical distancing” convey different meanings and reveal inconsistency in choosing one accurate Arabic equivalent.

The seventh poster titled “Hand sanitizing” and the eighth poster titled “Hand washing” provide the residents of the City of Ottawa information about the importance of frequently sanitize and wash hands to avoid COVID-19 infection. In the English text of the

“Hand sanitizing” poster, it says “alcohol-based hand sanitizer”; however, in the Arabic poster, it says the hand sanitizer should contain at least 60% alcohol. In terms of the “Hand washing” poster, the Arabic poster reflects an accurate translation in terms of the meanings and communicative messages transmitted from the English poster.

The ninth poster titled “Stop the coronavirus” offers information about how citizens can prevent the spread of the virus. The title of the English poster is “Stop the coronavirus”; however, the Arabic translation is different because it includes two additional words “together we” which means *معاً* in Arabic. Unlike all other Arabic translated texts, in this Arabic translated poster, translators who work for the City of Ottawa Public Health used gender-neutral verbs by including the Arabic feminist letter in a bracket such as *اغسل(ي)، تجنب(ي)*.

The tenth poster titled “Mask/physical distancing” presents information about the importance of maintaining physical distancing. The English phrase “physical distancing” was also translated as *التباعد الاجتماعي*. The eleventh document titled “Physical distancing factsheet” also offers facts about the importance of physical distancing and information about how to maintain physical distancing. In this text, the English phrase “physical distancing” was also translated as either *الابتعاد الجسدي* or *الابتعاد المادي* or *الابتعاد الاجتماعي*. These different translations generate different meanings and understanding. Moreover, “social media” was translated as *وسائل الاعلام الاجتماعية*. However, in the Arab countries and culture, “social media” are widely known as *وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي*. Moreover, the word “distress” in the “**Distress** Centre of Ottawa” was translated as *الاستغاثة* which according to the back translation it means “help”. The accurate Arabic equivalent for the English word “distress” should be *محنة*.

And the last poster titled “Cough etiquette” offers information about following a specific etiquette when coughing in public. The English poster states that the alcohol percentage of hand sanitizer is **70%**; however, the Arabic translated poster states that the alcohol percentage of hand sanitizer is **60%**. In addition, the English poster mentions that the physical distance should be “more than **2 metres/6 feet**”; however, the Arabic translated poster mentions that the physical distance should be “more than **1 meter/3 feet**”.

6. Discussion

In effect, COVID-19 pandemic is a meta-narrative which is circulated to global audiences and citizens by institutions, organizations, and media outlets. WHO is one of the reliable and credible international organization that translates and circulates COVID-19 public narrative which constitutes with other public narratives the COVID-19 meta-narrative. WHO’s English and Arabic public narrative of COVID-19 which conveys information about the cause, symptoms, prevention, and treatment of COVID-19 virus are similar in terms of conveying meanings and communicative messages about the virus. However, there are some minor translation equivalents inaccuracies when it comes to choosing appropriate equivalents. One of the observations is that WHO’s translators were aware of the cultural differences between English and Arabic culture and that was obvious in following the omission/adding strategy in some of the English texts and their Arabic translations.

For instance, there are additional information in the Arabic text that offers information about the relationship between COVID-19 and humid and hot weather. This fact can be related to the hot and humid weather in most Arab countries. On the other hand, we find more information and details in the English text about the relationship between COVID-19 and animals. The habit of having pets at homes is common in most English and western cultures. By doing so, WHO relied on selective appropriation in order to emphasize on certain aspects and narrative elements of COVID-19 narrative, especially when those narrative elements are culture bound.

On the other hand, the City of Ottawa's public narrative of COVID-19 public narrative as represented in the English texts and Arabic translated texts is not as accurate as WHO's translation. In fact, some of COVID-19 terminology are mistranslated into Arabic and that led to misinterpretation of the original communicative messages as embedded in the English texts. For instance, there was inconsistency in translating some COVID-19 key phrases. For example, the English phrase "physical distance" was inconsistently translated into different Arabic equivalents such as *الابتعاد الجسدي* or *الابتعاد المادي* or *الابتعاد الاجتماعي*. All these Arabic translations convey different meanings which directly affect the transmitted communicative messages and the entire COVID-19 narrative. In addition, most of the Arabic verbs in the Arabic translated texts are gender-biased and exclusive verbs which target Arab male audiences. This fact is also related to the Arab culture which in most cases gives more weight to male audiences than female audiences even when target audiences belong to mixed genders.

In terms of narrative features, examining the role and function of narrative features in the English and Arabic translated texts allows us to understand how COVID-19 narrative works in the texts of both WHO and the City of Ottawa, and how they utilized narrative features to construct a coherent COVID-19 narrative to their target audiences. It is worth noting that the four narrative features named temporality, causal emplotment, relationality, and selective appropriation are interrelated and overlap in order to elaborate a coherent narrative and promote a particular version of a narrative.

The examination of the use of temporality narrative feature by the WHO and the City of Ottawa identifies how these two organizations place the sequence and position of COVID-19 narrative elements and events which affect the overall representations of COVID-19 narrative. Hence, different orders and sequences in which the narrative elements are placed within the texts carry different meanings and interpretations. In fact, temporality has three aspects: space, thematic, and chronologic. For the purpose of this paper, the analysis focuses on the use of temporality thematic sequence which reveals the changing mood of contents and themes in the English and Arabic translated texts. With regard to the use of temporality thematic sequence, both the English and Arabic translated texts consist of the following COVID-19 themes: causes and symptoms of the virus, virus and workplace safety, virus and food safety, masks, virus and shopping etiquette, and prevention and treatment. In fact, these themes offer sufficient information about the virus which support the overall COVID-19 English and Arabic narrative of WHO and the City of Ottawa.

The examination of the use of causal emplotment narrative feature in COVID-19 English and Arabic narrative uncovers how WHO and the City of Ottawa emphasize particular COVID-19 narrative elements in their texts. Even though WHO and the City of Ottawa have common COVID-19 themes in their English and Arabic translated texts, WHO published more COVID-19 narrative elements in the form of information and details with more emphasis on the English texts. As a matter of fact, the sufficient information and details about COVID-19 encourage WHO's target audiences to construct a comprehensive public narrative of COVID-19 in both English and Arabic. However, the City of Ottawa provides its audiences with less information and details about COVID-19 themes; a fact that may leave residents of Ottawa in confusion on how to behave and act safely to avoid being infected by the virus.

The examination of the use of relationality narrative feature by WHO and the City of Ottawa determines the ways target audiences can constitute a relationship between different COVID-19 narrative elements, and interweave them into a larger configuration of events. In view of that, the analysis process focuses on how key words and phrases in the English and Arabic translated texts have relational meaning and interpretations for target audiences. To begin with, it is noticeable that WHO's English and Arabic texts contain important information

about the virus which lead its target audiences to clearly relate together many aspects of the virus starting from causes and symptoms to prevention and treatment. Also, the accurate English and Arabic definitions of COVID-19 key terms result in a good understanding of the relationship between different aspects and narrative elements of COVID-19. For example, WHO offers the following definitions for the three key terms named self-isolation, self-quarantine, and physical distancing:

Self-isolation is when a person who is experiencing fever, cough or other COVID-19 symptoms stays at home and does not go to work, school or public places.

والمقصود بالعزل الذاتي هو عندما يلزم الشخص المصاب بالحمى أو السعال أو غير ذلك من أعراض مرض كوفيد-19، بيته ويمتنع عن الذهاب إلى العمل أو المدرسة أو الأماكن العامة.

To self-quarantine means to separate yourself from others because you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 even though you, yourself, do not have symptoms.

الحجر الصحي الذاتي هو أن تعزل نفسك عن الآخرين لأنك خالطت شخصاً مصاباً بمرض كوفيد-19، رغم عدم ظهور أي أعراض عليك.

Physical distancing means being physically apart. WHO recommends keeping at least 1-metre distance from others. This is a general measure that everyone should take even if they are well with no known exposure to COVID-19.

ويعني التباعد الجسدي الابتعاد عن الآخرين جسدياً. وتوصي المنظمة بالابتعاد عن الآخرين مسافة متر واحد (3 أقدام) على الأقل. وهي توصية عامة يتعين على الجميع تطبيقها حتى لو كانوا بصحة جيدة ولم يتعرضوا للعدوى كوفيد-19

In translating COVID-19 key terms from English into Arabic, WHO was consistent in choosing the Arabic equivalents. This step ensures that audiences are not confused when they relate together different aspects of COVID-19 English and Arabic narrative. However, the City of Ottawa was not consistent in many situations when translating key terms and phrases from English into Arabic. For example, the English phrase “physical distancing” was translated as either *الابتعاد الجسدي* or *الابتعاد المادي* or *الابتعاد الاجتماعي*. These different translations generate different meanings and understanding and may cause confusion when Arabic audiences attempt to relate different aspects of COVID-19 Arabic narrative.

The examination of the use of selective appropriation narrative feature focuses on the COVID-19 narrative elements and aspects which were selected and emphasized in the English and Arabic translated texts. As a matter of fact, both WHO and the City of Ottawa chose and accentuated the important aspects of COVID-19 in their English and Arabic narrative, especially the narrative elements about prevention the spreading of the virus. However and as mentioned earlier, WHO’s English and Arabic translated texts offer more information and details about COVID-19 important narrative elements, aspects, and events.

7. Concluding Remarks

Baker once said that “[n]arratives are the stories we tell ourselves and others about the world(s) in which we live. These stories provide our main interface with the world” (2010b, p. 350). This paper explored how both WHO and the City of Ottawa Public Health constructed and disseminated the English and Arabic COVID-19 public narrative as embedded in their English and Arabic translated texts. In addition, this paper examined how the two organizations

employed the four narrative features in their informative texts. As final remarks, the English and Arabic translated texts of WHO and the City of Ottawa contain necessary and important narrative elements that help in constructing COVID-19 English and Arabic public narrative with some differences in utilizing the four narrative features. On the one hand, WHO offered a coherent English and Arabic public narrative of COVID-19 pandemic due to the amount of information and details embedded in the English and Arabic texts. As well, WHO's translators were aware of cultural differences between western and Arabic cultures and that was apparent in the choice of accurate equivalents in the Arabic translated texts. Accordingly, WHO's translators followed sense-for-sense translation strategy which aims to maintain and transmit the meanings and communicative messages from source texts and language to target texts and language. Moreover, WHO's translators were consistent in translating into Arabic the main key terms and phrases of COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the inconsistency of translating COVID-19 key terms and phrases into Arabic has made the City of Ottawa's Arabic narrative of the pandemic less coherent. Furthermore, most of the verbs in the Arabic texts are gender-biased and exclusive words that target Arab male audiences. The analysis process also revealed that the City of Ottawa's translators followed word-for-word translation strategy of the English texts and this is apparent in the lexical and grammatical errors and inaccuracies in the Arabic translated texts.

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