
RESEARCH ARTICLE

From "Dependent Translation" to "Creative Translation" by Taha Abdurrahman

Tarik ElFalih

Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Abdelmalek Essaadi University, Tetouane, Morocco

Corresponding Author: Tarik ElFalih, **E-mail:** tarik.elfalih@etu.uae.ac.ma

ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a critical and analytical examination of the transformative dimensions of translation as conceptualized by the Moroccan philosopher Taha Abdurrahman. Central to Abdurrahman's intellectual project is the call to transcend the pervasive Eurocentrism that characterizes contemporary translation theories. Abdurrahman offers a nuanced critique of the translation methodologies employed during the Abbasid period, particularly the uncontextualized appropriation of Greek philosophy. He contends that this approach led to the marginalization of Islamic philosophy, reducing it to a mode of mere transmission and dependency, initially on ancient Greece and subsequently on the modern West. To address these historical inadequacies, Abdurrahman advocates for an innovative translation strategy termed *ta'şiliyya*, which translates literally to "authenticating." This strategy emphasizes a transformative process whereby the source text is integrated into the receiving culture, aligning with its specific epistemic and cultural needs, irrespective of the original context. Abdurrahman posits that this method is essential for fostering an autonomous Arab/Islamic philosophical tradition, one that is not subsumed under external theoretical paradigms, even if this necessitates deviating from conventional criteria of accuracy and faithfulness. This paper critically engages with the theoretical foundations and proposes practical applications of Abdurrahman's translation paradigm. It situates his framework within the broader historical trajectory of translation in the Arabic intellectual tradition and contemporary translation studies. Furthermore, it interrogates the theoretical and methodological ramifications of eschewing conventional norms of fidelity and accuracy, notwithstanding their entrenched and restrictive nature.

KEYWORDS

Translation, Taha Abdurrahman, Islamic philosophy, Faithfulness, Western-centrism

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 October 2024

PUBLISHED: 08 October 2024

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2024.7.10.16

1. Introduction

The ongoing discourse on translation theories has primarily been influenced by Eurocentric frameworks, sometimes leading to the marginalisation of non-Western intellectual traditions. These Eurocentric frameworks sometimes allocate more importance to Western philosophical concepts, procedures, and assumptions, therefore establishing them as universally applicable while marginalising non-Western epistemologies. Since translation has historically been employed to disseminate knowledge from Western societies to other parts of the world, it has often overlooked the cultural and philosophical contexts of non-Western nations. This supremacy is seen in the manner in which translation has been employed throughout history. As a result, translation has not only facilitated the transmission of knowledge but has also been employed as a means of intellectual colonialism. Furthermore, it has shaped the perception of knowledge, identity, and standing within the global intellectual hierarchy of the culture that is receiving the information.

The objective of this work is to challenge established paradigms by carefully examining the concept of transformational translation as defined by Taha Abdurrahman, a modern Moroccan philosopher. Among contemporary Arab-Islamic philosophers, Abdurrahman distinguishes himself by his steadfast dedication to the advancement of a distinct philosophical heritage deeply

rooted in the cultural and epistemic characteristics of the Arab-Islamic milieu. The author's response to the prevailing influence of Eurocentrism in translation theories involves a fundamental re-evaluation of the translation process itself. He perceives it not as a neutral linguistic exercise but rather as a deep intellectual involvement. In other words, he views translation as a rigorous intellectual endeavour. According to Abdurrahman, translation serves as a site for power relations, where the validity of cultural and philosophical authority may either be confirmed or diminished.

This innovative approach, termed *ta'şiliyya* by Abdurrahman, which directly translates to "authenticating," offers an alternative paradigm that seeks to align translation practices with the epistemic and cultural demands of the Arab-Islamic culture that is being served by the translation service. In contrast to conventional translation approaches that prioritise fidelity to the original text, Abdurrahman's *ta'şiliyya* lays importance on contextually integrating the translated content into the intellectual framework of the recipient culture. Effective implementation of this approach necessitates the active involvement of the tradition that is being translated. This process guarantees that the original information is not merely replicated in its present condition but rather is thoroughly examined and modified in a way that aligns with the philosophical and cultural aspects of the environment in which it is being received.

The author's critique of both historical and modern translation methods advocates for intellectual and cultural independence that opposes being influenced by philosophical frameworks situated outside the area. Specifically, Abdurrahman highlights the *Abbasid* translation enterprise, which, while outstanding in its scope, often demonstrated the thoughtless embrace of Greek intellectual ideas inside the Arab-Islamic realm. From his perspective, this method led to the gradual elimination of the unique philosophical contributions authored by Arab-Islamic thinkers. Their work was mostly limited to interpretations or extensions of Greek ideas, without the opportunity to develop an independent intellectual path. Abdurrahman argues that there is a tendency for a similar pattern to occur in the current context since modern Arab-Islamic thinking is growing more reliant on Western intellectual frameworks. The author presents an argument for the potential occurrence of a comparable pattern.

The objective of this review is to place Abdurrahman's work in the broader perspective of Arabic intellectual history and the developing field of translation studies. This is achieved by examining the theoretical foundations and practical implications of *ta'şiliyya*. In addition to considering the historical foundations of translation in the Arab-Islamic world, his approach also presents a paradigm that anticipates the future and questions the dominant position of Western epistemologies. In doing so, Abdurrahman's *ta'şiliyya* offers a detailed plan for achieving intellectual autonomy. This framework facilitates the restoration of philosophical autonomy for non-Western traditions by means of translation, therefore making a valuable contribution to the advancement of a genuinely dialogical and pluralistic intellectual milieu on a worldwide level. The implications of this paradigm for the field of contemporary translation studies are substantial, leading scholars to reassess the ethical and methodological assumptions that form the foundation of the translation process. Given the context of non-Western traditions striving to assert their intellectual independence, this becomes particularly crucial. An essential cornerstone of Abdurrahman's conceptual framework is his criticism of the Eurocentric bias that is intrinsic in modern translation theories. Owing to the impact of Western epistemological paradigms, these theories often overlook the many intellectual traditions and cultural frameworks that exist in the Arab-Islamic context. In general, Eurocentric translation theories have disregarded the unique contributions and intellectual history of non-Western civilisations, particularly the Arab-Islamic past, by attributing excessive importance to Western philosophical concepts and modes of thought. Abdurrahman argues that the imbalance in question is not only a technical limitation of translation but rather a manifestation of a deeper problem of intellectual colonialism. Abdurrahman argues that this issue occurs when Western methodologies become the primary perspective through which all information, including knowledge from non-Western societies, is interpreted. Ultimately, this results in the significant diminishment or complete eradication of the profound philosophical and intellectual heritage of the Arab-Islamic civilisation from the global narrative.

Moreover, Abdurrahman has identified this as a basic issue that can be traced back to the translation movement that took place throughout the Abbasid era. Throughout this period, Greek intellectual texts were conveyed to the Arab world without sufficient contextualisation. Abdurrahman perceives the Abbasid translation movement as having both positive and negative consequences, but it is often commended for its vital role in safeguarding and passing along Greek knowledge throughout successive generations. On one side, it facilitated the Arab-Islamic world's access to monumental philosophical works; on the other hand, the uncritical assimilation of Greek concepts led to a form of intellectual subordination. Due to the lack of proper contextualisation of these foreign concepts within the Arab-Islamic intellectual legacy, Greek philosophy was often embraced without substantial critique or adaptation, leading to the relegation of Islamic philosophy to a subordinate position. Instead of establishing its own independent path, Islamic philosophy became a mere vessel for the dissemination of foreign concepts, a phenomenon that, as identified by Abdurrahman (2006), hindered its development and independence. The aforementioned procedure transpired across the whole duration of Islamic history. According to Abdurrahman, this reliance persisted even as Islamic philosophy became increasingly influenced by Western theoretical frameworks in the modern day. In the contemporary era, Arab-Islamic contributions have endured further marginalisation due to the dominance of Western intellectual paradigms, particularly in fields such as philosophy,

science, and translation studies. Current translation theories prioritise fidelity to the source text and often operate within strict Eurocentric boundaries, neglecting to consider the epistemic demands and cultural nuances of the target culture. Consequently, the present Arab-Islamic ideology is at risk of replicating the same patterns of dependence that were typical of the *Abbasid* historical era. In his book, *The Spirit of Modernity: A Prolegomenon to Laying the Foundations of Islamic Modernity* (2006), he stated that translation in the Arab-Islamic world has undergone several phases, which he elucidates in this paragraph.

The second phase of Arabic translation is comparable to the first in that it is based on the principle of similarities recognized by Arabic linguists during the Abbasid era. However, this principle has since been rendered obsolete, and its nullification can be explained by the following reasons:

A- The first phase of translation was voluntary and driven by a desire to assert self-identity and realize its vast potential. In contrast, the second phase was a hasty reaction motivated by self-defence, which led to more limited constraints.

B- In the first phase of translation, Arabic scholars operated from a position of strength, using translation to shape their cultural identity and develop their own civilization. In contrast, the second phase was undertaken by latecomers in a position of weakness, profoundly influenced by the backwardness of their societies. This societal decline has contributed to psychological challenges that threaten their identities and well-being.

C- The first phase of translation prioritized selecting writings that would not conflict with Islamic ethics. In contrast, the second phase focused on translating a wide range of texts, regardless of whether they might conflict with Islamic moral standards.

D- The first phase of translation focused on texts from a bygone civilization, even if its relics still existed. In contrast, the second phase translated materials from a developing civilization with the aim of shaping human history in the modern era.

Within this historical era, native intellectual traditions were replaced by frameworks originating from foreign nations. Abdurrahman argues that if these tendencies are not disrupted, the Arab-Islamic world will persist in its intellectual reliance on the West, leaving little room for the Arab-Islamic world to develop its own philosophical distinctiveness.

In accordance with broader postcolonial critiques of translation, Abdurrahman's thesis highlights how translation has often functioned as a tool of epistemic violence, hence upholding the dominance of Western knowledge systems (Bhabha, 1994). Postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha have long argued that translation, being not a neutral action, is substantially implicated in the power dynamics of colonialism and empire. Historically, translation has undermined the intellectual and cultural autonomy of colonial peoples by forcing Western epistemologies upon them. Therefore, translation is not only concerned with the transfer of language; instead, it serves as a site of intellectual struggle, where the dominance of Western knowledge is reproduced and preserved. However, Abdurrahman offers a constructive alternative to many postcolonial theorists by proposing the concept of *ta'sīliyya*. This concept serves as a means of verifying the source text within the intellectual legacy of the culture that is receiving it. Abdurrahman takes a proactive stance by proposing a theoretical framework for how translation could be employed as a means of enhancing intellectual and cultural empowerment. This is in opposition to the postcolonial criticisms that often focus on the detrimental aspects of text translation. Nevertheless, as per Abdurrahman's understanding, *ta'sīliyya* does not include outright rejection of foreign information. Instead, it entails a critical examination of such knowledge in a way that aligns with the epistemic demands of the tradition that is being influenced by it. *ta'sīliyya* is a process of transformation that serves as an alternative to passively accepting the original material in its present condition. This process involves modifying and incorporating the translated content into the culture that is receiving it in a way that upholds and enhances the intellectual independent authority of the receiving culture.

The approach described here represents a considerable deviation from conventional translation theories, which tend to put fidelity to the original text above the requirements of the culture receiving the translation. Conversely, *ta'sīliyya* focuses great importance on the context and the dynamics of transformation. It recognises that the translation process is inherently biased and invariably shaped by the specific intellectual and cultural environments in which it occurs. Abdurrahman's philosophy of *ta'sīliyya* offers a method to overcome the intellectual domination that has historically occurred when foreign works are translated into Arab-Islamic culture. This is achieved by advocating for a translation approach that is more attuned to cultural nuances and based on solid

epistemic principles. Alternatively stated, it is not only a method of translation but rather a more extensive intellectual endeavour aimed at reinstating the autonomy of the Iranian and Arab philosophical legacy.

Hence, Abdurrahman's critique of Eurocentrism in translation encompasses not just a call for translation methods that exhibit greater cultural sensitivity but also serves as a constituent of a broader endeavour to reduce the influence of colonialism on the generation of knowledge within the Arab-Islamic realm. In order to develop a more diversified and fair global intellectual order, Abdurrahman aims to facilitate Arab-Islamic intellectuals' interaction with Western knowledge on their own terms. To do this, he challenges the prevailing influence of Western epistemologies and advocates for the *ta'şiliyya* approach. The latter is the term used to describe the recognition of translation as a transforming activity; Abdurrahman's concept of *ta'şiliyya* surpasses the traditional translation norms that prioritise accuracy and integrity to the source literary work for translation objectives. The primary objective of traditional translation theories has traditionally been to maintain a faithful representation of the source content. Perception of accuracy is regarded as the paramount attribute of translation. However, Abdurrahman offers a critique of this approach, arguing that an overemphasis on loyalty might impede the intellectual and cultural development of the tradition that is conveyed by the message. The traditional approach to translation, which prioritises literal precision, often overlooks the epistemic, cultural, and philosophical backgrounds of the culture that is understanding the translated text. Consequently, this leads to a type of intellectual subordination where the translated concepts remain unfamiliar and alien to the intellectual customs of the culture that receives them. Conversely, *ta'şiliyya* promotes a more dynamic and integrated approach. This methodology entails not only the translation of the original content but also the modification and restructuring of it to meet the specific epistemic and cultural demands of the tradition that is receiving it. The technique described by Abdurrahman in the article by (Hashas & Al-Khatib, 2020) allows the translated book to seamlessly and naturally integrate into the intellectual framework of the culture it is meant to serve. As a result, it becomes an integral part of the philosophical and intellectual discussions within that culture.

The transformative method advocated by Abdurrahman underscores the notion that translation should not be perceived as a passive process of linguistic transmission but rather as an engaged, innovative, and even revolutionary endeavour. By employing *ta'şiliyya*, the process of translating is converted into a means of intellectual empowerment and self-assertion. This approach allows the culture as the recipient of the translation to actively engage with the foreign text in a critical manner while also modifying it to reflect its own intellectual authority. Therefore, Abdurrahman argues that this strategy is essential for the advancement of a distinct Arab-Islamic intellectual heritage that is free from the limitations imposed by external models. It is his firm belief that the Arab-Islamic world should not only passively accept foreign knowledge without question but instead actively participate in the process of critically assimilating and modifying that information in ways that contribute to the advancement of its own intellectual and cultural capacities. Consequently, *ta'şiliyya* serves as a means for intellectual advancement, enabling the Arab-Islamic legacy to evolve independently rather than being assimilated by the dominant influence of Western ideology. Within the context of this discourse, *ta'şiliyya* poses a challenge to the conventional contradictory relationship between precision and alteration in translation. Translation traditionally presents two choices: either the translator remains faithful to the original text, preserving its precise form and content, or they exercise creative freedom by modifying the text to align with the demands of the target culture. By proposing a moderate approach that surpasses these oversimplified categorisations, Abdurrahman disrupts this binary model. In his view, the primary responsibility of the translator is not only to replicate the original text but rather to ensure that the translated content aligns with the broader epistemic framework of the culture that is receiving the translation. The aim is to enhance intellectual consistency and logical order within the specific tradition being focused on, even if this requires a significant deviation from the original text. Therefore, *ta'şiliyya* facilitates the possibility of creative deviation from the original, aiming to foster intellectual liberty and cultural independence, respectively.

The progression of translation from a mere technical task to an epistemic procedure has important implications for our understanding of the role of the translator. When following the concepts of *ta'şiliyya*, the translator undergoes a metamorphosis into an engaged catalyst for intellectual change rather than being seen as an impartial mediator between languages. Abdurrahman argues that translation is not just the transmission of ideas from one language to another but also entails the crucial tasks of reinterpreting, recontextualising, and even recreating those ideas in a manner that holds significance for the culture that is receiving them. Therefore, it is essential for the translator to possess a deep understanding of the philosophical and cultural context of both the original work and the tradition that is being translated. The role of the translator should extend beyond that of a language technician, encompassing that of a cultural mediator who facilitates intellectual exchange among many domains within a given culture. Moreover, the *ta'şiliyya* of Abdurrahman presents a formidable obstacle to the prevailing paradigms that have historically held sway in the realm of translation studies. *ta'şiliyya* challenges the epistemic violence often associated with translation processes in colonial or neocolonial settings by prioritising the sovereignty of the intellectual legacy of the destination culture. In several cases, translation has been used as a means of exerting intellectual supremacy. Colonialism refers to the imposition of the knowledge systems of the coloniser upon the colonised, resulting in the eradication or subordination of the indigenous people's epistemologies. The objective of Abdurrahman's paradigm is to reverse this scenario by empowering the culture that is being

exposed to the knowledge to exercise its own intellectual autonomy. In this context, the translator assumes the role of a participant in a broader decolonial undertaking. Translation is employed not to subjugate the culture from which it is received but rather to enhance and enrich it through deliberate and analytical engagement with concepts from other cultures beyond the one being translated. *ta'şiliyya* offers a paradigm that is especially relevant in the contemporary globalised society, where the transmission of ideas across cultural boundaries is more rapid and extensive than ever before. This framework is proposed by advocating for a translation paradigm that is grounded on epistemology. Abdurrahman's perspective on translation challenges the notion that non-Western cultures must unquestioningly embrace Western knowledge to the exclusion of any critical analysis. Instead, it promotes a dialogical and reciprocal relationship, where the culture receiving the knowledge has the capacity to shape and reinterpret the supplied information. Consequently, *ta'şiliyya* is not only a translation technique, but it also constitutes a broader ideology of cultural and intellectual opposition. In the face of global intellectual homogenisation, this philosophy seeks to preserve the autonomy and uniqueness of non-Western traditions.

The extensive and intricate history of translation in the Arab-Islamic world is the very foundation for Abdurrahman's notion of *ta'şiliyya*. This is particularly true during the Abbasid era, which is often regarded as a golden age of intellectual endeavour. This translation movement was initiated by the Abbasid caliphs and was supported by the construction of the House of Wisdom in Baghdad. This endeavour facilitated the dissemination of information about Greek, Persian, and Indian civilisations into the Arabic language. Hunayn ibn Ishaq, al-Kindi, and later al-Farabi and Avicenna were pivotal academics in the translation and interpretation of Greek philosophical literature, particularly those authored by Aristotle and Plato. This era is well recognised for its profound role in safeguarding and disseminating old knowledge, which subsequently influenced Islamic philosophy and the Renaissance in Northern Europe. Nevertheless, Abdurrahman approaches this legacy with a more analytical viewpoint, as opposed to the usual tradition of showcasing these achievements in a festive ambiance. Notwithstanding the crucial role of the Abbasid translation push in expanding intellectual perspectives, he argues that it led to a thoughtless adoption of Greek philosophy, which had enduring consequences for the intellectual heritage of Arab-Islamic nations. Abdurrahman (2006) argues that the extensive integration of Greek philosophy into the Islamic worldview led to the development of a new kind of intellectual dependence. Such occurrence took place without sufficient epistemic and cultural adjustment. It is his argument that the dependence on foreign philosophical frameworks ultimately hindered the potential for the development of a truly independent and autonomous Arab-Islamic intellectual heritage.

The critique presented by Abdurrahman regarding the Abbasid era is indicative of his heightened preoccupation with the potential hazards associated with intellectual colonialism. Within the discourse of postcolonial thought, this question has a deep resonance. Intellectual colonialism refers to the deliberate imposition of foreign epistemologies that may not align with the cultural and philosophical requirements of the civilisation being colonised. This parallels the manner in which European colonisation enforced alien political and economic structures on civilisations that did not originate from the Western territories. Hence, the *ta'şiliyya* paradigm developed by Abdurrahman may be understood as a strategic endeavour to combat colonialism by reinstating the autonomy of the Arab-Islamic intellectual heritage. *ta'şiliyya* advocates for a translation approach that is more attuned to the specific context in order to prevent the superficial importation of foreign concepts. This method entails modifying the original content to conform to the epistemic demands of the particular culture that is being translated. The earlier Islamic thinkers grappled with the quandary of reconciling the assimilation of foreign knowledge with the preservation of the purity of Islamic philosophy. The critique presented by Abdurrahman aligns with the concerns of the earlier Islamic thinkers since it underscores the need for cultural and intellectual independence. Notably, academics like al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah, who were not involved in the Abbasid translation endeavour, expressed criticism against the thoughtless adoption of Greek philosophy and endeavoured to restore the dominance of Islamic epistemology. Their efforts were directed at reaffirming the significance of Islamic epistemology. Similarly, Abdurrahman's *ta'şiliyya* aims to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between the benefits of engaging with foreign knowledge and the necessity of safeguarding an independent intellectual heritage.

The findings of Abdurrahman's *ta'şiliyya* have significant ramifications for contemporary translation studies, posing a challenge to the field's traditional emphasis on accuracy and precision. The conventional concept of translation, especially in Western nations, has prioritised the need to approximate the original text as closely as possible. Ensuring accuracy to the author's intentions and remaining faithful to the original language are often seen as the fundamental ethical obligations that a translation must meet. Conversely, Abdurrahman questions this concept by proposing an alternative paradigm that emphasises the epistemic and cultural needs of the tradition that is receiving the knowledge rather than exactly following the original text. This disparity raises significant issues about the ethical obligation of the translator. If the cultural and intellectual framework of the tradition receiving the translation does not align with the aim of the source text, is it suitable for the translator to persist in adhering to that intention? Alternatively, should the translator be granted the freedom to modify, adjust, and even alter the original content to enhance its relevance and comprehensibility within the specific translation context? The latter is proposed by Abdurrahman's *ta'şiliyya*, which promotes a flexible and innovative approach, thereby allowing the translator to actively shape the interpretation of the text.

Furthermore, scholars like Lawrence Venuti (1995) have expressed their criticism of the "invisibility" of the translator, which is widespread in the implementation of conventional translation methods. Venuti argues that translators are often expected to hide their own presence during the translation process, leading to the creation of a work that seems to have been written in the target language, specifically from the translator's point of view. The lack of visibility leads to the reinforcement of a power dynamic where the culture is embodied by the source material, and consequently, the culture it represents exerts dominance over the culture that receives it. In contrast, Abdurrahman's *ta'şiliyya* positions the translator as an active participant in the process of knowledge production rather than a passive channel for the transfer of meaning. Abdurrahman empowers the translator to modify the text in a manner that promotes intellectual freedom by urging them to prioritise the imperative of harmonising the translation with the epistemic requirements of the culture that is being translated.

The pragmatic implications of *ta'şiliyya* extend beyond the intellectual legacy of Arab-Islamic culture and hold significance for broader concerns in the realm of contemporary translation studies. The issue of how to integrate foreign knowledge into local environments is particularly pertinent in a society that is more globalised and where concepts and texts are swiftly transcending cultural and linguistic boundaries. The paradigm developed by Abdurrahman offers a comprehensive structure for considering translation not just as a linguistic endeavour but also as an ethical and epistemic procedure that may either sustain or challenge cultural dominance. This paradigm may be employed to reconsider the concept of translation. *ta'şiliyya* questions the dominant paradigms that have historically controlled the translation sector. It does this by promoting a translation paradigm that emphasises the intellectual autonomy of the culture in which the translation is being received. This presents novel opportunities for contemplating the function of translation in a context characterised by more fairness and cultural variety.

The revolutionary viewpoint of Taha Abdurrahman's critique of Eurocentrism and his suggested *ta'şiliyya* approach offers valuable insights into the transformative possibilities of translation. Abdurrahman redirects the emphasis from fidelity to the original text to a culturally and epistemologically cognisant approach in order to create a structure for the advancement of intellectual autonomy in the Arab-Islamic world. His approach prompts us to reassess the role of the translator, which should not be limited to that of a mere conveyer of meaning but rather as an engaged contributor in the process of knowledge generation. The objective of this study is to demonstrate that the perspectives offered by Abdurrahman are not only relevant to the historical context of Arab-Islamic intellectual history but they also have significant consequences for the discipline of contemporary translation studies. *ta'şiliyya* challenges us to rethink the ethics and politics of translation as a dynamic process of cultural negotiation and intellectual metamorphosis. This is especially pertinent in a culture that is becoming globalised, where the exchange of words and ideas is more seamless than ever before.

ORCID

Tarik ElFalih: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7945-9884>

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

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