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The Interplay of Linguistic and Cultural Factors in Translating Theatrical Concepts: A Comparative Analysis of Translation Theories and Practices

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the translation of English theatrical concepts into Arabic through a comparative analysis of Moroccan scholars Hassan Mniai and Khalid Amine. Using key terms—tragedy, comedy, performance, and site-specific performance—as focal points, the paper evaluates each translator's strategies against major linguistic and cultural translation theories, including those of Catford, Nida, Newmark, Bassnett, and Lefevere. The study highlights the challenges of (non)equivalence and emphasizes the role of translators as cultural mediators. By assessing divergent translational choices, it argues for the development of culturally rooted and theoretically informed practices in Arabic theatre translation. The paper contributes to the understudied field of Arab theatre translation by proposing more standardized, context-sensitive approaches.

KEYWORDS

Translation

Theatre

Theatrical Concepts

Equivalence

Arabic Terminology

Introduction

The translation of theatrical terminology from English into Arabic constitutes a specialized and intellectually challenging field of investigation, bridging the disciplines of language, culture, and performance. While translation, in its broadest sense, has long been employed as a mechanism for intellectual development and cross-cultural communication, the translation of theatre discourse is framed by specific challenges. This is due to the intricate interfacing of linguistic constructions, conceptual meaning, values, and performance traditions. Unlike technical translation or literary translation, the translation of theatre terminology into Arabic involves not only the replacement of words but also the communication of culturally situated ideas infused with specific theatre practices. As such, the translation transgresses the lexical and grammatical confines of language to enter the terrain of ideology, aesthetics, and reception.

Despite the development of translation studies as a scholarly discipline from the latter part of the twentieth century, the particular area of theatre translation, particularly the translation of theatre terminology, has not received a proportionate scholarly focus in the Arab world. Research in the field has been lacking, particularly in theatre scholarship written in Arabic, where terminology has been inconsistent, contextually misplaced, or diluted in meaning. This is exacerbated by the failure to coordinate among Arab language institutions, the unavailability of searchable dictionaries of theatre and performance, and the prevalence of literalist translation approaches that lack conceptual and performative fidelity to the source terminology. This poses

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challenges for translators to select suitable Arabic equivalents for English theatre concepts, leading to misinterpretation, ambiguity, and meaning loss.

This research addresses the above concerns by conducting a comparative study of four selected English theatre concepts and their translation into Arabic, with a focus on two eminent Moroccan translators in the discipline, Hassan Mniai and Khalid Amine. Concepts considered include theatre, tragedy, comedy, performance, and site-specific performance. These were selected due to the frequency of their deployment within scholarship, the complexity of the theory, and the specificity of the culture. Through a comparison of Mniai's and Amine's methods, this research examines how each translator navigates the space between the source language and target language, as well as the source culture and target culture. This comparison offers insight into the general implications of translation decisions within the context of Arabic theatre.

The guiding research questions informing the current paper are threefold: Firstly, how does Mniai engage with and translate the chosen theatrical concepts throughout his critical and translation work? Second, what strategies and term-forming processes do Mniai and Amine adopt in translating these ideas from English into Arabic, and what terminology is formed from English words and expressions in the target language? Finally, to what extent is it possible to transplant theatrical ideas that are resistant to direct translation into Arabic in a manner that maintains both semantic richness and performative intentionality? These queries are examined using theoretical frameworks that combine both linguistically based and culturally based approaches to translation, enabling holistic reasoning about translation as both a linguistic and a cultural process.

The research is founded on the premise that the translation of theatre theory presents multifaceted difficulties that exceed the reach of linguistic equivalence. This is due to the layered nature of theatre terminology, which is habitually drawn from particular historical, aesthetic, and cultural traditions. In addition, the research assumes that translators will interpret and represent the same concept differently, depending on their level of familiarity with the source culture, their proficiency with the performative meaning of the term, and the translation paradigm they adopt. This is best illustrated in the different renderings of the notion of "suspense," where Mniai renders the word as *al-mumāṭala* المماطلة (procrastination). In contrast, Amine employs *tashwīq* تشويق (anticipation or tension) as an indicator of different interpretive lenses and theoretical orientations.

The goal of this paper is to identify and critically examine the terminological, conceptual, and cultural aspects involved in translating theatrical concepts from English to Arabic. It aims to highlight the importance of adopting a theoretically informed and culturally aware approach to translation. Through its study of translation as a hermeneutic, communicative, and performative action, the study underscores the necessity for translators to serve as both transcultural brokers and not just linguistic technicians. As transcultural brokers, translators must possess a profound understanding of both the theatrical traditions at play and the evolution of terminology, as well as the processes governing conceptual equivalence and cultural transfer.

This paper also aims to highlight the greater importance of the problem within Arabic studies of translation and theatre critique. As the Arab world becomes increasingly involved in international performance practice and theory, the translation of theatre ideas is a crucial prerequisite for creating an indigenous theatre lexicon that is both appropriate and relevant. A strong, standardized glossary not only enhances the study of Arabic theatre but also allows for effective intercultural communication and scholarly exchange. By elucidating the translation strategies of two eminent Moroccan scholars, this research contributes to the formulation of more consistent and thoughtful practices within the profession of translating theatre in Arabic.

By doing so, the research demands greater scholarly focus on theatre translation, specifically the translation of theatre terminology, and calls for the development of cooperative frameworks among Arab language academies, translators, and theatre professionals. It is only through collaborative and context-oriented initiatives like this that we can ensure the faithful transmission of performance ideas and concepts across cultures and languages, safeguarding the integrity of the original work while facilitating the development of Arab theatre discourse.

Review of Literature

The translation of theatre concepts from English to Arabic requires both linguistic and theoretical work on cultural aspects. This research employs influential paradigms from translation studies to examine how various selected theatre terms—namely, tragedy, comedy, performance, and site-specific performance—are translated and interpreted by Hassan Mniai and Khalid Amine. These terms are not merely linguistic entities, nor are they purely culture-free ones. Instead, they are culturally located, historically contingent, and inscribed in performative traditions and disciplinary fields. Therefore, interpreting and conveying them requires something beyond lexical substitution, i.e., conceptual recontextualization across linguistic and discursive boundaries. To study this process, the current work employs both linguistically inclined approaches and culture- and literature-oriented models.

Linguistically oriented translation theories are primarily concerned with the relationship between the source and target languages, with a specific focus on the form, meaning, and equivalence of words. Roman Jakobson is one of the earliest scholars to outline the rudiments of translation theory. In his widely quoted "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Jakobson differentiates among three kinds of translation: intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic (233). This research is primarily concerned with interlingual translation, as characterized by Jakobson as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language" (233). Significantly, Jakobson emphasizes the problem of equivalence, claiming that total equivalence between two linguistic signs is impossible, especially when culture and conceptual meaning are involved. This is especially apt to the translation of theatre terminology, where even ostensibly universal events like tragedy and performance have different theatrical traditions.

J. C. Catford further develops the discipline by positing the existence of translation shifts, where translation diverges from formal correspondence to achieve textual equivalence. In A Linguistic Theory of Translation, he defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language" (Catford 20). Catford makes a distinction between formal correspondence, which is grammatical in focus, and textual equivalence, which is focused on the communicative function of the text. Whereas Catford's emphasis is still primarily structural, his level and category shifts help analyze situations where the Arabic translations of theatrical concepts differ in class or meaning from their English counterparts. Nonetheless, his model is incomplete in explaining culture and aesthetic subtleties, which are unavoidable in the translation of theatre discourse.

Eugene Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence allows for a more functional approach to addressing meaning in translation. In contrast to formal equivalence, which aims to match form and content as closely as possible, dynamic equivalence prioritizes the message's impact on the target culture. According to Nida and Taber, the translation should strive for "the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message, first in meaning and second in style" (12). This is especially helpful in play translation, where the translator must consider the performative effect of an expression. A word-for-word imitation of the original may not elicit the desired emotional

or intellectual impact on an Arab audience. For instance, the translation of performance as ʿ*arḍ* عرض literally might overlook the richer semiotic and experiential sense in which the term functions within Western theatrical language.

Peter Newmark proposes a middle-ground position between formalist and functionalist approaches. He differentiates between semantic translation, which prioritizes adherence to the original text, and communicative translation, which aims to evoke an equal reaction in the target readership (Newmark 39). Newmark's model promotes balancing linguistic accuracy with effective communication—a crucial consideration in translating culturally rich phrases, such as site-specific performance. Newmark's acknowledgment of the expectations of the readership and context enables a richer understanding of the decisions made in translation, where literal translation might obscure the performative nature of the original term.

Where linguistically oriented approaches to translation provide valuable tools for measuring text fidelity and equivalence, they fall short in addressing the broader sociocultural aspects of theatre translation. It is for this reason, then, that this research also engages with culture-and-literature-oriented approaches to translation, which situate translation within ideological, historical, and cultural parameters. Such approaches are particularly relevant to the translation of words like "tragedy" and "comedy," which both have lexical, culturally, and philosophically laden connotations stemming from centuries of dramatic theory and practice.

André Lefevere's idea of translation as rewriting offers a critical tool for discussing how translational decisions reflect broader ideological and cultural frameworks. For him, "all translation is a form of rewriting, and all rewriting is manipulation" (Lefevere vii). Translators are guided by particular ideological, poetic, and cultural principles that influence their decisions, whether consciously or unconsciously. For tragedy, for example, the term is not just a genre of drama but a philosophical term deriving from Western classical culture. Translators writing in Arabic settings might try to refunction or resemantize the term to fit into local frameworks of aesthetics and philosophy. Lefevere's model explains such changes as motivated actions instead of neutral transfers.

Susan Bassnett supplements Lefevere's view with her emphasis on the significance of cultural systems in translation. According to Translation Studies, meaning is not solely contained within linguistic signs but is conditioned by "interlocking systems of language, culture, and literature" (Bassnett 14). This is especially helpful in discussing the translation of site-specific performance, which is linked to Western avant-garde and postmodern performance practices. Inasmuch as Bassnett's method enables us to perceive translation as one of the processes of cultural negotiation through which terms are not merely shifted from one linguistic system to another but recontextualized within different artistic and cultural discourses.

Hatim and Mason add another useful model by merging discourse study and translation study. They define translation as "an act of communication which tries to convey, across language and culture barriers, another act of communication" (Hatim and Mason 1). Their model emphasizes discourse organization, ideological alignment, and readership, all of which are critical factors in theatre translation. Comedy translation, for example, requires far more than simply transferring a genre term; one must also grasp the culture's codes, narratives, and readership expectations that determine what counts as "comic" within a particular culture.

Recent scholarship has expanded and nuanced these foundational theories, particularly within Arabic-language translation and theatre studies. Mohamed Iffat's recent analysis of translating Macbeth into literary Arabic verse highlights the translator's dual responsibility: maintaining the poetic and tragic resonance of the original while reconfiguring its dramaturgical cadence to align with Arabic literary tradition (93). His work exemplifies how classical genre forms, such as tragedy, can be reshaped through translational aesthetics, enabling cross-cultural performance without erasing contextual depth.

Building on the idea of formal and conceptual coherence, Ahmed Nasser et al. advocate for terminological precision through the use of automated translation tools tailored for Arabic (Nasser et al.). While their study is situated in computational linguistics, its implications for theatrical discourse are far-reaching: without a stable glossary, performance translators risk conceptual fragmentation. Standardized terminologies, they argue, not only ensure fidelity across translations but also help unify academic and artistic discourse in Arabic-speaking contexts.

Similarly, Bassem Al-Rashidi's study on the dialectal rendering of Hamlet in Aden sheds light on vernacular translation as an act of cultural localization. He argues that dialectal adaptation not only facilitates audience identification but also injects new political and emotional valences into canonical texts (61). This process mirrors Nida's principle of dynamic equivalence, where the impact of the translation on the audience is prioritized over strict textual correspondence (Nida and Taber 12).

Nour Jaber's work on Ibsen in Arabic theatre further supports this dynamic model. She observes that translators often strategically recalibrate dramaturgical concepts to resonate with Arab narrative structures and ideological contexts (77). This blending of Western theatrical forms with local aesthetic expectations demonstrates the translator's role not just as a linguistic technician but as a dramaturgical architect and cultural interlocutor.

In the context of experimental theatre, El Amrani and Salmi examine the complexities of translating the concept of "site-specific performance" into Arabic. Their findings suggest that without an understanding of Western spatial dramaturgy and performance theory, literal translations of such terms can strip them of their theoretical richness (36). They advocate for translation as a form of cultural negotiation, echoing Bassnett's framework of meaning construction through interlocking systems of language, culture, and literature (Bassnett 14).

Finally, Khalil and Said's research on subtitled comedy reveals the difficulty of translating culturally dependent humor. Though centered on film and television, their emphasis on the translator's strategic negotiation between foreignness and domestic readability is directly applicable to comedic genre terms in theatre. They argue that humor translation hinges on sociocultural cues and narrative conventions that demand more than lexical substitution (44).

Together, these theoretical approaches to translation form a rich overall model for the study of translating theatre concepts. Linguistic theories provide specificity in the evaluation of text and semantic equivalence, while culture theory broadens the spectrum to encompass ideology, audience reception, and context of performance. By applying this integrated model to compare the translation of tragedy, comedy, performance, and site-specific performance, this research aims to demonstrate how both linguistic proficiency and cultural knowledge are essential to effective translation within theatre. It is only with both of these kinds of awareness that the translator can act as an authentic mediator of performative cultures, making the translated words accessible to the target community while maintaining the conceptual coherence of the source.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative comparative approach to examine how theatre concepts are translated from English into Arabic, with a particular focus on the strategies of Hassan Mniai and Khalid Amine. At its core is the investigation of how four culturally and semantically dense concepts—tragedy, comedy, performance, and site-specific performance—are translated into Arabic by two eminent Moroccan scholars. This enables a critical analysis of each figure's

translational decisions, facilitating a broader discussion of the linguistic and cultural aspects of theatre translation.

The reason for choosing these four is rooted in the fact that they are central to dramatic theory, occur with frequency in critical and theoretical writing, and are conceptually rich. Each one represents not merely one genre or performative type but a rich cluster of cultural, historical, and aesthetic connotations. The choice is also reflective of the deliberations within Arabic theatre studies concerning the difficulty of defining and localizing such terminology in language accessible to both source and target cultures.

To conduct this investigation, the study aims to compare specific Arabic translations presented by Mniai and Amine in their respective critical works and scholarly writings. Using the integrated theoretical model sketched above, which draws from linguistic approaches—Jakobson's, Catford's, Nida's, and Newmark's—along with culturally oriented approaches given by Lefevere, Bassnett, Hatim, and Mason, we are in the position to analyze both micro-textual and macro-contextual levels, looking at not just how a word is translated but why it is translated in a particular manner.

The study is keen to examine the processes of term-making and the question of (non)equivalence. It specifically explores how translators bridge lexical and semantic gaps between English and Arabic and negotiate the cultural specificity of performance concepts. Places where translators utilize strategies such as Arabicization, adaptation, or transplantation are identified and evaluated. For instance, in translating performance, the study considers whether the selected term in Arabic captures the term's experiential and semiotic aspects or merely its superficial meaning. In the same vein, the translation of site-specific performance is analyzed in relation to its situatedness within current Western avant-garde practice, which might not have its direct equivalent within Arabic theatrical practice.

The research is also cognizant of the translator as a mediator across cultures. In contrast to viewing translation as essentially technical, it is attentive to the translator's ideological stance, scholarship, and acquaintance with Western and Arabic dramatic traditions. All of these inevitably affect the translator's interpretive choices and his level of fidelity or domestication to the text. This is very much the situation for Hassan Mniai, whose translations tend to have a literal or etymological bent, as opposed to the culturally and semiologically aware renderings of Amine.

Lastly, the methodology is supported by conceptual analysis, close reading, and comparison of the texts. Translations are not merely analyzed in relation to each other but within the context of the theoretical stance of the authors and the texts they have written. Where appropriate, the meanings of the English words are elucidated through reference to standard dictionaries of theatre terminology, and their Arab equivalents are analyzed for semantic accuracy, conceptual coherence, and cultural salience. This methodological approach underpins the following analysis, in which each term is scrutinized in depth, and the implications of its translation on the construction of a unified, culture-based Arabic theatrical terminology are assessed.

Comparative Analysis of Key Theatrical Concepts

This section presents a more nuanced comparative study of four theatrical concepts—tragedy, comedy, performance, and site-specific performance—and their translation into Arabic by Hassan Mniai and Khalid Amine. The examination (based on the theory above) focuses on the cultural, linguistic, and conceptual effects of each translation. The objective is not so much a comparison of lexical choices as an evaluation of the wider hermeneutic and performative strategies employed by the respective translators.

Tragedy

The word tragedy is equivalent to the English word trajections, meaning a form of drama literature that represents human suffering and invokes in the audience an accompanying catharsis. In Western drama, the notion of tragedy is often associated with Aristotelian doctrine, as presented in Poetics, where tragedy is conceived as the mimicry of a serious action that "produces pity and fear" (Aristotle 10). The concept encompasses both structural and affective aspects, therefore.

Hassan Mniai translates tragedy into Arabic as *maʾsāt* مأساة, meaning "any sad or unfortunate event," a term frequently used in Arabic literature. Though مأساة may be an appropriate translation overall, it does not possess the philosophical particularity or dramaturgical specificity of the original word. Mniai's interpretation leans towards literal translation, indicative of an inclination to emphasize the etymological match more than the conceptual match. His translation is more a category for storytelling than the codified dramatic shape that is grounded in a specific aesthetic or historical tradition.

Khalid Amine, however, suggests the translation of tragedy from a hermeneutic standpoint that takes into account not only the performative nature of the term but also its philosophical meaning. Amine not only employs the word *tārājīdiyā* تراجيديا but also provides a gloss in the footnotes, situating it within its context to trace its roots back to the classical and forward to the contemporary. He insists that the tragic is an architected genre with specific historical laws of composition and affective formation. This course of action is in line with Lefevere's claim that translation is a rewriting conditioned by poetics and ideology (Lefevere vii). By situating tragedy within its broader cultural context, Amine enhances the term's more performative accuracy.

The contrast between the two translations demonstrates how a concept that might appear on the surface to form an understood or stable background in the case of tragedy can permit competing views, depending on the translating framework. Mniai's reconstruction expresses a textual or narrative orientation, while Amine's rendition confronts the historical use of the term in dramatic theory. This disparity sheds light on the necessity of more critical and terminologically precise framing for translating between Arabic and theatre.

Comedy

The concept of comedy in Western tradition is equally complex. Originating from the Greek kōmōidia, it historically referred to dramatic works with humorous or satirical elements, typically featuring a happy ending. In literary theory, comedy serves as both a genre and a mechanism for social critique, often using laughter as a tool for exposing hypocrisy, power structures, or absurdities.

Mniai translates comedy as *kūmīdiyā* كوميديا, a transliteration of the English term that reflects an attempt to preserve the foreignness of the word. While this choice signals respect for the term's specificity, it may not resonate fully with Arabic-speaking audiences unfamiliar with the classical roots of the genre. Mniai's translation thus runs the risk of opacity, offering little in terms of explanation or adaptation for the target culture. His reliance on transliteration can be understood as a strategy of transplantation—bringing the term wholesale into Arabic with minimal modification.

Amine, on the other hand, takes the word *al-mulahāt* الملهاة, which is an Arabic word from the literary tradition. However, he does not take that charge uncritically; he situates it in both modernity and the classical alike. Comedy in Amine's work is not just for enjoyment; it is a mode of discourse that moves between laughter and social analysis. His translation follows the

communicative translation model (Newmark 39), which aims to convey both the conceptual and emotional meanings of the word to the Arabic addressee.

كوميديا might be linguistically faithful, but we would argue that الملهاة is richer in meaning. It marks a regional appreciation of comedic forms. It acknowledges the performance and the much older, as well as far more geological, heritage of Arabic and Islamic modes of tale-telling, such as *al maqamat* and *al hakawati*. The contrast once more highlights competing translational ideologies at work: one in the direction of formal equivalence, the other in the direction of cultural accommodation.

Performance

Of the four notions examined in this paper, performance is probably the most semantically plastic and culturally debated. In English, the word has various meanings, ranging from theatrical performance to social behavior and identity formation. Performance theorist Richard Schechner argues that "this category performance must be understood as wide ranging with elements of ritual, play, sports, and theatre" (Schechner 7). The term is, therefore, resistant to specific definitions and needs to be translated with sensitivity to context.

Mniai renders performance as *adāʾ* أداء or occasionally as عرض. While these terms capture aspects of the concept, they fall short of encompassing its broader semiotic and experiential dimensions. أداء tends to emphasize execution or delivery, while عرض is more often associated with display or presentation. Both translations reflect a focus on the external manifestation of an act, but neither fully accounts for the immersive, embodied, and often liminal nature of performance as theorized in Western discourse.

Amine's translation reveals a more sustained attention to the performative complexity of the term. He renders the term "performance" as *furja* فرجة, with a broader and more critical framing linked to performance studies and intercultural theatre. His translation follows dynamic equivalence (Nida and Taber 12), aiming to re-strengthen the conceptual and emotional weight of the word in the new culture. Instead of confining performance to the stage, Amine examines the politics surrounding performance more broadly, within the context of identity politics, ritual, and embodiment.

Unlike الأداء, which denotes a unilateral action on the part of the performer, Amine's rendering of the term as الفرجة implies the participation of both parties: the performer and the observer/audience. By coining the term فرجة, Amine appears to combine two approaches in his translation: Newmark's communicative approach and Bassnett's cultural approach. Indeed, he succeeded in producing an effect on the Arab audience that is close to that obtained on the original concept's audience, to use Newmark's terms. More importantly, he considers translation as a 'crosscultural event' and a 'zone of contact/friction,' as Venuti put it once, between the foreign and translating cultures, where he successfully liberates the concept from the threat of literal translation and ensures the survival of the concept across time, space, and culture, to use Bassnett's words. When compared to Mniai's literal translation, we can say that Amine's translation is more accurate and appropriate, as it adequately conveys the meaning of the concept to the target language (TL) receivers, who are native speakers of Arabic.

This contrast demonstrates the translator as a mediator between cultures. If, in Mniai's translation, the tendency was to detach the term from the theoretical apparatus, here Amine reinserts it to give us a better understanding of its various and multifaceted significations. The translation of performance, therefore, becomes a space of exchange between linguistic exactness and cultural effectiveness.

Site-Specific Performance

The term "site-specific performance" refers to a genre of performance that is conceived in relation to the specific characteristics of a particular location. It emerged in the late twentieth century as a reaction against conventional theatre spaces, emphasizing the interplay between the performer, the audience, and the site. The term is deeply embedded in Western avant-garde and postmodern performance practices, making its translation particularly challenging.

Mniai directly translates site-based performance as *al-ʿarḍ al-murtabiṭ bi-l-makān* العرض المرتبط بالمكان. This translation is a word-for-word interpretative rendering that barely conveys the surface meaning of the word without the enriching depth of the concept. Furthermore, however technically correct that definition may be, it seems to provide no explicit nod to the broader theoretical discussions of spatial dramaturgy, audience interaction, and the phenomenology of place. That represents a literal translation ploy, one that is effective for clarity but not for critical depth.

Amine, however, translated 'site-specific performance' as *al-furja al-khāṣṣa bi-l-mawqiʿ* الفرجة الخاصة بالموقع. He provides critical commentary that situates the term in its intercultural and post-dramatic contexts. His framing acknowledges that theatre has undergone a theoretical shift from fixed spatial staging to an engagement with the site. Amine's standpoint is similar to Hatim and Mason's (1) in that translation is viewed as a communicative act within a specific context. He knows that site-specific performance is not only a matter of site but also of the performative reconfiguration of space and sense.

The difference in translations indicates a difference in orientation toward cultural specificity and theoretical engagement. Mniai's translation situates the term within a digital geospatial frame, whereas Amine's translation is dynamic and makes the site an actant in discourse and drama. This differentiation is essential to the study of Arabic theatre, which is still struggling to assimilate spatial theory and experimental performance practices into its language.

Discussion

The comparative analysis of the four theatrical concepts—tragedy, comedy, performance, and site-specific performance—highlights a complex web of challenges facing translators working between English and Arabic in the theatre domain. These challenges are not merely lexical or structural but conceptual, cultural, and ideological. They reveal how translation choices can either preserve or distort the philosophical and performative essence of theatrical terms, depending on the translator's theoretical orientation, linguistic strategy, and cultural literacy.

One of the most striking findings across all four concepts is the difference in translational approach between Hassan Mniai and Khalid Amine. Mniai's translations often lean toward literalism and surface-level semantic fidelity. His work demonstrates a commitment to lexical precision and etymological consistency but sometimes falls short of conveying the deeper, conceptual, and performative layers of meaning. This is particularly evident in his renderings of performance and site-specific performance, where his choices reflect a focus on physical enactment and spatial location but fail to capture the immersive, discursive, and semiotic aspects inherent in the original terms. Mniai's methodology appears to align more closely with Catford's theory of formal correspondence, where structural alignment is privileged over interpretive flexibility (Catford 20).

In contrast, Amine's translations are consistently more context-aware and conceptually expansive. He demonstrates a keen awareness of the cultural and theoretical underpinnings of each term and often supplements his translations with commentary that bridges Western and Arabic theatrical paradigms. His use of dynamic equivalents, discursive reframing, and context-sensitive annotations reflects a commitment to communicative and cultural equivalence, as

articulated by Nida and Newmark (Nida and Taber 12; Newmark 39). Amine's translations function not only as lexical substitutes but as vehicles for theoretical transposition—translating not just the term but the discourse in which the term operates.

These differences underscore the translator's central role as a transcultural mediator. In translating theatrical concepts, the translator must move beyond a binary view of source and target languages and engage with the conceptual architecture of each term. This involves not only understanding the historical and cultural baggage of terms like tragedy and comedy but also the performative logic and theoretical constructs that shape terms like performance and site-specific performance. The translator must ask: What does this term do in its original context? How is it used in academic discourse, performance practice, and critical theory? Moreover, how can its function be preserved—or reimagined—within the framework of Arabic theatre?

The notion of (non)equivalence emerges as a recurring theme in this discussion. As Jakobson, and Hatim and Mason, have argued, equivalence is rarely absolute and often needs to be constructed within a functional or pragmatic framework (Jakobson 233; Hatim and Mason 1). In the case of theatrical translation, equivalence is further complicated by the fact that many concepts are rooted in Western philosophical and dramaturgical traditions that have no direct counterpart in Arabic performance history. This is particularly true for site-specific performance, a genre largely absent from traditional Arab theatre and therefore requiring not just translation but cultural and aesthetic transplantation.

Another significant insight concerns the process of terminology formation in Arabic. The lack of a standardized lexicon for theatre and performance studies contributes to the inconsistency and variability in translation practices. As this study demonstrates, the same concept can be expressed in multiple ways, depending on the translator's training, institutional context, and theoretical inclinations. This variability hampers the development of a cohesive academic discourse in Arabic theatre studies and limits the accessibility of global performance theory to Arabic-speaking scholars and practitioners.

To address this issue, the role of the translator-scholar becomes crucial. Translators like Amine, who are also embedded in academic and performance networks, are better positioned to introduce, explain, and contextualize new concepts. Their work extends beyond translation into the realm of knowledge mediation, where they actively shape the reception of foreign theories and practices in the Arabic-speaking world. This mediating role is not without its challenges, especially in contexts where ideological, linguistic, and institutional constraints may inhibit translational freedom.

The discussion also points to broader epistemological questions about the translatability of performance theory itself. Can a concept like performance, which in Western theory encompasses identity, ritual, embodiment, and representation, be fully translated into Arabic without significant semantic loss or cultural distortion? The answer, suggested by this study, lies not in direct equivalence but in strategic recontextualization. Translators must be equipped not only with linguistic tools but also with theoretical frameworks that allow them to reconstruct meaning in culturally intelligible ways.

Lastly, the comparison reveals that translation in the theatrical domain is not simply a matter of transferring terms but of participating in an ongoing dialogue between traditions. This dialogue requires mutual intelligibility, theoretical openness, and institutional support. The inconsistency in translations, the lack of shared terminological standards, and the absence of coordinated efforts among Arab cultural institutions highlight the need for a more unified approach to theatre translation. Without such efforts, the risk remains that translated concepts will circulate in fragmented and misunderstood forms, hindering rather than advancing intercultural exchange.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the need for culturally grounded, theoretically informed translation practices in Arabic theatre studies. Translators must be trained not only in language but also in the history, aesthetics, and critical discourses of theatre. Only then can they perform the complex task of rendering performative concepts in ways that are both accurate and resonant within the target culture. The work of figures like Mniai and Amine illustrates the stakes of this task and the different pathways available to meet its demands.

Conclusion

This study has examined the interplay of linguistic and cultural factors in translating four foundational theatrical concepts—tragedy, comedy, performance, and site-specific performance—from English into Arabic. By comparing the translational strategies of Hassan Mniai and Khalid Amine, the analysis has revealed significant differences in how these concepts are interpreted, contextualized, and linguistically rendered. These differences highlight broader issues in theatre translation, including the problem of (non)equivalence, the absence of standardized terminology, and the translator's dual role as both a linguistic technician and a cultural mediator.

The analysis demonstrates that theatrical translation cannot be reduced to a purely lexical operation. Instead, it is a hermeneutic and performative act that involves a deep understanding of the cultural and theoretical frameworks underlying each concept. While Mniai's translations tend to prioritize surface-level semantic equivalence, Amine's renderings reveal a more dynamic and contextualized engagement with the terms. These contrasting approaches highlight the need to move beyond literal translation models and adopt strategies that account for the discursive, historical, and performative dimensions of theatrical vocabulary.

The findings also underscore the need to develop a coherent and standardized lexicon for Arabic theatre studies. The current lack of consistency in translating key concepts not only creates confusion in academic discourse but also limits access to global theoretical developments in performance studies. A unified terminological framework would enhance communication among scholars, facilitate curriculum development, and promote cross-cultural understanding in theatre education and practice.

In light of these findings, several practical implications emerge. First, there is a pressing need for interdisciplinary collaboration between translators, theatre practitioners, and academic institutions to develop consensus-based glossaries and lexicons. These efforts should be informed by both linguistic rigor and cultural sensitivity, ensuring that translated terms are conceptually faithful and performatively functional. Second, translator training programs should incorporate modules on theatre and performance theory, allowing future translators to engage more critically with the terms they render. Such training would equip translators with the analytical tools necessary to navigate the complexities of theatrical discourse.

Ultimately, this study paves the way for further research into underexplored areas of Arabic theatre translation. Future studies might examine the reception of translated theatrical texts by Arabic-speaking audiences, the impact of translation on dramaturgical practices, or the role of digital media in disseminating translated theatre theory. These inquiries would build on the present work and contribute to the evolving field of translation studies in the Arab world. By treating translation as both a linguistic and cultural act, this paper affirms the importance of informed, reflective, and critically grounded practices in translating theatrical concepts. Only through such practices can the Arabic theatre lexicon grow in depth, precision, and international relevance.

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