On Translating English Sports Nicknames into Arabic

By

The assistant lecturer Najla' Abdul-Hussain Badr

Al-Mustansiriyah University
College of Arts
Translation Department

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Abstract

Nowadays, the transfer of English sports nicknames invades the Arabic sports reporting which tends to make much use of them. These nicknames are frequently used to dub players, clubs, stadiums, coaches, etc. that sometimes their original names are no longer used by journalists, commentators or fans. Thus, it seems very interesting to deal with such brand- new field full of twists and turns, oddities and quiddities. The transfer of nicknames may seem easy which is not true for it poses crucial problems for translators owing to the fact that they reflect not only the English culture and language but also even other ones like Italian, Spanish, etc. That is also due to the phenomenon of globalization of such sports as soccer, tennis, baseball and so on. This requires the translator to gauge the target language (TL) familiarity before adopting any translation strategy.

At the outset and before embarking upon discussing the translation strategies proposed for sports nicknames, the present researcher finds it worth while to put these nicknames under the microscope, giving her classifications of them. Moreover the paper examines relevant issues: language of sports (LS) and translator versus (vs.) knowledge.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the study is limited to investigate nicknames in two sports, viz. football and tennis.

1. Nickname:
1.1. What is nickname?

Nickname "was originally 'ekname' in the Middle English" (Nickname, 2006). It consists of two syllables: 'eke' meaning 'also' or 'added' and 'name'. Both, therefore, mean as a whole " also name" (Kendall, 2004). It has almost disappeared from the English language because it has developed into nickname. On the other hand, Burridge (cited in Pedler, 2003) claims that 'n' of 'nickname' came from the word beforehand, which was 'an'. So it was originally 'an ekename' which became 'a nickname'.

Nicknames have been friendly used as terms of affection in Greece and Rome and as a substitute of family names in Viking societies (Nickname, 2006). They are short, clever, cute, derogatory, or otherwise substitute names for a person's or thing's real name, e.g., Tom is short for Thomas (ibid.) Sometimes they are called by nametags; a nametag is a label attached to a name (Beard, 1998: 112). In other times they are misthought as pseudonyms. In fact a pseudonym is a name adopted by many people instead of their original names for a particular purpose- perhaps to convey an image of some kind, to avoid an unpleasant association, to make their identities more memorable, to hide their identities, or simply to make their names more pronounceable or easier to spell (Crystal, 2003:152). Certain professions attract the use of pseudonym-notably authors, actors and media personalities (ibid.). Nickname can be also distinguished from alias; a name by which a person is called (e.g. criminal) on other occasions (Hornby, 1974: 21). However, it sounds common that a nickname is called 'screen name' as regards artists, actors and so on (Nickname, 2006). A person's online nickname may also be known as his " handle ", especially within hacker culture (ibid.)

1.2. Classification of Nicknames:
No last name is necessary any more in sports reporting as long as nicknames have flourished therein. To show how they are formed and invested with linguistic and cultural values of their societies, sports nicknames are classified in terms of the following criteria:

A-Nicknames Relating to Linguistic Form:
Diminutive is the most common type of nicknames, usually shortened or otherwise altered version of true name, such as Jim for James, Jack for John,

Ted for Theodore or Betty for Elizabeth (A Brief Discussion of Nicknames and Diminutives, 2004). Diminutives are, in other words, formed by corrupting, shortening, or otherwise changing a person's given name into some different forms (ibid.). This happens in a variety of ways:

One of the most common forms of the nickname is the "short "form. These nicknames are formed when part of the regular name is cut off to stand as a diminutive. For instance:

From the back
1- Luca from Gianluca Viali(Soccer Nicknames,n.d.)

From the front
2-Man.United *for* Manchester United
3- Juve from Juventus (ibid.)

In modern-day English, the most common type of diminutive is formed by using ubiquitous Scottish "y"or "i"(ibid.) or "s". For example:

4- Giggsy *for* Giggs, Ryan
5- Ruddi *for* Rudd Gulit(ibid.)
6- Becks *for* Beckham, David

Many other languages utilize the diminutive ending as well. In Italian language, for example,"o" tacked onto the end makes a name a diminutive as it does for:

7- Spenno *for* Spencer, John (ibid.)
8- Phelo *for* Phelan, Terry (ibid.)
9- Mancio *for* Mancini, Roberto (Podnar, 2000)
Sometimes this diminutive ending gives a certain connotation, as is the case with the following nickname:

10- Moro (Black one) *for* Morientes, Fernando (ibid.)
The first and second names are contracted, ending by a diminutive syllable as:
11- Zizou *for* Zinedine Zidane (Soccer Nicknames, n.d.)
Finally the initials of the first and second names are only left:
12- DJ *for* David James

B- Nicknames Relating to Performance on the Field:

1- Bati-goal *for* Batistuta   (a terrific scorer of goals) (ibid.)

2- A-Trainer *for* Andre Agassi   (From training his opponents)

3- Boom Boom *for* Boris Becker
(He has, as a tennis player, a service as strong as artillery)

4- Mosquito *for* Juan Carols Ferrero
(He has very fast reactions and hi-speed strokes)

5- E.T. *for* Ronaldo(ibid.)
(He has superskills in football no one on earth can ever have.)

6- The Rocket *for* Roy Lassiter
(His powerful goal-scoring abilities are just like a rocket) (ibid.)

7-Mr. Loser *for* Hector Cuper (Because he has lost all the finals of the championships he has reached with the teams he coached.)

8- Pinturricchio *for* Alessandro Del Piero. (ibid.)
(Named after the famous Italian painter "Pinturricchio" because his shots are like a painting.)

C- Nicknames Relating to Teams'Colors:

1- The Whites *for* Real Madrid (Nickname, 2006)

2- Red Devils *for* Manchester United (ibid.)

3- Orange *for* Netherlands national team (ibid.)

4- Gli Azzuri (Blues) *for* Italy national team (ibid.)

D- Nicknames Relating to Slogans of Clubs:

1- The Gunners *for* Arsenal (ibid.)

2- Wolves *for* Wolverhampton Wanderers (ibid.)

3-The Saints *for* Southampton

E- Nicknames Relating to Character:

1-Matador (A man whose task is to kill the bull in the sport of bull-killing.) *for* Marcelo Salas (Soccer Nicknames, n.d.)

2- The Cathedral *for* the stadium of Athletic Bilbao (This is supposedly due to its physical proximity to church (Schulman, 2004). However, this nickname for this "four-sided enclosure of every thing that lies outside" was not arbitrarily chosen, for it has an alternative shrine, almost a holy place. (ibid.)

3- The Lions *for* Athletic Bilbao team (The team's nickname, Los Leones, the lions, suggests an undefeatable, strong stand, in accordance with the Euskadi

(the local name for Basque) belief that San-Mame′s was fed by lions as a child– a sign of his courage and invincibility (ibid.)

4- Kaiser *for* Frans Becknbauer(Podnar,2000)

(He has a very strong character inside and outside the fever pitch)

5-The Tank *for* Eduardo Hurtado

(He goes through people like a tank)(Soccer Nicknames, n.d.)

6- Little Soldier *for* Di Livio

(When he runs he is just like a toy soldier) (ibid.)

7- The Red Bull *for* Alexi Lalas

(Strong and powerful, and fierce as a bull) (ibid.)

8- The Beautiful Game *for* Soccer (Nicknames for the Sport itself, 2004)

9- Super Mario *for* Mario Basler (Should be obvious why!) (Podnar, 2000)

10- Speedy Gonzalez *for* Gonza′lez, Christian (ibid.)

(He is an Argentinean left-wing footballer who is very fast just like the famous Mexican cartoon character "Speedy Gonzale′z".)

11- Animal *for* Edmondo   (He crashed a car, killing a girl and is constantly getting red carded) (ibid.)

F-Miscellaneous Nicknames:

The following nicknames are drawn upon conventions of sports media, family life, nationality or place of origin, or appearance:

1- Pistol Pete *for* Pete Sampras

[Originally tennis media people used it in reference to Pete Maravich. (Wertheim, 2001: 4)]

2- A- Rod *for* Andy Roddick

[Alex Rodriguez was the first to be nicknamed as A-Rod. (ibid)]

3- Goose *for* Jeff Aoose

(Announcers kept screwing up his name.)(Soccer Nicknames, n.d.)

4-Spice Boy *for* David Beckham (Podnar, 2000) (it is related to his wife who was a member in a singing band called "Spice Girls")

5- The Kid *for* Valderrama,Carlos

[A family tradition .His father who was also a great soccer player was called "The kid". When Carlos began to play, his father passed on the nickname. (Soccer Nicknames, n.d.)]

6- The Aussie (The Australian) *for* Patrick Rafter.

7-The Eastern Wind *for* Andriy Shevchenko. (Podnar, 2000)

8-The White Knight *for* Andre Agassi (He agreed to change his colored clothes for all-white kit at the 1995 Wimbledon tennis tournament (Beard,

1998:21)
9- The Bat *for* Cle Kooiman (He broke his cheekbone and had to wear a face mask that made him look like a bat) (Soccer Nicknames, n.d.)

2. Language of Sports (LS):

History of sports is "probably as old as the existence of people as purposive beings. Sports has been a useful way for people to increase their mastery of nature and the environment" (History of Sport, 2006) .The industrial revolution and mass production brought increased leisure when opened the wide door for increases in spectator sports, less elitism in sports and greater accessibility.
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A sport is very important to society as a whole as it is "a very important social institution, providing employment and entertainment value systems, and contributing enormously to the economy" (Newspapers and Sport, n.d.). All different forms of the media recognize this. Newspapers, for instance, have a long and very close association with sports and this seems set to continue into the 21st century with newspaper owners buying up sporting teams as they see great potential for cross promotion (ibid.).

All the rules of newspaper language apply to newspaper reporting of sport (ibid.). LS has its own linguistic expressions and many of these expressions are familiar to sports fans through the medium of newspaper reporting (The Language of Sport, 2003). It is usually informal incorporating slang and nicknames and a lot of special terminology. Some of these nicknames can be excluded from the previous familiar linguistic expressions, as is the case with the nickname *Speedy Gonzalez*. It is given to the footballer Christian Gonzaʹlez and inspired from the cartoon "Speedy Gonzalez", but not all soccer fans, of course, have watched that cartoon to grasp that link. According to the above, LS is a register. Register is " the set of features which distinguish one stretch of language from another in terms of variation in context to do with the language user (geographical dialect, idiolect, etc) and / or language use (field or subject matter, tenor or level of formality and mode or speaking vs. writing)" (1997: 222 – 23). Seen this way, it is concerned with these variables (i.e., field, tenor and mode) while genre is defined as "the overall purpose or function of interaction"(Trosborg, 2000), as in sports writing genres: memoirs, biographies, collected journalism (Beard, 1998: 85). These variables can be

clearly realized in terms of nicknames, for instance *Spice Boy*, where it is analyzed as a message in itself as follows:

SL Nickname (Spice Boy) profile
Field: The main field is sport.
Subject matter: Football writing about the English footballer David Beckham whose wife was a member in a famous singing band called "Spice Girls".

Tenor:
Sender: Journalists.
Receiver: People who are well-informed and interested in soccer and the personal life of the footballer in question.
Sender- Receiver Relationship: The social role is symmetrical, as there is an assumed shared knowledge between the sender and the receiver.

Mode: Written.
Purpose: Primarily to entertain soccer fans and secondarily to inform them.
Making the same analysis for the TL version of the previous nickname, only readership and purpose are expected to change .TL readers cannot be assumed to possess the relevant background knowledge on the cultural aspect of that source language (SL) nickname and the translator must provide explanation and information. Therefore the social role is now asymmetrical. With regard to purpose, the TL version is to inform the TL reader of that cultural aspect in the form of entertainment. However, one can see sub-registers in different sports like tennis, baseball, soccer, etc.

Furthermore, many popular sports like soccer, tennis, baseball, etc. have been fashionable in the past ten years. This is related to what we can call the globalization of sports. Thus, although the main purpose of much newspaper sports coverage is, as Beard (ibid.) states, to inform the reader, it is not really so straightforward .He (ibid.) adds that increasingly sports coverage in newspapers involves gossip, intrigue, the personal life of the stars .In other words a good deal of sports coverage is more concerned with entertainment than information. Other two purposes which may lie behind written sports texts can also be highlighted: instructive (e.g. instructional publications and manuals about sports) and persuasive (e.g. fanzines often have articles as well as advertisements which are persuasive.). However, those multipurpose and globalization can be easily proved by the enormous successes achieved by

international competitions like the World Cup, but that doesn't mean that nationalism is dying, certainly not in sports. In sports where the contest is between individuals, the performance of the individual is often represented in terms of a national personality stereotype (ibid. 33) .An example of that is the soccer-caused war that happened between Honduras and El-Salvador in 1969 [after the latter managed to qualify for the World Cup at the expense of the former] (Schulman, 2004).

For politics, the suggestion that sport lies outside the world of politics, that it speaks language of its own is in fact a very political statement (Beard, 1998: 39). LS plays a key role in this field. To support that view, feelings run so high in Germany following a soccer match that no incumbent German chancellor has ever lost an election in the wake of a major German victory (Applebaum, 2002). The re-election of Helmut Kohl in 1990 was widely attributed to German victory in that year's world cup .To conclude, LS is not different from any other language; it is a part of that social and political fabric of nations. It expresses some of these emotions, just like drama– pleasure, pain, irony, tragedy, and comedy.

3. Translator VS. Knowledge:

Beginning with the famous saying that, in sport, "you either know the language or you don't–you're either an insider or an outsider" (The Language of Sport, 2003), one can note outstanding issues relevant to this paper; the factors that may have bearings on the translator in translating sports texts.

Translation is primarily functioned "to bridge the cultural gap between two worlds and make communication possible between different linguistic communities"(Wong & Shen, 1999: 6). Translators are communicators involved in written communication. Typically Hatim & Mason (1997: 141) state that one may say of translators that they are constantly exchanging some thing not only by engaging in a dialogue with a source text producer and a likely text receiver but also by brokering a deal between the two parties to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Such exchange needs a personal knowledge on the part of the translator in the field concerned, otherwise any lack of these factors would hamper the process of exchanging. (ibid.). This knowledge is dissected by Bell (1991: 36 – 7): TL knowledge; text-type knowledge; SL knowledge; subject area (real-world) knowledge; and

contrastive knowledge. Actually, Baker (1992:128) combines TL knowledge, text-type knowledge, SL and contrastive knowledge under the term 'textual competence' and refers to real- world knowledge by the term 'co-reference'. She (ibid.) cites Hoey who points out that co-reference is not strictly a linguistic feature at all but a matter of real-world knowledge. Indeed, it is so obvious that the link between, for instance, *Roberto Baggio* and *The Divine Ponytail* is a matter of a real-world knowledge (i.e. his magical skill and lovely head-do) rather than a textual competence.

TL readers often interpret the message in terms of their own culture. This is related to the fact that "they cannot draw on the experience of the source text author but only on their own " (Larson, 1984: 441). Thus, it is a hard rather than impossible mission for the translator to find a compromise to make it possible for the reader to understand the message in the light of the SL background. This, in result, recalls a third type of knowledge- pragmatic knowledge .The latter refers to the knowledge of "the intentionality or the purposes for which utterances are used in real contexts" (Hatim & Mason, 1997: 222). Similarly, as Gutt (1991: 185) states, the translator has, for communicative success, to ensure that his intentions and the expectations of the audience will be in line; so he chooses a suitable approach and makes sure that the audience is aware of and in agreement with his choice.

Finally it is worth mentioning that too much knowledge may have sometimes negative bearings on the translation. Nida and Taber (1974: 99) point out that too much knowledge can be a deterrent to effective translation. They (ibid.) add that translators know so much about the subject that unconsciously assume the readers will also know what they do, with the result that they frequently translate over the heads of their readers. However, experience plays a key role in translating that only experienced translators can skillfully and organically bring their competence and knowledge into play in SL interpretation and reproduction.

4. Strategies for Translating Sports Nicknames:

Names in general and nicknames in particular are highly significant in the SL social interaction. Newmark (1981: 70) believes that there are two types of names. First, in theory, names of single persons or objects are 'outside' languages, belong, if at all, to the encyclopedia not to the dictionary

and have… no meaning or connotations (ibid.). Both are, therefore, untranslatable and not to be translated (ibid.) Second, names that are used as metaphor or are linked to connotations, both of word images and general sound-echoes. (ibid.:70-1).In this type he(ibid.) insists that if the name is used as a metaphor, it should be translated and that the names should be appropriately changed in languages which have different sound connotations.The second type is also referred to by Beard (1998 : 20-1) as he thinks that there is "an intricate pattern of naming used by journalists and commentators in the field of sport…". He (ibid.) says that newspapers include nametags and exemplifies the converge of 1995 Wimbledon where Pete Sampras became "Pistol Pete" while Andre Agassi was known as "the Pirate of the SW19". These nametags contain a good deal of assumed shared knowledge; Bell (1991:112) uses "shared knowledge" with two aspects: linguistic knowledge and social knowledge. Linguistic knowledge is defined as the knowledge of rule systems governing the code while the social knowledge as the that of conventions which constrain and regulate the application of the shared 'ground-rules' for communication in operation in a speech community (ibid.:113).Thus, Pistol Pets refers presumably to the speed and accuracy of Sampras's play ,his first name helping to make an alliterative effect (Beard,1998:21).Agassi's nametag refers in some way to his clothing for which he was heavily sponsored(ibid.) . He is a Pirate because of his headband (Wimbledon's address is London SW19). In line with Newmark, Gutt (1991: 144) suggests that proper names are not transcribed but translated on the basis of such semantic meaning as they might have. This is to be expected where the meaning may be felt more relevant than the phonological form–as is the case, e.g., with names intended to give evidence of the person's character: Blues (Chelsea)الـــزرق. However, this is not always the case since some transcriptions are more relevant to the reader than their translations Gli Azzuri (Blues) الاد زوري for Italy national team.

It is worth mentioning that, in this section, the translator in some cases suggests two strategies and this is conditional to their TL currency. In one sense the SL author has in mind a typical reader whom he assumes to understand all special references but the translator is not translating for that assumed typical reader because it may be that some casual readers cannot understand these references. Hence, the translator is supposed to choose any of the following strategies that guarantee for all levels of readers an understanding of the SL meanings and associations. Accordingly the

following strategies are proposed:

A- Transference: is still a controversial topic; whether it is a translation procedure. However, it is defined by Newmark (1988:81) as "a process of transferring an SL word to a TL text", considering it as a translation procedure. It is the same as Catford's transference, including transliteration, which relates to the conversion of different alphabets e.g. Russian (Cyrillic), Greek, Arabic, Chinese, etc. into English (ibid.). The translator has to use this strategy if the transference of the SL nickname has a TL currency and there is a reference helps in identifying the nickname within the TL text .For example:

1- Zizou زيزو *for* Zinedine Zidane زيـن الـديـن زيـد ان

2- Bati-goal بـا تيـجول *for* Batistuta بـا تيستوتـا

B- Translation: This strategy is often applied to those nicknames whose translations are common in the TL and which are culture-specific or metaphorical, or which have connotative associations. The translations may be applied only when there are references that define the TL versions within the TL text. For example:

1- Red Devils الـشـيا طين الـحمـر *for* Manchester United نــادي مـا نتشستر يـونـايتد

2- The Tank الـدبـابـة *for* Eduardo Hurtado ادو اردو هيـرتـادو

3- Matador (أو الـمـاتـدور) *for* Marcelo Salas مصـارع الـثيـران مـارتشيلـو سا لاس

C- Functional Equivalent: This common strategy, applied to cultural words, requires the use of a culture-free word, sometimes with a new specific term… (ibid. : 83) . For example.

1- Pinturicchio الـرسام (functional equivalent) *for* Del Piero ديـلـبـيـرو

    "Pinturicchio" is referred to a famous Italian painter called Bernardino Di Betto surnamed by his fellow students as "Pinturicchio" (the dauber) because, perhaps, of his great facility (K., 2000). The link between the Italian footballer "Del Piero" and that painter is, therefore, that great facility and the artistic style with which Del Piero plays football. These associations may be lost if the SL nickname is transcribed to the TL reader as (بـنـتوريـكيـو). Phonologically speaking, the nickname is too lengthy to be pronounced by the TL readers. On the cultural ground, the nickname is also non-current in the TL

culture. Besides the functional equivalent (الــرســـام) is so familiar to Arabic football- interested readers . Thereupon, transcription is ruled out here.

2- Boom Boom   الـمـدفـع *for* Boris Becker بـورس بيـكر

This example involves two main problems. First, the effect of the alliteration represented by the SL nickname and originally derived from the initials of the original name of the tennis player Boris Becker. Actually the transcription (بـوم بـــوم) may not render that effect because the reader would misread it as a repetition of the word " owl" and result in confusion. Second, the SL nickname has no accepted one-to-one equivalent in the TL, so the translator resorts to the functional equivalent sacrificing the aesthetic effect of the SL alliteration reluctantly.

D- Translation Plus Compensation:

To avoid the loss of meaning that may arise due to the ambiguity of some cultural-specific nicknames, translation plus compensation can be adopted. Compensation often includes a definition, paraphrase or footnote with regard to the nickname within the TL text. For example:

1- Blues (أو الـبلـوز) نـادي الـزرق *for* Chelsea نـادي تشيـلـسي

2- The Cathedral ملـعب الـكاتدرائيـة *for* the stadium of Athletic Bilbao ملـعب اتلـيـتك بيـلبـاو

E-Transference and Compensation:

It is used when the translation is unable to render the SL culture-specific aspect of the nickname. For example:

1-Spice Boy سبايـز بـوي *for* David Beckham
(علـــى غـرار فرقـة سـبـايـز جيـرلـــز الـتـــي زوجتـــه هـــي إحدـعضواتـها .)

F- Omissions: Sometimes the translator may have to omit a part of the SL nickname if that part represents a linguistic specificity and a TL ambiguity in the case of SL transference to the TL. However, this strategy can be used provided that the omission would not result in a meaning distortion or confuse the TL readers. For example:

1- A- Rod رودر *for* Andy Roddick انـدي رودك
2- A- Trainer الـمروض *for* Andre Agassi انـدري اجاسي
.

5. **Conclusions:**

The exploration and translation of sports nicknames, within a sporting context, result in the following main conclusions:

1- the snowballing mode of LS requires the translator to be in constant acquaintance with nuances of its terminology, nicknames etc,

2- LS has its own colloquialism represented by nicknames,

3-in some cases, the translator may not be as a knowledgeable as the writer but rather as ignorant as the average reader, so that the translator's judgments are hampered by his own lack of background material. The translator should, in abstract, do such available research as Internet exploring to assess the relevant material but this is not always possible, so he can consult subject experts, professionals and researchers in the field of sport,

4- the best translator of sports writing is the best sports fan,

5- the translator should make assumptions about the level of readers of these texts and their responses, i.e., he has to establish social interaction with his readers bearing in mind that the readers he is translating for do not have his information. But this does not mean adopting the opposite extreme and trying to oversimplify assuming that the reader has no imagination whatsoever, and

6-in choosing a certain translation strategy, the main priority of any sports translator is deemed to be TL currency that sometimes he can have two acceptable strategies for, e.g., the same nickname.

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