

Sufi Terms and Their Translation from Arabic to English. *Diwân al-Ḥallâż* as a Case Study

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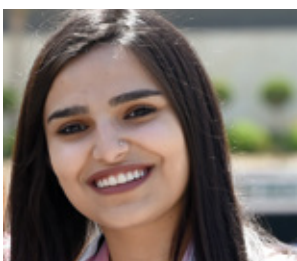
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adjunta de traducció a la Universitat Americana del Líban (Beirut). És doctorada en Lexicologia i Terminologia Multilingües, Traductologia per la Universitat de Lió II (França). Va obtenir una beca del programa Fulbright per estudiar a la Universitat Estatal de Carolina del Nord (EUA) i ha presentat diversos treballs en congressos al Líban i altres països àrabs, així com a Europa i als Estats Units. D'altra banda, és autora de llibres, ressenyes de llibres i articles sobre traducció i terminologia publicats en revistes que preveuen l'avaluació d'experts.



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Traducció i té estudis de Llengua i Literatura Àrabs per la Universitat Americana del Líban. Treballa com a traductora autònoma i com a intèrpret per a programes relacionats amb el benestar i per a missions humanitàries. Els seus interessos sempre han girat entorn de l'espiritualitat i el sufisme, amb l'objectiu de desxifrar significats i descodificar determinats missatges. Té el ferm convenciment que involucrar-se plenament en tot allò que fa és la clau fonamental de la vida.



Abstract

The translation of Sufi poetry is a relatively unexplored topic. This paper examines the challenges a translator may encounter when translating Sufi terminology into English, covering the formation of Sufi terms, their nature, and how they function in context. A textual approach to terminology is envisaged, where Sufi concepts are analyzed along with their translation.

We analyze terms extracted from the collection of poems by the Sufi mystic al-Ḥallâż (*Diwân al-Ḥallâż*) and consider their translations by the British scholar Martin Lings in his book *Sufi Poems: A Medieval Anthology* (Arabic and English ed.).

KEYWORDS: Sufism, terminology, translation, poetry

Resum

Termes sufí i la seva traducció de l'àrab a l'anglès. *Diwân al-Ḥallâż* un cas pràctic

La traducció de la poesia sufí és un tema relativament inexplorat. Aquest article examina els reptes amb què es pot trobar un traductor quan tradueix la terminologia sufí a l'anglès, i inclou qüestions com ara la formació de termes sufís, la seva naturalesa i la seva funció en el context. El treball aborda un enfocament textual de la terminologia, en què els conceptes sufís s'analitzen juntament amb la seva traducció.

En l'article analitzem termes extrets de la col·lecció de poemes del místic sufí al-Ḥallâż (*Diwân al-Ḥallâż*), així com les traduccions que en va fer l'erudit britànic Martin Lings al seu llibre *Sufi Poems: A Medieval Anthology* (edició en àrab i en anglès).

PARAULES CLAU: sufisme, terminologia, traducció, poesia

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1. Introduction to Sufism and Sufi Poetry

The term Sufism or /*taṣawwuf*/ in Arabic is derived from the Arabic word /*ṣūf*/, which means “wool”. According to Tavakoli (2014, p. 11), “As a sign of religious mendicancy, Sufis used to wear coarse woolen garments, expressing thus their strict rejection of any kind of worldly pleasures”. Other definitions of Sufism might be also considered like that of Vaswani (2002, p. 8), who states that “There are some who associate the word Sufi with the Greek word *sophía* which means ‘wisdom’ and others who associate it with the word *safa* which means ‘pure’”. Accordingly, we could affirm that the term Sufism itself is polysemous, referring to different concepts.

However, it is very important to know that Sufism is a spiritual experience that cannot be explained by the mind nor put into words; in fact, it is very far from rational and worldly matters. A Sufi is on a mystical journey and a spiritual path to reveal the secrets of knowing the Ultimate Truth. Sufis look to the Quran and Hadith as spiritual references (see Iraqi, 2017, p. 5). For them, the only way to reach the Divine is by turning inward and experiencing the unity of existence. Moreover, for Sufis, God is the Absolute Being and whatever exists is a determination and manifestation of Him (see Nurbaksh, 1990, p. 5). For a Sufi to walk this spiritual path, he/she must pass through several “*maqâmât*”¹ or “stations” that are attained through prayer, fasting and meditation, and the “*ḥâl*”² or “mystical state of mind” might be granted in a gracious manner to the Sufi only by the Grace of God and cannot be attained by the mystic’s efforts (see Makarem, 1989, p. 196).

As for Sufi poetry, it has been referred to as a coded declaration of Sufi experience, and as an expression of divine love and unity of being. Some of the most prominent Sufi poets are *Žalâl ad-Dîn ar-Rûmi*, *Šams at-Tabrîzi*, *‘Ibn al-Fârîd*, *Manšûr al-Ḥallâẓ*, among many others.

2. Aims and Importance of this Study

The objective of this study is to examine the various issues and challenges of translating Sufi terminology, with a focus on terms used by *al-Ḥallâẓ*. This is important since an adequate translation of Sufi poetry has not yet been achieved, as reflected by the lack of studies published on this specific topic. On the issue of spiritual texts, including Sufi texts, Abdel Jawad & Al-Hajri (2016, p. 145) state that “Spiritual texts have not received due attention in translation. With the exception of few studies, such as Pokon 2005 and Piken 2014, very little in the translation theory or practice has been dedicated to the discussion and translation of such texts”. Therefore, this study, mainly based on the translation of Sufi terms from Arabic to English, can

be a building block for translators who are considering translating Sufi texts, and particularly Sufi poems. Throughout this study, we offer insights into the translation of religious texts and examine the conceptual and terminological challenges that translators would face in rendering Sufi terms and concepts into English: the challenges and difficulties that underlie the translation process and make it very delicate and for the most part complex.

We analyze some terms extracted from the collection of poems written by the Sufi mystic *al-Ḥallâẓ* (*Diwân al-Ḥallâẓ*). Extracts of the poems are reproduced by the British scholar Martin Lings in his book *Sufi Poems: A Medieval Anthology* (Arabic and English ed.) and translated by him into English. The translation of *Diwân al-Ḥallâẓ* was done using Old English. This could be explained by the fact that Lings was extremely passionate about this language that he studied when he was young. According to *The Islamic Encyclopedia*, “To the young Lings and his close class companion, Adrian Paterson, the Old English poetry sessions taught by Lewis³ were so spell-binding that little else mattered then”.

The Sufi terms *al-Ḥallâẓ* used in his writings is difficult to understand even for native speakers of Arabic. How clear, then, would a translation of his poems be in English? Our main and key questions in this study are the following: Is the translation of Sufi terms an easy task? To what extent did Lings succeed in rendering Sufi concepts? And what are the different elements that should be taken into consideration when translating Sufi terms?

We begin by explaining why *al-Ḥallâẓ*’s works are chosen as our focus and discuss, in a brief manner, the always close relationship between translation and terminology, on the one hand, and between term and concept on the other.

3. Why *al-Ḥallâẓ*?

Al-Ḥallâẓ, whose full name was *Abu ‘l-Muġīṭ al-Ḥusayn bin Manšûr al-Ḥallâẓ*, was a Persian mystic, poet, and teacher of Sufism born c. 858 near Bayda, a town in the Iranian province of Fars, and executed c. 922. “Although evidently his family was partly of Iranian stock, they had become Arabicized; the name *Hal-laj* has been taken as referring to *Husayn*’s father’s work as wool carder” (Dictionary of World Biography, p. 421). His impact on Sufism and mysticism was great, and therefore it is important to study the poems he wrote in Arabic with their translation into English.

Al-Ḥallâẓ was a great traveler, and his journeys took him into countries beyond the frontiers of Islamic rule to preach and teach. In his book *The Passion of Al-Hallâj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, the French Islamicist Louis Massignon (1982, p. 10) describes *al-Ḥallâẓ* as the “Martyr of Divine Love”. On the cross, *al-Ḥallâẓ*, the martyr of Sufism, asked forgiveness for those who

slaughtered him; his unconditional love did not differentiate between friend and foe. The body perishes, the spirit never dies, it shall ever live. “I am the truth”, /’ana l-ḥaq/ in Arabic, was the famous and controversial sentence he pronounced that ended his earthly life and made him the martyr who can never be forgotten, the martyr of truth. The act of communion and oneness with God, who was the Truth, led him to state this. “Although it seems highly probable that he referred instead to experiences of the divine presence, many Muslims regarded him as attempting to arrogate a place for himself alongside Allah. For Sufi thinkers, this expression, while comprehensible to the mystic, was regarded as a dangerous breach of the secrecy which should shroud such experiences” (*Dictionary of World Biography*, p. 423). Deceitfully, he was accused of proclaiming Godhood. Al-Ḥallāz devoted his life to spread the light of knowing to everyone regardless of gender, origin, and social class. His name has come to represent suffering, love, and unitive experience, and is still cited frequently in arts and literature.

4. Terminology and Translation

Terminology and translation are two fields of knowledge that share cognitive, linguistic, and communicative grounds. If specialists are by definition users of terminology, translators and interpreters must also be considered high-priority users insofar as they facilitate communication between specialists considering that multilingual terminology goes hand in hand with translation.

For translators, terminology facilitates the translation of content from one language to another. This process implies the understanding of the original text, and therefore the importance of knowing the terminology of the original language, because it is primarily through terms that specialized texts convey knowledge. There is no knowledge without terminology. It follows that translators must have some knowledge of, and familiarity with, the content of the discipline they are translating from.

In this study, we will observe in some places how the translator’s familiarity with Arabic and especially with Islamic religion, culture, and civilization facilitated the understanding and apprehension of various concepts related to Sufism. Nevertheless, some challenges continue to exist due to the nature of Sufi concepts, or more exactly the nature of the Sufi domain itself, which is essentially built on secrecy, involving secrets that can only be revealed to spiritually enlightened people. Early Muslim Sufis “consider their works (books, texts, prayers, etc.) their own property, not to be revealed to out-group members”, as noted by Abdel Jawad & Al-Hajri (2016, p. 147). This makes us question whether the translator should be loyal to the readers or to the source text.

5. Term and Concept

A term can be composed of one lexeme or it can be a combination of many lexemes; however, it is worth noting here the difference between a term and a word in a sense that any term can be a word but not any word can be a term. Indeed, a *word* belongs to the general vocabulary while a *term* must be specific to a domain and does not exist independently of a domain. This implies that the main difference between a term and a word is the nature of reference. Valeontis & Mantzri (2006, p. 5) portray the methods of term formation, which are creating new forms, using existing forms, and translingual borrowing. The process of creating new forms is through derivation, compounding, and shortening forms or abbreviating. In the second method, which is using existing forms, the formation of new terms can be achieved through the conversion of the parts of speech. The third method used in term formation is translingual borrowing, whereby terms existing in a language are incorporated into another language through different procedures such as loan translation. Other methods that we can mention and that are considered of extreme importance in term formation are semantic transfer, which incorporates essentially metaphor and metonymy; terminologization,⁴ in which a term is transferred from the general vocabulary to a specific vocabulary; and transdisciplinary borrowing, also known as internal borrowing, where a designation from one specific domain is used in another one in order to represent a different concept.

A concept is the meaning of a given term in a specific domain. It is part of the extra-linguistic world. It consists of a set of traits called *conceptual traits*, represented as follows: TC₁, TC₂, TC₃, TC₄, to infinity. These traits are used to name a concept and may differ from one language to another. This implies that different languages see the same reality differently.

It is impossible to express all the conceptual traits that constitute a concept in the process of nomination; otherwise, the term will turn out to be a description or a definition. For researchers working with language, linguistics, and translation, the essential question is how to gain access to a maximum number of traits in order to understand a concept and render it in another language. This access cannot be done without the assistance of an expert in a specific domain, who is the only one capable of largely providing explanation about a concept. The most important step in the process of translating Sufi texts is to discern the nature and particularity of Sufi terms, which will constitute a key decision for the translator in the process of finding the appropriate equivalents in the target language.

6. Nature and Particularity of Sufi Terms

6.1 The metaphorical aspect

Poetry is known as a dense form of literary work where language is compressed within a certain rhyme and structure; thus, it is the pinnacle of figurative meaning. Figurative language is used to express an idea in a metaphorical manner in a sense that the term or expression cannot be understood literally. In fact, the real meaning is conveyed in subliminal phrases that can invoke similes, metaphors, imagery, connotations, and implications. Figurative language is intensively used in Sufi poems and al-Ḥallâż excels in delivering his experience, beliefs, and knowledge in metaphorical verses full of multi-layered implications and significance. It is no wonder that Sufis have resorted to figurative language in its two aspects –metaphor and symbolism; this is partly because of the fear of being accused of doing wrong to the religion or the State; in fact, freedom of expression at that time did not exist. Table 1 shows examples of metaphorical terms extracted from *Diwân al-Ḥallâż* and how Lings translated them into English.

In the first example, al-Ḥallâż brought the “eye” (an organ for seeing) to make the heart (an organ for living and loving) see and realize what cannot be seen with the physical eye. This is obviously a metaphor showing in what way God can be seen (known by the seeker of Truth) and the level of connection with the Divine a Sufi can attain, emphasizing the aspect of true knowledge in comparison with mere faith. Lings’s strategy was to keep the same image in English, “the eye of the heart”, which is a calque of the original metaphor, in the sense that he took up the same conceptual traits used to nominate the Arabic concept and used them for the equivalent in English. Although it constitutes a calque, this metaphor is not strange to Western culture and to Christianity, where Saint Augustine, for example, used the same metaphor in one of his quotes⁵ to refer to the concept by which God can be seen.

In the second example, al-Ḥallâż invites the reader to contemplate, yet to meditate what he described with consciousness and awareness, what he called /*ʿayn al-ʿaql*/. This is the eye of perception which he is pointing at, the knowing eye from which nothing can

be hidden, the tool by which truth can be unveiled and recognized. In English, the translation can better refer to this meaning by using the term “Third eye” and not “Intellect’s eye”, the term used by Lings. Al-Ḥallâż did not mean by /*ʿaql*/ the limited mind trapped by the play of existence but the unbounded consciousness transcending every materialistic dimension and piercing through it with supreme senses of seeing and hearing (/*ʿasmâʿ wuʿât waʿabsâr*/). It is a confirmation from a realized being that a subtle realm exists and can be experienced when bypassing the five senses and relying on perception /*baṣîra*/ not normal vision /*baṣar*/. Perception is a main trait of a true knower; with his evolved spiritual eye, he witnesses the unseen, the subtle which flows secretly behind all appearances.

The metaphor used in the third example is /*ḥizâb al-qalb*/. As mentioned, the strategy of the translator consists of keeping the same image in English, “heart’s veil”. This can be explained by the fact that translating Sufi images and metaphors literally “better preserves the intended meaning and is more faithful to reality”, as put by Amina Iraqi (2017, p. 21).

6.2 Symbolism

Another characteristic of the Sufi terms in al-Ḥallâż’s poems is symbolism. Sufis have used symbols or coded terms to remain mysterious even while revealing secrets. Abdel Jawad & Al-Hajri (2016, p. 148) describe Sufi language as “a system of codes, metaphors, symbols, signs, significances, and configurations which differ totally from those in literature, philosophy, politics and the like”. Thus, Sufis have created a terminology with the aim of being understandable only by those who are on the same path and which could reflect total ambiguity to others. Symbols in Sufi literature do not express the literal meaning of the term or phrase; in fact, they describe meanings that transcend human senses. Hiding the secret of truth from unaware ignorant people and not those genuine aspirants is mandatory and sacred, and whoever discloses it is a traitor to the fundamentals of the Sufi path; nonetheless, it is a way to secure the knowledge and avoid clashes with religious and political authorities at that time. It is worth mentioning in this respect that symbolism was

Transcription	Arabic Source Text	English Target Text
Raʿaytu rabbi <i>biʿayni qalbi</i> Faqltu man ʿanta? Qalaʿanta!	رَأَيْتُ رَبِّي بَعَيْنِ قَلْبِي فَقُلْتُ مَنْ أَنْتَ قَالَ أَنْتَ (p. 29)	I saw my Lord with the eye of the heart . I said: “Who art thou?” He answered: “Thou.” (p. 28)
Taʿammal <i>biʿayni l-ʿaqli</i> mâ anâ wâṣifun Falil-ʿaqli ʿasmâʿun wuʿâtun waʿabsâru	تَأَمَّلْ بَعَيْنِ الْعَقْلِ مَا أَنَا وَاصِفٌ فَلِلْعَقْلِ أَسْمَاءٌ وَعَاةٌ وَأَبْصَارٌ (p. 31)	O ponder what I say with the Intellect’s eye . Keen is the Intellect of hearing and of insight. (p. 30)
Waʿanta <i>ḥizâbu l-qalbi</i> ʿan sirri ġaybihi Walawlâka lam yuṭbaʿ ʿalayhi <i>kitâmuhu</i>	وَأَنْتَ حِجَابُ الْقَلْبِ عَنْ سِرِّ غَيْبِهِ وَلَوْلَاكَ لَمْ يُطْبَعْ عَلَيْهِ خَتَامُهُ (p. 29)	The heart’s veil o’er its secret mystery. Art thou, nor, but for thee, had it been sealed. (p. 28)

TABLE 1. Lings’s Translation of Metaphorical Terms in *Diwân al-Ḥallâż*

deeply rooted in the Arabic culture, and more precisely in the Arabic language. In fact, each letter of the Arabic alphabet – which was not ordered, as is now the case, with graphically similar letters succeeding one another – was represented by a specific number for the purpose of dissimulation of messages, as shown in Figure 1.

Table 2 presents examples of symbolism from al-Ḥallâẓ’s poems.

In the first example, the lover and the beloved are one, the “I” and the “He” are also one since he who realizes the Truth and is able to see the whole existence and non-existence, the manifested and the non-manifested as a single entity, is a sparkle of the endless divine ocean. Thus, the “unity of existence” is reflected and symbolized by introducing the creation as a divine revelation and not separate from the Divine Being. The individual is then an image or a manifestation of the cosmic soul and the human being is divine since his essence is divine too, and in him the eternal is dwelling.

Furthermore, symbolism was closely associated with imagination to touch the beyond which resides behind the “veil”, or the so-called *Maya* in the Eastern philosophies. Imagination is deemed important since the mystical experience cannot be attained by logic but through mystical and spiritual experiences.

In the second example, “Al-Ḥaq” (the Truth) is one of the 99 names of God in Islam; for this reason, the statement might seem too arrogant and full of blasphemy for those who are not on the path of al-Ḥallâẓ and Sufism and who do not understand his experience of truth and struggle to decipher his language. This is a coded text; therefore, one cannot adhere to the surface meaning, which led to the terrible death of the legendary Sufi poet.⁶

6.3 The function of al-Ḥallâẓ’s Sufi terms in context

Our focus is based on a “textual approach in terminology” since we examine both the Arabic text with its various terminology and meaning of terms and the translation into English with the various terms used to render Sufi concepts. If it is true that terminology must come

from the texts to better return to them, this is because texts constitute a kind of medium without which the term cannot exist or be understood since it becomes isolated from its natural environment (see Thoiron & Béjoint, 2000, p. 16). This approach was adopted by many terminologists, among them Didier Bourigault & Monique Slodzian. In their article entitled “Pour une approche textuelle de la terminologie” (Towards a textual approach in terminology), they argue that it is in the texts produced by a community of experts that a good part of the shared knowledge of this community is expressed, and this is where the analysis should start (see Bourigault & Slodzian, 1998-1999, p. 30).

In order to study the function of al-Ḥallâẓ’s Sufi terms, we must examine terms and their use in context. Each term reflects a certain meaning in Sufi poetry that is far from its literal meaning. In this case, we can indeed study the meaning of each Sufi term in context and analyze the concept it holds.

It is evident that Sufis have introduced a vast number of terms to describe their experience of the spiritual path towards the Divine Being. So as to exemplify the manner in which context specifies the function of terms, we analyze some Sufi terms that we have extracted from our corpus. The total number of terms extracted is 21, as listed in Table 3.

Table 3 shows three categories of terms. The first category includes Sufi terms such as /ḥub/ (love), /ḥaẓ/ (pilgrimage), and /maslak/ (path), which are formed by terminologization. Terminologization is used to refer to the use of common language words in language for specific purposes where they take on a particular meaning. This passage from general to specialized vocabulary is analyzed by many terminologists who speak about the “osmosis” that exists between the specialized vocabulary and the general language (see Candel, 2003, p. 228). Maria Teresa Cabré, for instance, gives the example of arms, head, limb, body, foot, eye, and brain that are currently used with a specific meaning in mechanics, construction, administration, geology, computer science, or urban planning (see Cabré, 1994, p. 593).



FIGURE 1. Arabic alphabet

Transcription	Arabic Source Text	English Target Text
'Ana man 'ahwa wa man 'ahwa 'ana Nahnu rūḥani ḥalalna badana Fa'idâ 'absartani 'absartahu Wa'idâ 'absartahu 'absartana	أنا من أهوى ومن أهوى أنا نحن روحان حللنا بدنا فإذا أبصرتني أبصرته وإذا أبصرته أبصرتنا (p. 39)	He am I whom I love, He whom I love is I, Two Spirits in one single body dwelling. So seest thou me, then seest thou Him, And seest thou Him, then seest thou Us. (p. 38)
'Ana l-ḥaqqu wal-ḥaqqu lil-ḥaqqi ḥaqqu Lâbisun dâtahu famâ tamma farqu	أنا الحق والحق للحق لابس ذاته فما تم فرق (p. 29)	I am the Truth, and Truth, for Truth, is Truth, Robed in Its Essence, thus beyond separation. (p. 28)

TABLE 2. Examples of Symbolism from al-Ḥallâẓ’s Poems

The second category consists of terms taken from the Quran, such as /tažalli/ (manifestation), /nûr/ (light), and /tawḥîd/ (oneness). Finally, the third category represents terms taken from other specialized domains, mainly philosophy, such as /ḍât/ (essence) and /ʿaql/ (intellect), and Arabic grammar such as /faşl/ (gone) and /'ism/ (name). This passage from one domain to another is very common in terminology and in the formation of terms. It can be also explained through the interpenetration that exists between different domains of knowledge in general; many domains share many concepts with others. In fact, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to establish limits between domains. By way of illustration, using Table 4, we take the first category of terms formed by terminologization and we analyze the concepts of /ḥub/ and /maslak/ in al-Ḥallâż's poems:

Studies of the scripts, discipline, and worship can lift the aspirant closer to truth. However, for the Sufis, love is the doorway to divinity. Divine love is an exquisite peculiarity in Sufi poems, love to the level of annihilation and full dissolution of the individual self into the universal ocean of divinity. When love is so colossal it merges the lover and the beloved, when the beloved becomes far dearer than the lover, all dimensions fall. It is that collapse of dimensions that pierces the veil and reveals the beauty of the truth to quench the eternal longing within. Al-Ḥallâż loved the Divine to the edge of craziness, an intense love that led to death. What seems to be a love story in which the two lovers

are inseparable, in complete fusion and blending into one everlasting essence, is actually the story of a state of effacement of the ego, a vanishing into God. Love for the Sufis is a transcendental act, applied in their life as a blossoming of their experience. In his poems, Al-Ḥallâż describes intimate moments with his beloved and the feeling of intoxication, too. This explanation portrays the meaning of love in the Sufi context, in contrast to its meaning in general vocabulary. Love, as defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* online, is “an intense feeling of deep affection, a great interest and pleasure in something, a person or a thing that one loves”. The meaning of love when taken out of the Sufi context is nothing but a related materialistic and worldly connection with someone or something. This kind of connection is generally limited and conditioned, unlike the unconditional divine love expressed by Sufism.

The concept /maslak/ (/masâlik/ in plural) in spirituality does not mean /tarîq/ (road) and cannot be translated as “road” or “route” in English as is the case in the general vocabulary; it means a journey of transcendence, an attainment, and a higher realization to get closer to the truth until enlightenment happens and not merely a simple trajectory between two locations. In Sufi contexts, the concept /maslak/ is not a paved passage but a tough and rough escalation in consciousness, a know-how of pure love dissolving the very identity of the seeker to realize the illusion of duality and the oneness of the existence in truth.

Arabic Sufi Terms in <i>Diwân al-Ḥallâż</i>	Equivalents in the Translated Text
/SIR/	SECRET
/QALB/	HEART/SOUL
/TAWḤÎD/	ONENESS
/TAŽALLI/	MANIFESTATION
/ḤUB/	LOVE
/RÛḤ/	SPIRIT
/ḤAQ/	TRUTH
/NÛR/	LIGHT
/ĠAFLA/	IGNORANCE
/MAQÂM/	STATION
/QUĐSI/	SANCTUARY
/ḌÂT/	ESSENCE
/ḤAŽ/	PILGRIMAGE
/FAŞL/	GONE
/ĠAYB/	MYSTERY
/MU'NIS/	INTIMATE FRIEND
/'ISM/	NAME
/MASLAK/	PATH
/ʿAQL/	INTELLECT
/MUSIR/	DEPTH OF SOUL
/WAHM/	IMAGINING

TABLE 3. Sufi Terms from the Corpus

Transcription	Arabic Source Text	English Target Text
Wallâhi mâ ṭala ^c at šamsun wala ġarubat ‘illa waḥubbuka maqrûnun bi’anfâsi	والله ما طلعت شمسٌ ولا غرُبت إِلَّا وَحِبِّكَ مَقْرُونٌ بِأَنْفَاسِي (p. 32)	I swear by God, sun riseth not nor setteth, But in each breath I breathe my love for Thee. (p. 32)
Waḥḥidni wâhidi bitawḥîdi šidqin Mâ ‘ilayhi mina l-mâsâliki ṭuruqu	وَحَدِّنِي وَاحِدِي بِتَوْحِيدِ صِدْقٍ مَا إِلَيْهِ مِنَ الْمَسَالِكِ طَرُقُ (p. 29)	One with Thee make me, O my one, through Oneness Faithed in sincerity no path can reach. (p. 28)

TABLE 4. Sufi Terms Formed by Terminologization

6.4 Challenges encountered in the translation of al-Ḥallâẓ’s terms

When translating al-Ḥallâẓ’s terms, translators face diverse problems posed either by understanding the meaning of the terms and concepts or by rendering Sufi concepts without distorting the image in the target language. They also face a huge dilemma in preserving the poetry structure including poetic devices such as rhyme and meter.

6.4.1 Conceptual-related challenges

Translation is a process of rewriting a source text in another language, which consists of several stages to deliver the final product. Sufi poems might be extremely challenging for a translator. The first stage of the translation process lies at the base of reading and understanding the meaning of the source text. On the level of understanding the meaning that resides behind the terms in al-Ḥallâẓ’s poems, the translator might encounter figurative language including metaphors, imagery, and symbolism that could hinder the process of interpreting the meaning of the source language beforehand. In dealing with al-Ḥallâẓ’s poems, one must not only master the Arabic and English languages, but he/she must also be equally familiar with Sufi concepts to be able to comprehend the meaning and find adequate equivalents. Sufi texts form part of the classical Islamic discourse, which

presents a number of specific challenges for the translator; in addition to being formalistic and highly rhetorical, each individual field of study evolved its own, very distinctive technical lexicon that was designed for the practitioners of the discipline. Consequently, this *terminus technicus* was not necessarily accessible to the “outsider” but indeed had to be acquired, so as to navigate one’s way through such texts. Sufism also presents a particularly unique challenge since, as a mystical tradition, the experience it represents is fundamentally ineffable. The fact that conventional language could not express such experiences did not deter Sufis from attempting to articulate their perspective, creating a unique communicative paradox (Picken, 2014, p. 177).

An illustration of the above is the concept /ğafļa/ translated into English as “ignorance” by Lings instead of “inattention”. The term /ğafļa/ in Arabic stands for /taẓâhul/ (the back translation of which is “inattention”) and not /ẓahl/ (ignorance), as it was understood by Lings in the first example of Table 5.

Another example of conceptual-related challenges is the term /qalb/ which appears to be polysemous in the Sufi domain. /Qalb/ was translated in different contexts by the English term *heart*.⁷ However, in Table 5 /kânat liqalbi ‘ahwâ’un mufarraqatun/, the translation was different. Guided by the context in which terms are used and acquire their meaning, Lings suggested the appropriate equivalent in English as *soul* and not *heart* to render the concept /qalb/ in Arabic. This choice is justified because the term /qalb/ here collocates with the word /’ahwa’/ (longings) to form a new meaning. In this context, the word /’ahwa’/ in Arabic means /šahawât/ or desires. Since only the soul can possess desires and longings, it would be inappropriate to use “heart” in this context.

6.4.2 Linguistic-related challenges: finding the equivalence of terms or terminological accuracy

A problematic factor in translating al-Ḥallâẓ’s poems lies in the process of finding the equivalence of terms in the target language. According to Abdel Jawad & Al-Hajri (2016, p. 144), “The role of the translator in dealing with such texts [spiritual texts] goes beyond the inter-lingual equivalences of the messages to a deeper understanding and interpreting of their spiritual function”. Some Sufi terms might have no equivalents in the English language and may not fully communicate the desired effect on the reader, and some of them might be untranslatable.⁸

This untranslatability, as Tavakoli (2014, p. 45) puts it, “can be due to cultural differences, so there are words outside of the frame of the target language”. The true meaning of Sufi terms can only be ascertained through an understanding of the religious and spiritual culture in which such terms occur. As such, the translator should read not only the words or terms, but also the context in which they appear.

This poses a major challenge to the translator who is conveying only the literal meaning of the poetry, and

Transcription	Arabic Source Text	English Target Text
Mâ lâmani fika ‘aḥibba’i wa’a‘dâ’i ‘Illa liḡaflatihim ‘an ‘izmi balwâ’i	ما لامني فيك أحبائي وأعدائي إلا لغفلتهم عن عظم بلوائي (p. 31)	They chided me because of Thee, My friends and foes, in ignorance . (p. 30)
Kânat liqalbi ‘ahwâ’un mufarraqatun Fa’sažma‘at muđ ra’atka l-‘aynu ‘ahwâ’i	كانت لقلبي أهواء مفرقة فاستجمعت مذ رأتك العين أهوائي (p. 31)	Diverse longings had my soul , But seeing Thee hath made them one. (p. 30)

TABLE 5. Translation of Terms with Conceptual-Related Challenges

mainly to the one who is not aware of the Sufi path. In other words, the translator must succeed in maintaining compatibility and rendering Sufi concepts in the target language, as well as being faithful to the original meaning. As Al-Ḥallâż’s verses are very rhetorical, figurative, and complicated in nature, the translator becomes more prone to the inability of rendering Sufi concepts. Hence, the translator must not convey the literal meaning of the term, but he/she must find an equivalent to the given in the target language. In other words, for a translator to render Sufi concepts, he/she must have full knowledge of the subject to be able to convey the real meaning behind the terms. Proper spiritual analysis of the concepts must be addressed prior to the act of translation, in the sense that the translator has to be aware of putting the spiritual experience into words that make justice to the deeper understanding of the self and the beyond. Therefore, ideally a translator who has a similar spiritual experience that goes beyond the scope of human mind and logic can better convey Sufi concepts. As an example of the above, we take the term /quds/ from al-Ḥallâż’s verses where the translation was plausible and other terms like /al-wahm/, /al-musirrîn/, /sir/, and /mu’nis/ where it was questionable.

Lings was able to find the right equivalent for the term /quds/ (see Table 6), which means the only refuge and final destination; thus, a sanctuary is not just a sacred part of al-Ḥallâż but a sacred unlimited dimen-

sion in which he dissolves totally, where the sacred of the individual being melts in the sacred of the one universal being.

It could be said that the best translation of the term /mu’nis/ (see Table 6) is “permanent companion” since al-Ḥallâż is in continuous company with God, while an intimate friend – as translated by Lings – might not be persistent company.

The term /musir/ (singular form of /musirrîn/) (see Table 6) means “the initiated” or “the one holding the secrets of truth”, but Lings linked the secret to the depth of the souls regardless of whether these souls are enlightened with truth secrets or not. Knowers of truth like al-Ḥallâż are holders of an immense secret, a secret only floating between the initiated or those on the path of realization. Those seekers are /musirrîn/ or hiders of the secret, which, if ever disclosed, can lead to death. And disclosing the secret is considered a sinful calamity. The term /sir/ is not a secret only as per the literal meaning but a description of what dwells within, the inner nature that is holy and veiled. Here, *secret* means “the Divine”, the only living which has endless secrets; such firmly protected dimension cannot be accessed without complete erosion of the individual self or ego and must not be wide open to the unfaithful. Nothing is more precious or more intriguing than the secret of the knowers. Thus, al-Ḥallâż joined the two terms /sir/ and /musirrîn/ in one verse to pinpoint

Transcription	Arabic Source Text	English Target Text
Hawaytu bikulli kulla kullika yâ qudsi Tukâšifuni ḥatta ka’annaka fi nafsi	حويت بكلّي كلّك يا قدسي تكاشفني حتى كأنك في نفسي (p. 37)	I clasp with all my being all Thy Love, Thou art my Sanctuary : Thou showest me Thee. (p. 36)
Walaylatu l-hažri ‘in ṭâlat wa’in qašurat Famu’nisi ‘amalun fihî watađkâru	وليلة الهجر إن طالت وإن قصرت فمؤنسي أمل فيه وتذكر (p. 33)	The night of separation, be it long or short, Mine intimate friend is hope of Thee, memory of Thee. (p. 32)
Li’anwâri nûr r-iddîni fi l-kalqi ‘anwârun Walis-sirri fi sirri l-musirrîna ‘asrâru	لأنوار نور الدّين في الخلق أنوار وللسر في سرّ المسيرين أسرار (p. 31)	For the Lights of religion’s Light are Lights in men, For the Secret , Secrets in secret depths of souls . (p. 30)
Walaysa lil-wahmi minka wahmun Faya‘lamu l-wahmu ‘ayna ‘anta	وليس للوهم منك وهم فيعلم الوهم أين أنت (p. 29)	Thou giv’st imagining no image. For it to imagine where Thou art. (p. 28)

TABLE 6. Translation of Terms with Linguistic-Related Challenges

that the Divine concealed a spark: (/anwâr an-nûr/, /asrâr as-sir/) lights of the light, secrets of the secret in creation and seekers alike.

The known reality for a Sufi is nothing but a matrix of illusion, and for the seeker who has the subtle eye, God is the true reality and the only existent. Thus, it could be said that illusion is a more accurate translation for the term /wahm/ (see Table 6), since imagination is an act of a human thought and not a divine play (illusory reality).

6.4.3 Preserving poetic devices

Translating poetry into prose is definitely less challenging than conserving a poetic structure, or in other words, conserving the rhyme. Most of al-Ḥallâẓ's poems became songs due to their musicality. Thus, preserving the spirit of poetry while translating is surely a difficult task and the compression of meaning requires mastery over the target language. In this regard, Lings did not conserve the rhyme at the end of his verses, but he delivered poetic stanzas. Throughout the translation process, he showed signs of great flexibility regarding the rhyme; in short, we could say that he preferred to lose the rhyme in order to preserve the meaning of the text as much as he could. It should be noted that gravely restricting oneself to the rhyming features usually comes at the expense of other equally important features, such as the meaning and the concepts used by the author.

7. Results

Many translation scholars have emphasized the importance of being faithful to the source text and have proposed different methods and strategies for a translator to adopt. While translating spirituality, one is dealing with metaphysical connotations and experiential states that language in general can only point to without reflecting them the way they are. Language, as we know, is unable to bring forth the realm of the beyond into the rigid reality (physical world). Al-Ḥallâẓ tried to explore language by producing a novelty in the traditional literature of his time, returning it to the level of letters and to its Quranic root. Because of this, al-Ḥallâẓ can hardly be understood in the original language due to his unusual use of terms, which implies that finding the relevant equivalents for Sufi terms in the target language is an even harder task. To what extent is it possible to translate Sufi terms into English? Are Sufi terms translatable or not? After analyzing the translated poems of al-Ḥallâẓ by Lings, we could say that the translator has made efforts to render Sufi philosophy to the English-speaking audience. Lings' understanding of Sufism and his lifelong interest in the Islamic culture and the Quran fruited in his work.

To answer the question of the translatability of Sufi terms based on our study, it is fair to say that Lings was able to translate Sufi terms only to an acceptable range of comprehension but not to the full scale of conviction. As a matter of fact, most Sufi terms hold meanings that do not exist in English, which poses a serious problem for the translator. For instance, a Sufi term like /^Cišq/ cannot be translated simply as "love" because it identifies a very intense and advanced state of love. A language limitation adds to the mystical barriers that the translator may face during the process of translation. Lings' translation of al-Ḥallâẓ's poems falls under the mentioned challenges. Thus, while translating Sufi terms into English, the translator will stumble upon terms that do not really have equivalents in the target language, which will limit his/her choice of terms.

One beneficial strategy that can be adopted by a translator when translating Sufism is to find the closest equivalent in the target language and/or to keep the Arabic Sufi term as is in parentheses. The translator can additionally resort to adding footnotes in the target text to compensate for the meaning lost in translation. It is trivial to underline here the importance of relying on terminologies in the form of glossaries and dictionaries pertaining to Sufism, mainly Sufi monolingual dictionaries such as /^Cmuẓam al-muštalaḥât aš-šûfiyya/ by Abdel Menem al-Hafni. Terminologies can be used as tools to aid the translator in rendering Sufi concepts and terms to an adequate extent. Sufism as a philosophy can be less difficult to deliver when one is aware of Sufi path and beliefs. To reiterate, putting a spiritual experience into words and materializing such subtle and abstract concepts into a linguistic framework is no easy task.

8. Conclusion

For a translator to convey Sufi concepts and terms in another language, he/she must not only be bilingual but also bicultural and well versed in Sufism. Lings played an important role as a mediator between two cultures (East/West and Islamic/non-Islamic) and contributed to the incorporation of Sufi terms into English. The discussion of the examples in our study taken from the source text and the target text provides an insight into the nature of Sufi concepts and terms. In a nutshell, spiritual texts such as Sufi texts must be approached with utmost caution to prevent any potential ambiguity or misinterpretation. The hymns of al-Ḥallâẓ have lived through history despite religious controversies and have crossed the barriers of language to reach human consciousness regardless of cultures and doctrines.

We have attempted to examine a sample of terms with their translation into English. This study is certainly not exhaustive and neither are the bibliographical references that we have cited, but it seeks to answer

questions related to any attempt of translating spiritual texts, and in particular Sufi texts, highlighting some of the difficulties encountered by any translator of such texts. We hope that this study will constitute a cornerstone for further studies and reflections on the terminology of Sufism. The translation of Sufi texts is,

as Picken notes (2014, p. 177), “no more or less difficult than translating the sentiment of love displayed in the lyric poetry of a medieval sonnet, as it requires not only technical ability and theoretical knowledge but also intersubjectivity and consequently, empathetic understanding”. ❁

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Transcription System: Times Beirut Roman

Consonants			
ء	/ʾ/	ض	/ḍ/
ب	/b/	ط	/ṭ/
ت	/t/	ظ	/ẓ/
ث	/ṯ/	ع	/ʿ/
ج	/ǰ/	غ	/ġ/
ح	/ħ/	ف	/f/
خ	/ħ̣/	ق	/q/
د	/d/	ك	/k/
ذ	/ḏ/	ل	/l/
ر	/r/	م	/m/
ز	/z/	ن	/n/
س	/s/	ه	/h/
ش	/š/	و	/w/
ص	/ṣ/	ي	/y/
Short vowels		Long vowels	
	/a/		/â/
	/u/		/û/
	/i/		/î/

Notes

1. The singular term is /maqâm/, which denotes a spiritual stage that marks the long path of Sufis and that could lead them to be united with God. Although the exact number of /maqâmât/ is not unanimously agreed upon, Sufis generally believe that there are seven major /maqâmât/: /maqâm of tawba/ (repentance), /maqâm of wara^c/ (fear of God), /maqâm of zuhd/ (renunciation, or detachment), /maqâm of faqr/ (poverty), /maqâm of šabr/ (patience), /maqâm of tawakkul/ (trust, or surrender), and /maqâm of riḏa/ (satisfaction). For Sufis, each /maqâm/ is a phase whereby they strive to purify themselves from the world and prepare themselves to reach a higher spiritual degree.
2. The plural term is /aḥwâl/. The difference between /aḥwâl/ and /maqâmât/ stems from the fact that /aḥwâl/ are favors granted solely by God, while /maqâmât/ are attained through efforts produced by Sufis themselves.
3. Writer, poet, and Christian apologist, C. S. Lewis.
4. This process of term formation will be studied here as one of the processes that characterize the formation of Sufi terms.
5. "The whole purpose of life is to restore to health the eye of the heart by which God can be seen".
6. See p. 30.
7. See Lings's book p. 29 (3 frequencies of the term heart), p. 31 (2 frequencies of the same term), p. 33 (2 frequencies of the same term), p. 37 (2 frequencies of the same term), p. 39 (1 frequency of the same term).
8. In her article entitled "Translating the Sufi Dictionary into English", Amina Iraqi gives many examples of Sufi terms that are untranslatable into English given the difficulty of expressing the Arabic Islamic meaning in English. She said that «The Sufi dictionary is abundant with culturally-loaded terms that carry meanings having no exact equivalents in English» (Iraqi, 2017, p. 9).