Arabic-English Translation at University of Birmingham: Perspectives and Predicaments

Muhammad Akram[1]
Fahd Alqasham[2]
Amir Barket[3]

Abstract

This study focuses the issues that trammel the process of translation from source language to target language and vice versa faced by the Arab learners. Translation is a fundamental element in life and has played a decisive part in the development of languages like English as it derives from the universal need for mediation between speakers and writers of different languages. The researcher utilized a quantitative approach to find out the key areas of trouble in translating a text. This study has also unearthed the facts that L1 negative translation is one challenging problems for the learners of this level. The structure of the L1 and that of the L2 also present a problem to them. Apart from the above-mentioned problems, finding translation equivalent also involves special bilingual skills to go along with the trend among languages to "lack of fit". This study recommends that the learners should be honed to professional standards in universities and through experiences aided by such tools as bilingual dictionaries.

Keywords: Arab Learners, Lexical errors, Semantic Errors, Syntactic Errors, Translation errors.

1. Introduction

Translation is a universal phenomenon and has a vital part in connection and transmission between different cultures and societies. Translation is necessary course content allow students access the target language. The change of any content from an L1 to L2 to comprehend the ideas of the L1 is called translation. Yowelly & Lataiwish (2000) consider translation as a process and a product. Literal translation focuses on accurate meanings of the words in their real linguistic context (Ghazala 1995). Many of the students focus on the literal translations without considering the appropriate context.

[1] Govt. Graduate College Burewala, Pakistan drmuhammadakram80@gmail.com

[2] Department of English, Qassim University, Mithnab KSA F.Alqasham@qu.edu.sa

[3] Govt. Graduate College Vehari, Pakistan amirbarket777@gmail.com

Arabic is a complex language Semitic language with English being an Indo-European language. The basic purpose of translation is to pass on the accuracy and clarity of the meaning from one language into another. Schaffner (1998) counts the benefits of teaching translation including the target language structure consolidation, extending the word bank of the target language. According to Shaheen (1997) several translation syllabi as being subjective and the `do-it yourself type' in the Arab context. The specifications of the source text obstacles the way to translation.

The knowledge of two languages does not give the knowledge to translate the one language into another. Translation is a universal phenomenon. Translation embraces semantic and structural ambiguities but it is necessary course content as to make the students access the target language. The learning environment does not comply with the language contents. Translators are possibly to encounter a lot more angularities between the local and western culture. Translation is necessary for learning vocabulary items, sentence structure and meanings of lexical items which learners use new and novel contexts of the target language. The real essence of translation is lost when the students cram translation.

Zagy (2000) considers the aim of translation is not the conversion of the lexical words of the original language rather it is to pass on the elucidation to the target language. According to Catford (1965) the process of translation is "the replacement of textual material in one language, by equivalent textual material in another language". He further distinguishes between restricted translation (textual material substitution of the L1 at one level only) and total translation (textual material substitution of L1 grammar and vocabulary by L2 equivalent grammar and lexis).

1.1 Language, Translation and Culture

Language depends on its culture and culture develops with the language. Culture consists of a set of norms and traditions that control a particular community and their collective behaviour. Language plays an essential part of these cultural norms and beliefs and also bestows a mutual impact of the source and target cultures. Such an influence of language on translation process as the extent and level of combination of the L1 text may vary in the L2 culture that are to cause difficulties in the translation process. One of the

major difficulties is that sometimes what has been translated might or might not completely merge in the target culture, what Yowelly & Lataiwish (2000) term as integration. Yet, when such an integration does not occur, it is termed "source translation". Sometimes translation neither preserves the source nor the target culture and it is termed as "alienation" (Yowelly & Lataiwish 2000). Culture explicitly demonstrates the complex structure of language.

1.2 Problems of Equivalence and Non-Equivalence in Translation

Equivalence describes the true nature and the degree of the connection between the L1 and L2 text. Chan & Krishnavanie (2021) conducted a translation study in the Malaysian context in which they investigated the translation of different name labels and address terms from English to Malay. This study identified the main translation strategies using Baker's (1992) & Eugene Nida's (1964) communication and comprehension methods. The study discussed the priority of the translator and revealed most frequently used strategies are paraphrasing, omissions of address terms and translating neutral words.

Roza, Zainul, & Amri (2021) conducted a descriptive study in the Indonesian context to find out equivalence problems faced by Indonesian students. They used Translog to collect data and error analysis technique was applied for data analysis. The findings revealed a number of equivalence problems. Ali (2020) discusses the issue of meaning loss and meaning capturing in comprehension with regard to the translation of cultural expressions. Analytical and critical method was applied for data analysis. Findings of the study revealed that capturing the meaning and consistency of translation are most of the time absent from the text. Akan, Karim & Chowdhury (2019) conducted a study on Saudi students by furnishing Arabic IPA transcriptions for Arabic-English translation. Their study addressed the translation problems of the Arabic - English translation. The study also endorsed some practical solutions to these problems.

Alexandre (2019) discussed the role of Cultural hegemony in Translation Studies. The researcher approached militant translation method to study the effect of cultural hegemony of English. Ayesha's (2018) study investigated the advantages and/or disadvantages of Pashto, the possible role of national

language (Urdu) and learning English. The researcher applied Linguistic Proximity Model. The subjects of the study were given the tasks of rendering translation of Urdu sentences into English and Pashto sentences into English. The researcher marked the prediction of Pashto and Urdu in learning English. The results invalidated the potential part of native languages in learning the target language.

Sometimes, because L1 text and L2 text are socio-culturally and linguistically different, the students encounter the problem of non-equivalence while translating. Because of the non-availability of some relevant situational features in the source/target culture, non-equivalence may occur at the lexical or at the phrase level Baker (1992) This happens because the lexicalized concept in the source text fails to ensure it or to give it an equivalent in the target text. Non-equivalence also takes place on phrasal level where lexical items do not stand by themselves but they "almost occur on the company of other words" (Baker, 1992:46). To keep up the sequence of language stretches, it becomes sometimes difficult to comprehend the meaning of a lexical item unless combined with other lexical items or words.

1.3 Research Questions
1. What are the issues that Arab learners of English have to encounter in the process of translation?
2. What are the plausible sources of making errors in translation?

2. Review of the Related Literature
Siemund, Al-Issa, & Leimgruber (2020) studied the impact of multilingualism and English on Emirati students. There were 692 university students who participated in the study. Data were collected through questionnaires. The researchers explored the twitchiness between Arabic and English, and the greater use of English in different domains. They found 'Gulf English' consequent upon the use of multilingualism in United Arab Emirates. They also found that issues of translating from native to target language were resolved with the amalgamation of different languages.

Sabtan (2020) worked on teaching machine translation to undergraduate students in Oman. The study urged to incorporate machine translation courses with integrated technology to be taught at Gulf universities. It would

help the students to become effective and competent future translators. But the present study does not discuss the aspect of technology in translation.

Bakaric (2019) cited in Sabtan (2020) also argues in favor of post-editing integration into the syllabus of English department students at university level and also favors the inclusion of machine translation content in language course and proposes the compulsory course content for university students to learn a foreign language i.e. English.

Jabak (2019) conducted a qualitative study with the use of Google translate. He examined error analysis of some Arabic sample of translations into English with the help of Google translate. He indicated that the output of machine translation (Google Translate) had errors both at lexical and syntactic levels. The quality of translation, he added, was also affected. Alsalem (2019) in her study found Google translate beneficial in the development of learners' translation abilities.

Rabadi & Althawbih (2015) explain the negative effects of Arabic homonyms on translation in the Jordanian context. It was a pre-test post-test experiment conducted on 36 translation students at undergraduate level in Jordan. They concluded that a lack in their Arabic language vocabulary was the big cause of this negative result.

House (2009) says, "Translation is the replacement of an original text with another text". The foremost problem in rendering translation is associated with the reading comprehension ability in L1. The most frequent translation errors are of cultural and semantic nature. Al-Mubark (2015) found that Arabs use modern standard Arabic in the written communication that differs to a considerable extent from classical Arabic.

Bader S. et al. (2013) conducted a study regarding problems of translating cultural expression from Arabic to English. Their study revealed that students were unfamiliar with cultural expressions of the target language; they failed to find appropriate equivalents in L2 because of poor translation strategies and techniques.

Gass & Selinker (2008) consider lexical knowledge might be "the most important language component for learners". Insufficient lexical knowledge

leads to serious lexical errors in language acquisition. Al-Sohbani & Muthanna (2013) studied the challenges of Arabic-English translation and found that poor performance of students in translation is due to lexical knowledge insufficiency; they had no practice of grammar; lacked in cultural backgrounds.

Khalifa (2015) reported on the translation problems of Saudi students of English and concluded that due to lack of L2 reading comprehension, grammar and structure, Saudi learners are unable to translate structure of English into Arabic properly.

Cultural errors emerge because of the differences in culture (specific speech habits, speech norms and conventions defining linguistic competence. Cultural problems arise because certain phrases in Arabic find no appropriate equivalents in other languages and particularly in English as Al-Mubark (2015) contends. Al-Mubark (2017) studied the challenges of idioms translation from L1 (Arabic) into L2 (English) and he stressed the worth of cultural aspects in the process of translation. His study revealed that learners had limited ability particularly in the cultural context.

House (2001) defines equivalence as the reproduction of a text in another language which indicates the acceptability of the equivalence. According to Shuttleworth & Cowie (1997) equivalence usually defines the connection between L1 and L2. So equivalence refers to the basic nature and the extent of the logical meaning between L1 and L2.

Abdelwali (2002) studied the problems in translating the Holy Quran to claim the fact that "Quranic features are alien to the linguistic norms of other languages". He found distinct combinations of cultural, phonetic, semantic and rhetorical features. The researcher added that the "Quranic lexemes and styles were not captured in most of the English versions of the Quran".

Zughoul & Abdul-Fattah (2003) investigated the competence of EFL learners in rendering the Arabic verbs into English. The study was conducted on two groups of EFL students. The study stressed on the importance of lexical collocations in translation. The researchers suggested that learners' awareness of collocation should be raised.

Al-Ali (2004) investigated the learners' interpretation of lexical items, words and phrases in Quranic contexts with a corpus of 20 Quranic excerpts. The study concluded that participants of the study had encountered "overt" and "covert" field specific knowledge problems". His findings suggested that "more attention should be paid to con-textual clues in order to detect the intended meaning of familiar lexical items when they occur in unfamiliar contexts".

Bahumaid (2006) studied the problems of translators in the types of collocations and found a considerable low performance of the participants of the study. The results showed that even for the qualified and expert translators rendering "Arabic collocations, particularly culture-bound ones, posed a great challenge to translators".

Dweik & Shakra (2011) investigated the problems of rendering cultural collocations in the religious texts. It was a postulate based study that cultural collocations pose problems in the translation of theological texts. The study concluded that translators encountered the problems of semantic collocations, lexical and metaphoric collocations. Learners were not aware of the disparities between Arabic and Western beliefs. While translating learners take notice of diverse language structure and lexical items to develop grammatical competence in order to shape the way of comprehension and communication. In Arabic the length of sentences is longer as compared to English. The sentence structure in Arabic appears to be unclear because of grammatical relationships and syntactic word order (Al-Mubark 2015). A lot of words in Arabic have polysemous meanings but the learners are not really aware of the polysemous nature of the words.

2.1 Theoretical Framework of Study

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the functionalist approach of translation by Reiss (1981). It focused the text as translation unit rather than mere isolated words or sentences. It was basically the shift from formal layer of translation theories to the functional aspect of translation. This approach emphasized the target text and evaluated the key role of the translator. The theoretical framework supports the thesis that the Arab students at university of Birmingham face macro-linguistic and pragma-linguistic problems including cohesion and coherence and the lack of logical

connections between sentences and it indicates the plausible sources of making errors in translation process.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants
The researcher utilized a quantitative approach to find out the key areas of trouble in translating a text. The participants involved in the study were 23 (3 from Libya, 4 from Oman, 4 from Dubai and 12 from Saudi Arabia) students from University of Birmingham. All of these participants were students of MA (Linguistics and TESOL) at department of English (University of Birmingham, UK). They were aged between 23-28 years.

3.2 Research Tools
For the study, the researcher designed a questionnaire which consisted of 10 items based on likert scale ranging from Always (1) to Never (5). In order to answer these questions, the previous written tests of the students were analyzed, applying the error manual of Dagbeaux et al. (1996), which was altered in accordance with the purpose of the present study. Louvain *Error Tagging Manual* is an efficacious enterprise. This is a substantial accumulation for checking the strength and efficacy of translation. This error manual is easily available from the Centre for English Corpus Linguistics, University of Lancaster. The error manual was categorized into the following categories:

> Cultural Errors
> Grammatical Errors
> Lexical Errors
> Semantic Errors
> Syntactic Errors

4. Data Collection and Analysis
To check the efficacy of translation done by the participants, data were collected from English department repository (the previous written tests) with the prior permission of the concerned teachers and students. They were assured of their anonymity and were told about the nature and purpose of research. The researchers administered the questionnaire (about the views and perception of students about translation skill) in the classroom with the permission of the teacher. The quantitative data analysis technique was

utilized. The frequencies of the questionnaire items were calculated by applying inferential statistics method. The mean score was also calculated. The following table and figure show the frequency results and mean score of every questionnaire item.

Table 1: Frequency and Mean Score of Questionnaire Items

| Statements	Always	Often	Don't know	Some-times	Never	Mean
I find no difficulty in translation because of lack of vocabulary.	2	3	1	7	10	3.91
I find the proper equivalent in the target language.	1	3	2	8	9	3.87
I can translate without thinking in my mother tongue.	1	2	1	2	17	4.39
I feel no difficulty in translating technical terms.	1	1	2	6	13	4.26
I find it difficult to translate the grammatical patterns.	1	2	1	6	13	4.22
I feel no difficulty in translating cultural aspects of language.	1	2	0	9	11	4.00
I find the meanings a great problem in translation process.	2	2	0	9	10	4.00
The contextual variations cause problems for me while translating.	2	1	0	8	12	4.17
I learn translation systematically in the university.	4	2	0	9	8	3.65
I find no difficulty in comprehending the syntactic structure of English and Arabic.	1	1	0	5	16	4.48
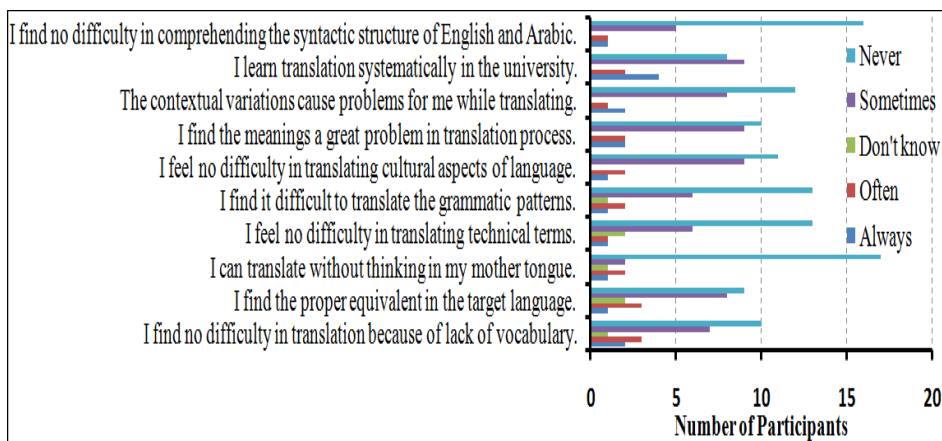
Figure 1: Frequency of Questionnaire Items

The result of the table shows that majority of the learners found difficulty in translation because of lack of vocabulary. The mean score of first item is 3.91. The result shows that the proper equivalent in the target language was also a cause in erroneous translation. The mean score of second item was 3.87. It has been found that Arab learners have to think in their mother tongue before doing translation which clearly indicates the L1 negative transfer on their translation process. The mean score for the third item was 4.39. The table shows that learners found a great trouble in translating technical terms and the mean score was 4.26. The grammatical patterns also caused difficulties for Arab learners. The mean score was 4.22. Cultural aspects are another reason for the wrong translation. Learners have poor knowledge of cultural norms and rituals of the target language and they could not translate the source text in English. The mean score for this item was 4. The semantic errors also come into play in translation process. Students found meaning difficulty in translating the text. The mean score for meaning item was 4. The contextual variations were also hampering the translation process and the mean score for this item was 4.17. The learners were dissatisfied with their learning translation as it was not systematic. The mean score for this item was 3.65. The syntactic structures turned out to be a serious problem for the learners. The mean score for this item was 4.48 which is the highest mean value of all the questionnaire items.

Table 2: Types of Errors in Translation

Type of Errors	No. of Errors	Percentage
Cultural Errors	378	23.37%
Grammatical Errors	234	14.47%
Lexical Errors	367	22.70%
Semantic Errors	267	16.51%
Syntactic Errors	371	22.95%
Total Errors	1617	100%
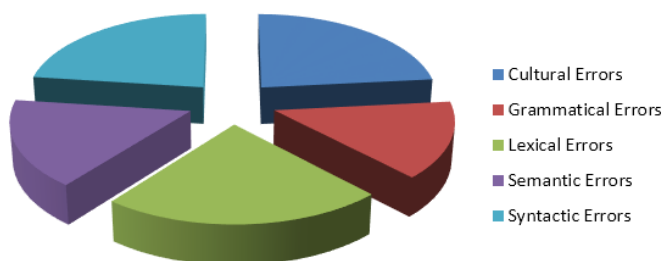
Figure 2: Type of Errors in Translation

4.1 Cultural Errors

(23.37%) of errors belonged to cultural errors. To learn a language means to learn the culture of that language. Arab students are not well aware of English culture which is evident in their translation errors. A number of errors occur in cross-cultural translation where Arabic reflects the Oriental culture and English reflects the Western culture. Cultural errors include linguistic, geographical, social and religious ones. According to Yowelly and Lataiwish (2000:107), "the greater the gap between the source and target culture, the more serious difficulty would be".

4.2 Grammatical Errors

The results show that 14.47% are grammatical. Grammatical errors occur due to complex L1 grammar and L2 grammar and their distinct word order. The

most frequent errors in grammatical category include verbs, tenses, articles, adjectives and personal pronouns.

4.3 Lexical Errors

There were (22.70%) of errors which means poor word bank caused all this. Lexical errors occur when there is a breakdown in comprehending a lexical item or an expression. The common or frequent lexical errors include synonymy, polysemy, collocations, metaphors and idioms (Ghazala, 1995:24). The Arab learners face difficulty in knowing the proper meaning of some idiomatic expressions in English. It has been observed that both in English and Arabic translations, the learners stick to literal translation. Some inappropriateness was observed in cultural substitution.

4.4 Semantic Errors

There were 16.51% of semantic errors that implies that Arab learners do not translate the text in an accurate and precise meaningful way. Semantic errors are caused by the learners because of their failure in recognizing the uncommon and complex combination of different words which are replete with certain semantic codes and to create rhetorical functions are used in religious texts. Some errors in the translation process are associated with the use of synonymous and polysemous lexical items that exhibit specific semantic features.

4.5 Syntactic Errors

There were 22.95% of syntactic errors. This indicates that Arab learners have poor syntactic knowledge of the target language.

5. Discussion of the Findings

Keeping in view a quantitative criterion, it was found that majority of translation errors are due to mother tongue influence (negative transfer of L1). The lexical and grammatical structure of L1 influence the generation of errors in L2 to a great extent. Another important factor is the failure of linguistic structure consolidation of the target language, for students are unable to render the translation. The overgeneralization is one of the causes in translation problems. Low proficiency of the target language is a huge hindrance in the way to translation.

Furthermore, the findings of the study reveal that Arab students at university of Birmingham face macro-linguistic and pragma-linguistic problems including cohesion and coherence and the lack of logical connections between sentences. The students need to adequately develop their pragma-linguistic competence for doing translation. As Fareh (2014) studied the macro-linguistic errors in Arab EFL learners' essays and found pragmatic inadequacies in their translated work.

This study found out that ESL learners have to face various problems in doing translation from L1 to L2 and vice versa. For instance, the lack of bilingual and bicultural competence causes a problem for them. That's why the learners of this level cannot come up to the mark at receptive, code-switching and productive phase. Idioms are considered to be one of the noteworthy linguistic impediments translators come across, particularly during the translation of a literary text. They bring about different tools to come over such obstacles. Following are the major causes of translation errors:

- Absence of pragma-linguistic competence
- Translation techniques are inadequate.
- Translation practices are sporadic.
- L1 negative transfer is there to a considerable extent.
- The leaners have poor exposure to the authentic English text.
- Lack of cultural awareness of both source and target langL1 and L2.
- Lack of syntactic knowledge.

5.1 Implications
The implications for translation tasks and activities may take a number of shades from lexis, sematic approaches and syntactical structures to ideologies in vogue in particular culture. The translator, of course, has to reflect upon the significance associated with cultural aspects and their necessary translation into the target language and target language culture as well.

5.2 Significance of Study
The study will help the course designers and policy makers to integrate translation modules in different undergraduate and graduate degree

programs. This will help the practical application of translation concepts and terminology from English to Arabic and vice versa. The study will pave the way for editing specialized bilingual English-Arabic and Arabic-English dictionaries.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Translation is a fundamental element in life and has played a decisive part in the development of languages like English as it derives from the universal need for mediation between speakers and writers of different languages. Translators do not intend to translate languages; they are cultures always that they translate, though it is done unconsciously. A translator becomes tricky with words to get at the nearest choice so that the meaning does not fade away in the process of translation. Actually, the problem with translation sprouts up from the alternative word bank (lexical items) the translator uses. Because every language has a varied grammatical circle, it thus may not possibly have a precise match. If a translator has a real comprehension of the culture of L1 as well L2, he can only then interpret the implied and intended meaning and translate the target text accurately.

The study recommends that translation should be taken as an academic activity at every stage of the ESL learners' academic career. Written translation has traditionally been considered more important because of its relative permanence and lasting influence on the transmission of culture. Maximum exposure to the target language is necessary for the helping learners accomplish translation appropriately. Bilingual competence is evenly a major requisite for comprehensive translation. Furthermore, the study stresses the importance of using corpora in teaching translation. Translation through machines is an innovative process in the present era. Industries rendering translation have developed modern software functioning multi tasks.

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