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Register shift in translation: A Corpus-based Study

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ملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة الي دراسة متغيرات نمط النص discourse parameters of register اثناء الترجمة من اللغة الانجليزية الي العربية والمشاكل التي تنتج عنها عند تجاهل هذه المتغيرات ، حيث ان عدم ادراك المترجم لمقاييس وللمعايير الثلاثة التي تشكل نمط النص field , tenor and mode): قد يودي الي ضعف الترجمة وتغير في المعنى الاصلي للنص .

ومن خلال هذه الدراسة تم تحليل ترجمة نصوص من الانجليزية الي العربية قام بها طلبة قسم اللغة الانجليزية ، حيث تبين بوضوح وجود اخطاء تتعلق بمتغيرات نمط النص field , tenor and mode و تأثر عملية الترجمة في نقل المعنى الحقيقي الذي يقصده الكاتب.

Abstract

This study aims at investigating the workability of the register variables in translation and the problems arising from discourse parameters with regard to English-Arabic translation. It is believed that one of the problems involved in translating a source text (ST) into a target text (TT) is locating the equivalent appropriate discourse parameters of register: field, tenor and mode. Throughout the study, the analysis of the students' translations have shown that they made errors which shifted the discourse parameters of register. This leaded to distort the intended meaning of the ST. Thus students faced difficulties in translating register parameters of the source text into the target text.

1. Introduction

Translation entails more than substitution of lexical items and grammatical items from one language to another, however; it requires cultural competence of the two languages (Casagrande, 1954, p. 338). In this regard, Grogray and Carrol emphasize the same claim by saying that

> There has been a growing awareness that translation is not just a matter of item to item equivalence, or indeed a group of items to a group of items, or structure to structure; rather it is a matter of text to text equivalence which involves variety and register considerations (cited in Buttler 1999, p. 45).

The notion of register did not receive the attention which one thinks it deserves until the London School of Linguistics singled out for close study. Little attention was made of

register until 1964, when Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964, p.130) explained register in linguistic science and language teaching. Therefore, register was developed as a concept, notably by the above mentioned scholars who highlighted the importance of register as a name given to a variety of language distinguishes according to its use.

2. Theoretical framework

In this study the writer will use the descriptive analysis as a method of the study. This descriptive kind of research gives analysis of description as clearly as possible in terms of the three register parameters (field, tenor and mode). Therefore, the researcher will describe the data and analyse them by providing sufficient explanation.

In sociolinguistics, the term register refers to specific lexical and grammatical choices as made by speakers depending on the situational context, the participants of a conversation and the function of the language in the discourse (cf. Halliday 1989, 44). According to M.A.K. Halliday, there are two main types of variation in language, social and functional. Dialects are characterized by social or regional variation, whereas register concerns functional variation.

Nevertheless, many linguists hold the view that speakers often only control one or two social varieties of language (standard and dialect), while they use a “wide range of registers” (Barnickel 1982, 13; Biber 2000, 135; Halliday 1990, 43; Trudgill 1983).

Register is also defined in terms of differences in vocabulary and syntax between different samples of language activity like a sports commentary and a church service (Hatim & Mason, 1990, p. 46).

One of the earliest application of the concept of register to translation was provided by House (1997, p.45) who demonstrated its use to the quality of translation. Her model deals with the same parameters and adds to the concept of social role relationship which in addition to the quality power dimension also included the related concept of positional role versus situational role.

According to Hatim and Mason (1990, p.55) identify register membership of text as:

Essential part of discourse processing; it involves the reader in a reconstruction of context through an analysis of what has been taken place (field), who has participated (tenor), and what the medium has been selected for relaying the message (mode). Together, the three variables set up a communicative transition in the sense that they provide the basic conditions for communications to take place.

They suggest that the three variables of register can cause problems if there are great differences between the scientific and technical cultures of the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). Therefore, to achieve a faithful rendering, a translator has to preserve the same register of the source text (ST). In other words, a translator may encounter difficulty in preserving the register of the ST, as in the examples below:

(1) Blare would be in Downing Street.

(1a) السيد بلير سيكون في شارع دوانق

The problem, here, is that the translator is unaware of the context and shifted the register of the ST. A better translation could be:

(1b) السد بلير لامحالة سيصل الي رئاسة الحكومة

In the next sections, data will be analysed and see what happen to the three variables of register in the students' translation.

3. Data Collection

The data collection consists of three texts given as a take home- exam to students at Benghazi University, Libya (the three texts are attached as appendix I). More than forty students took the exam but only the work of twenty students were selected because their answers are more reliable and presentable than the rest of students' translations. The students (for each was assigned alphabetical letters from A to T) were asked to render three English texts into their native language (Arabic). The texts are: text I, text II, and text III (see the appendix). The students who undertook the tests were final- year undergraduate students at the translation section of Benghazi University.

Before investigating of the students' corpus, analysis of the three source language texts are needed.

Therefore, we will identify the three parameters of register in each source text (ST) in order to show how the students preserve them in their translation.

3. Analysis of SL Texts

3.1. Analysis of Text I (economic text)

Here, the text is evaluative relayed by syntactic forms such as the cohesive devices and thematic structures. Thus, the evaluative information provides effect throughout: *must lift, swiftly close, would ease fears, that once an agreement… could break.* Text 1(economic) would be analyzed as follows:

Field of discourse: economic domain – International Monetary Fund and Russian government.

+ evaluative
- emotive
- referential
- connotative
- phatic

Tenor of discourse:

formal

+ accessible

public

Mode of discourse:

Channel limitation: written to be read

Thematic structure: marked as in (agreement has been reached), (would be used as…)

3.2. Analysis of Text II (scientific text)

Field of discourse: the writer intention is to persuade. It is a scientific text accounts for chemical substances. The text is evaluative, as it presents preponderance of evaluative terms such as: *contamination, poisoning, the most dangerous* and *suffered*.

+ evaluative

- referential

- connotative
- phatic

Tenor of discourse:

Formal
+ accessible
public

Mode of discourse:

Written to be read

3.3. Analysis of Text III (technical text)

The text exhibits relative degree of technicality which can be recognized through the vocabulary and the function of lexical items that exist in the structure.

Field of discourse: Technical domain and journalistic text.

+ evaluative
- referential
- connotative
- phatic

Tenor of discourse:

formal
-emotive
+accessible

Mode of discourse:

Written to be read

Having detected the parameters of register in the three source texts, investigation of students' translation is provides in the following discussions.

4. .Analysis of The students' Corpus

Students' translations have been investigated to see the misinterpreting of register field, tenor and mode) in each translation. Thus, failure to preserve any of the Hallidayan discourse parameters (field, tenor and mode) of the ST into the TT is considered macro errors. Accordingly, register errors were noted down and identified as errors related to field of discourse, tenor of discourse, or mode of discourse. These errors in representing the three discourse parameters causes shift in the register of ST.

Therefore, the errors were analyzed and classified in different tabular forms. Each table illustrated students' errors in different category. Table One, for instance, shows the errors according to each text and the type of the error. Errors were calculated for each student separately and for the group as a whole.

The following graph (figure 1.) shows these errors classified according to each variable of register.

It illustrates the total of errors and the percentage of each variable that made in rendering the TT. The highest percentage of errors occurred at field of discourse (42%), whereas the lowest percentage of errors is at mode of discourse (18%). It can be noticed that the students have faced difficulty in rendering the appropriate register, especially field of discourse. By investigating the students' corpus. the highest number of errors committed by the students is in text II, whereas the lowest number of errors occurred in text I (see Table One).

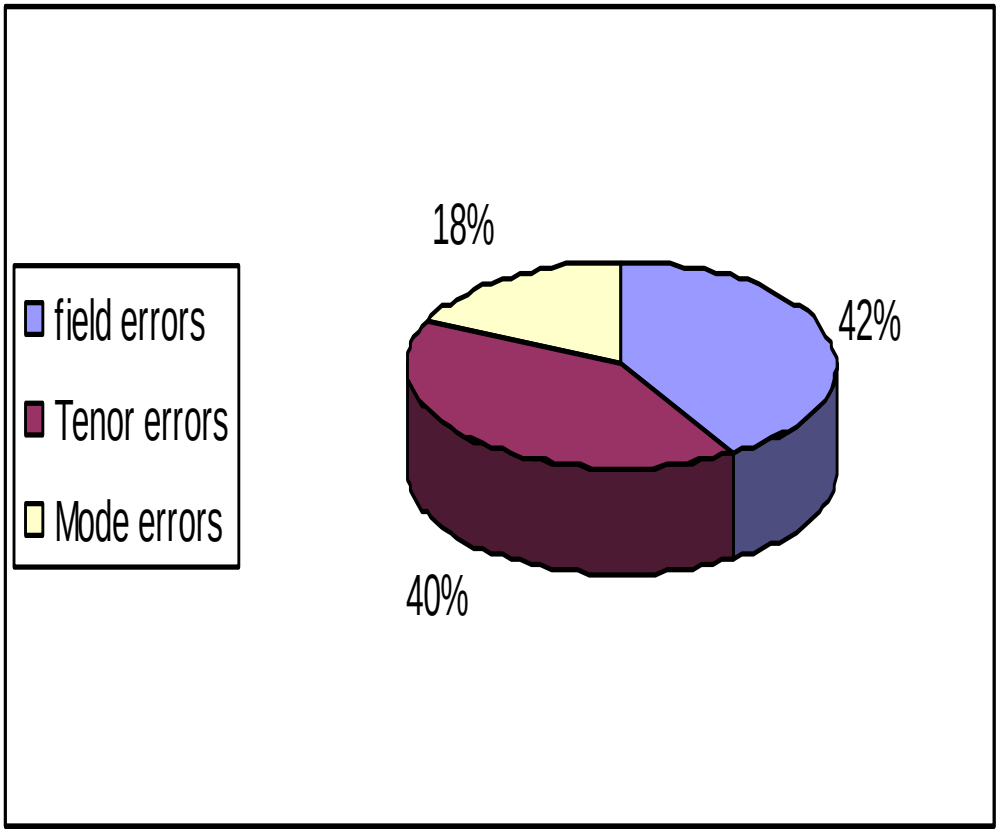

Figure 1 : division of errors

In the next sections, the three discourse parameters will be elaborated in detail by providing examples of the analysis of students' translation to see where they misrepresented and shifted each variable of register.

4.1. Field of Discourse Errors

Field of discourse is defined as "the total event, in which the text is functioning, together with the purposive activity of the speaker or writer; it thus includes the subject-matter as one element in it" (Halliday 1994, 22).

Errors Category	Text I Economic Text		Text II Scientific text		Text III Technical text		Total of errors	
	Total	100%	Total	100%	total	100%	total	100%
field errors	119	32%	126	34%	118	32%	363	41%

Table One: field errors in the texts (I, II, and III) `

In the analysis of the students' translations, it seems that most of the students have shifted the field of discourse (see Table One). Let us take some instances from the students' translations:

(1) He also hinted that the IMF's strict supervision would be used as weapon in the battle between reformist and conservative factions within the current government, which is intensifying as the June 16 election approaches.

Student (C) :

لمح ايضا بان اشراف صندوق النقد الدولي الصارم سيستعمل ***كسلاح*** في **المعركة** بين **الفئات الاصلاحية** والمحافظة ضمن الحكومة الحالية التي تشتد على اقتراب انتخاب 16 يوليو

Studentt (F):

اشار ايضا الي ان رقابة صندوق النقد الدولي الصارم ستستخدم ***كسلاح في لاشتباكات*** بين الاحزاب المحافظة والمصالحة داخل ***تيار*** الحكومة ***كوسائل*** الانتخابات في السادس عشر من شهر يوليو

Student (H):

وقد اشار الي ان المراقبة الصارمة من قبل البنك المصرفي الدولي ستستخدم كسلاح بين عملية ا***عادة اصلاح والانشقاقات الحزبية*** مع الحكومة الحالية باقتراب موعد الانتخابات في 16 يوليو.

From the above examples**,** It seems that the students are unaware of the register and made shifts in their translations. For, example, student C and F translated the items: weapon, battle, current in sentence 1 as: **الاشتباكات**، **سلاح** and student F translated the phrase '***current government***' as: الحكومة **تيار** .This translation is out of context and shifted the meaning of the original text.

The phrase 'conservative factions' was produced by student C as: ***الفئات الاصلاحية*** Another difficulty in representing the field of the discourse made by student H, when he translated ' the conservative factions' into ' اعادة الاصلاح والانشقاقات'. The acronym 'IMF' which is abbreviation of 'International Monetary Fund' (صندوق النقد الدولي) was translated by student H as: ***البنك المصرفي الدولي*** . Here the terms 'بنك' and 'مصرف ' are similar in meaning and considered as repetition.

All these mistranslations affected the intended meaning of the source text and indicate that the students shifted the field parameter of register. Consequently , They failed to achieve a successful translation.

As can be deduced from the table above and to provide further instances that the students found difficulties to maintain the appropriate field of discourse in the three texts, especially in text II (scientific), let us look at other shifts of register in the translations of the students M, H, J, and K in sentence 2 respectively.

(2) Russia must lift most oil and gas Tariffs…

(M) (2 a) علي روسيا رفع معظم بيانات أسعار الغاز و النفط

اضطرت روسيا لزيادة التعريفة علي النفط والغاز (H)

يجب علي روسيا أن ترفع أسعار النفط و الغاز(J)

ترفع روسيا تعريفة النفط و الغاز(K)

In the above examples, one can say that the students did not produce a successful translations because they only picked up isolated words and interpreted them out of their context. Thus, they translated the verb 'lift' into 'رفع' which shifted the meaning of the original from, "إلغاء التعريفة", to ترفع which implies a different meaning. Student K also translated the verb 'lift' into the verb ترفع in the past tense. Here, the student not only shifted the meaning but also changed the evaluative tone of the text. The appropriate translation could be:

يجب على الحكومة الروسية الغاء اغلبية التعريفة الجمركية التي تفرضها على الغاز والنفط

(My translation) MT

Anther misinterpretation of field can also be seen in example 3 from text II.

(3) Doxines are also produced by incarnation of chlorine waste and the burning of leaded petrol.

In this sentence the word *leaded petrol* translated *as ترشيح البترول* which is not the appropriate field in this context. This shows that the student is unaware of discourse parameters. To appreciate field failure, a successful translation could be: (3a)

و تتكون أيضا مادة الديوكسين نتيجة تشكل مخلفات الكلور و احتراق البترول المعالج بالرصاص

(MT)

Briefly, it can be concluded that field of discourse in the ST is not rendered successfully in the students' translations. We spotted some translations misinterpreted the meaning of the original text, whereas in some others are less evaluative and shifted the tone of the text. Consequently the intended meaning is not successfully achieved. Thus students should have not only bilingual competence but also cultural knowledge if communicative translation is required (Fargal & Shunnaq, 1999, p. 125).

4.2. Shift in the tenor of discourse

Tenor of discourse (sometimes also referred to as style; cf. Esser 2009, 78) describes the people that take part in an event as well as their relationships and statuses. “The tenor refers to the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary, among the participants involved” (Halliday 1994, 22.). There might be a specific hierarchy between the interlocutors, e.g. when the head of a business talks to an employee, or they may have only a temporary relationship, e.g. when a person asks an unknown pedestrian for the time. The tenor of discourse refers to the relations among producers and receivers, especially at the level of formality, such as colloquial, standard, formal and highly formal. For example, sentence 4 below would be undesirable in formal context whereas sentence 5 would be more appropriate:

(4) Cops came to his home.

(5) police came to his home.

The problems are arise when students try to transmit the meaning of culturally bound items which do not exist within the range of the TL-user knowledge. For example, the

phrase: *would ease the fears*, was rendered by some of students as: يسهل المخاوف which is not the same tenor of the ST.

To preserve the same tenor, the translation could be: يقلل من المخاوف

Consider Table Three below which shows shifts in tenor when the students translated English texts into Arabic. The total number of shifts in text I (Economic text) is 112 errors with 31% whereas the shifts in the text II (scientific text) are 130 errors with 36%.. In text III (technical text) the shifts are 113 with 31%.. Thus most of the errors were occurred in the scientific text.

Errors category	Text I Economic Text		Text II Scientific text		Text III Technical text		Total of errors	
	Total	100%	Total	100%	total	100%	total	100%
Tenor errors	112	31%	130	36%	113	31%	355	41%

This may indicate that the scientific text was difficult to the students to preserve the right tenor.

Based on the total number of error 355 with 41%, most of the translated texts are less formal and less than the STs. These shifts in tenor occurred as a result of the problems that the students encountered in translation, which can be attributed to the differences between the two language systems. This can be seen in the wrong selections of terms or expression, as well as word order, which affected the students' translations.

To illustrate problems of shifting in tenor, consider the translation of the word 'cut' in the example 6 below from text I.

(6) 50 per cent cut in tariffs on oil.

(6 a) Student B - خصم

Student E - مقطوعة

Student I - للقطع

The word "cut" was translated by the students into: خصم- مقطوعة – للقطع. This indicates that they do not transfer the right tenor. The appropriate rendering would be in (6b) which reflects the tenor of the ST.

(6b)تخفيض 50% من التعرفة المفروضة على صادرات الغاز (MT)

To sum up, students have faced problems in interpreting the appropriate tenor. At the tenor of discourse level, the majority of errors made in text II are 130 errors, whereas the lowest is in text I. Errors committed at the tenor level in text III are the most frequent, but the least are in text I. This because text III is a technical one which has more difficult jargons. It can be said here that misinterpreting of tenor does not affect greatly the propositional meaning of the text but it results in register misappreciations," causing lack of professionalism and precision" (Farghal & Shunaq, 1999, p. 161).

4.3. Shift in Mode of The discourse

Mode of discourse refers to the medium of communication which Hatim and Mason (1990, p. 49) define as a basic distinction between speech and writing. Channel which goes behind speech or writing can be classified into categories such as telephone conversation, essay and business letters.

For Halliday et al (1964, p. 91) mode refers to the part of language which is played by the language activity in the situation. In other words what participants expect language to do for them, the symbolic organization of the text, the status it has and its function in the context. Whereas Swales (1990, p.40) states that mode is associated with management of discourse, and Bell (1191, p. 188) considers mode as the choice of channel which carries the signal.

This variable determines the role and function of language in a particular situation. When analyzing the mode of a text, the main question is ‘What is achieved by the use of language in this context?’ For example, a fairy tale (in written form) may have a narrative or entertaining function. A spoken conversation can be argumentative (in a discussion) or phatic (e.g. to contact someone or to keep in touch with someone).

It can be said that shift in mode can create problems in translation, for example, in subtitling; mode of discourse can change spontaneous spoken conversation into written text that is to be read as if heard. Therefore, translator’s task has to find means to convey the changes of mode in the subtitles.

By analyzing the students' translations, we notice that some target texts lack cohesion and clausal linkage.

Table Four illustrates the total number of mode errors in each text. It can be seen that the number of mode errors is low especially in text I (Economic text). That is the total number of errors were made in text II (scientific text) is 61 with 38% which indicates that the students encountered more problems to preserve the mode of text.

Errors category	**Text I** (Economic Text)		**Text II** (Scientific text)		**Text III** (Technical text)		Total of Errors	
	Total	100%	Total	100 %	total	100%	total	100%
Mode Errors	42	**26%**	61	**38%**	55	**34%**	**158**	20%

(Table four: Mode shift in the three texts)

Consider example 7 from students' translation to text III (the technical text)

(7) Oozing water has begun to appear on the part of the left foot.

Student N .بداء تظهر مياه المستنقع على جزء من القدم اليسرى

Student I لقد بداء ظهور انهيار الرجل اليسرى و انهيار ابوالهول

These translations show that the students encountered the problem of thematic structure. That is to say the thematic structure is realized differently in English and Arabic. Thus, in sentence 18, 'oozing water' is theme, whereas the translations in N and I, theme is the verb ' has begun'/ بداء. Therefore, there is a shift in the structure of the sentence.

It has been also noticed in some students' translations, that the structure is shifted because of the difference between the two systems of both languages (English and Arabic). That is translating the passive structure raised problem in students translation. as in student I's translation of sentence 7.

(7) Once agreement has been reached.

Student I:

(7a) هذه المرة بلغت الموافقة

Sentence 7 is in a passive structure and was misinterpreted by the student in active because the student was not aware of rendering the passive structure. The proper rendering would be:

(7b)- عندما يتم التوصل إلي اتفاقية

Therefore, in contrast with the number of shifts in the translated texts that students made at the other two types of discourse (field and tenor) with number of shifts at the mode parameter, mode shifts are considered to be less problematic for the students.

5. Conclusion

The problems of the three discourse parameters of register were identified and investigated in the students' translations. The students seem to have encountered problems in transferring the register variables of the ST into the TT especially at the level of field and tenor of discourse. Most problems were made at the field of discourse parameter and in texts II and III (scientific and technical) which may be attributed to the differences of scientific and technical cultures of the two languages (English and Arabic).This may indicate that the students have not exposed to workshops that deal with discourse analysis. Furthermore, it is believed that the students do not have a full knowledge of the SL. It is part of the students' duty to have a wide knowledge of the language which being translated.

Generally, most of the students' translations are not as precise as the original; in that they lack equivalent register of the original text. The items that were chosen are less precise and deviated from the original expressions. students seem to have failed to preserve the register variables of the ST in the TT.

In this regard that students should be encouraged to perform text analysis in order to avoid misinterpreting register and retrieve the words from their context.

This can be achieved by training students to a approach texts rather than sentences and words, i.e. they should analyze the text on both micro and macro levels in order to reach as Nida and Taber (1969) staid, the closest natural equivalent.

Finally, to be successful i.e. to act in accordance of communicative purpose, translator cannot ignore register variables. Hence, register is not just useful, but necessary concepts for a translator. It is important for trainee translators to be aware of the conventions of discourse parameters of register in different languages.

It is no doubt that this research cannot provide solutions to all problems of register countered in this study. Therefore, future research can still be made to investigate register in literally texts when translating from Arabic into English or vice versa.

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