An Analysis of the Problems Encountering Libyan Pre-service Translators in the Faculty of Arts, the University of Benghazi, in Translating Arabic Texts into English

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Abstract:
This paper aims to explore the deficiencies that translation students encounter when transferring texts from their L1, Arabic, into English, their L2. They make mistakes when they translate in terms of syntactic, non-equivalent lexical, and synonymy errors. Another aim of this study is to review the literature focusing on the interference of the translator’s L1 in the translation process and therefore its impact on the translation outputs. In order to investigate this interference, we have collected five Arabic sentences from the internet. Ten randomly students of English were chosen as a sample of this study from Semester four at the University of Benghazi (El-Marj Campus). They were asked to translate these sentences into English without consulting other people. Only Arabic-English dictionaries were allowed in order to see how they could deal with them. The results of this investigation showed that these students failed to provide good translations of these sentences due to the interference of their mother language, Arabic, to the translation process.

Keywords: translation, interference, semantic, syntactic errors, synonymy.
1. Introduction

Generally speaking, translation is a procedure of transferring meaning from one language (the source language or SL) into another language (the target language or TL). This procedure is particularly difficult when translating into a TL that is not the translator’s first language (L1). In such cases, the translation outcome is likely to be a ‘mistranslation’. This is because translators can only see the text from the linguistic and cultural context of their first language (L1). If not, there will be misunderstanding of the translated text. The major challenge here is to enable target readers to read the translated texts as if they were reading them as SL.

This term is seen by others (e.g., Ibrahim, 2015; Omar, 2012; Erarslan & Hol, [12] as the influence of the native language (L1) on the learning of the second language (L2). Interference errors can be clearly seen in translation. Translation is considered to be a very important tool in all fields of communication and education. It is used to convey and share information among different cultures with different backgrounds and it is considered a means of communication among people around the world. It gives them the ability to communicate their thoughts, ideas, feelings, cultures and notions. The widespread notion of translation may lead to the appearance of errors. Errors are usually seen in written translation especially in lexicon, syntax and semantics. Most of the errors found in translation are triggered by the interference of the first language. The influence of the first language occurs naturally and the translator does not usually notice the error.

Although translators use bilingual dictionaries to obtain the nearest equivalents of the unfamiliar words to them in the TL - English - they continue to fail to achieve ‘naturalness’. That is to say, to produce a very suitable translated text that looks like the original. In addition, the use of incorrect syntactic, non-equivalent lexical, and synonymy errors and mistakes makes the translated text stand ‘unnatural’.

2. Literature Review

Fayez Aqel [3] explores the instructors’ and students' reactions to using Arabic language in teaching English as a foreign language in the Department of English and Modern European Languages at the University of Qatar. He concluded by recommending a judicious use of Arabic in EFL teaching, and when it is the shortest possible route to make learners understand, since it is believed that the mother tongue does have a vital, facilitating role in teaching the foreign language.

Hiroe, Kobayashi and Carol Rinner [9] examined how the structure of students’ L1 (i.e. Japanese) affected their translation outputs (in English). A sample of forty-eight Japanese students from Hiroshima University majoring in foreign languages were asked to write something in their L1 and to then translate it into English. All of them had studied English for at least six years and had ability levels varying from low intermediate to low advanced. The authors analysed samples of these translations in order to examine two main important issues; firstly, to discuss the variances between the texts resulting from writing in Japanese and then translating what is written into English; secondly, studying the relationship between these two writing processes and students’ language proficiency. They analyse students’ writings
in terms of syntax and error frequency, and how these interfere with students’ communication of the intended meaning, lexical choice, and word order levels. It has been found out that the syntactic and stylistic errors were the most common mistakes the students made when translating from L1. They concluded that, “the student questionnaire responses support the notion that too much dependency on the L1 may inhibit L2 writing and translation performance. These authors raised some problems that had not been widely discussed by other scholars of translation. Teachers of translation ask their students to render from their L1 into the L2 without knowing that there are differences between them at many surface levels. Translating from students’ L1 might constitute many textual problems. This study differs from Rinnert and Kobayashi’s [9] study because it analyses how difficult it is to apply L1 thinking to that of the L2. Because here in my study, students do not have to write first and then translate what they have written into English, rather, the samples were provided to them and they have to translate them into English. As analysis of the data gathered for this study will show, this often produces text that cannot be understood by target readers

The work of Håkan Ringbom [23] concerned the influence of students’ L1 on their translation of lexical items. In his study, Ringbom collected twenty-eight English sentences. They were given to randomly chosen, twenty one Finnish and twenty four Swedish students. They have studied English for seven years and a half. He classified his errors into three categories: approximation, acceptable and missing. According to him, approximation means ‘near-synonymy’; the second category, according to him, is ‘acceptable ‘acceptable’ means it is accepted to do well in a specific word. i.e rendered a word into English successfully. Missing, on the other hand, means ‘blank’ i.e. left without correspondence. He concludes his study by discovering that learners have failed to produce the correct form of the word. ‘Word’ play an important role in the translation process. Choosing the right synonymy and the right equivalent is a matter of defy to the students of translation. Especially when they attempt to render from their mother tongue into a language which has huge difference from Arabic, i.e English as will be shown in my case of study.

Like many Western translation experts, Peter Newmark [19] discouraged translation from L1 into L2 on the grounds that even if professional translators live in a target culture for a very long time they would still be likely to commit collocational mistakes. Newmark [19] insists that: “translators rightly translate into their own language”. However, in the Arab context it is relatively common for translators to work into their L2, particularly English .Jamoussi, [14]. The manifestation of meaning can only be expressed naturally when translators render into their L1. This is because they have a wide range of vocabulary to use, a strong background in the culture, and in linguistic usage. Dickins et al. [5] support this point of view by stating that, “Translator […] focuses on translation into the mother tongue, because higher quality is achieved in that direction than in translating into a foreign language”.

This means that when translating a text, you have to translate into your language. However, what if students of translation faced a sudden require to render from their own language, Arabic, into a second language, English? Should they neglect it? Or stand helpless? This study will show the deficiencies that a translation
student have when rendering into another language in order to clarify to them the weakness and strengthens that they might face during the translation process.

Interference from the students’ L1 can cause difficulties when they are attempting to translate into L2. This can take numerous forms.

The former will struggle to provide a suitable semantic and linguistic signs of the L2 and the latter will not comprehend this product when it is rendered into their language because it is not the translator’s L1. Most of the students rendering from L1 into L2 do not know if a given linguistic sign is the right counterpart or not.

This study uses a small sample of work by students to explore the types of difficulties typically encountered by EFL students with Arabic as L1 when they attempt to render English sentences into their mother tongue using a word-for-word translation technique. It also reflects on how we set students up to fail and how as teachers we can make small improvements to ensure that these type of exercises are more meaningful and help to prepare students of EFL to rethink their attitude towards translation.

This is based upon a study of the inappropriate renderings produced by Libyan university students taking a translation course on which they are required to translate individual/isolated sentences from Arabic (L1) into English (L2). The main aim of this study is to explore the problems that face English department students when they draw on L1 expressions and attitudes in the translation process.

In addition, the study will attempt to answer the following question:
- What are the main types of linguistic interference that affect the translation of the chosen sample of students?
- What syntactic, non-equivalent lexical, and synonymy errors might students face when translating from their L1?

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

3.1 The context for the study

The data in this study consist of some Arabic sentences regarding psychological advices. The sentences were taken from the internet. The sentences were chosen because when rendering them from Arabic into English, there will be syntactic, semantic, and non-equivalent lexical errors due to the major differences between Arabic and English in terms of sentence structure. Ten undergraduate students from the English Department at El-Marj Campus at the University of Benghazi, Libya participated in the translation of the samples.

| Number of males | 2 |
| Number of females | 8 |

The students were asked to translate the sentences into English. They were allowed to use dictionaries. The students were randomly allocated the numbers 1-10 in order to simplify the data analysis process. This research was conducted using Kussmaul’s
[15] analysis method. This method mainly comprises two important issues: semantic and pragmatic analysis. Each student response was handled on its own merits and analysed separately.

3.2 Results

The main focus here is to present the results of the students’ translations from Arabic (the students’ L1) into English, their (L2). These samples made by a randomly chosen group of translation students. The study was conducted to assess how these errors affected the message of the intended meaning of the original texts when translated into the TL, English. In other words, this analysis primarily focuses on the errors made by students when they translated the texts from Arabic into English. Semantic errors were subcategorised into two levels: synonymy errors and non-equivalent word errors. Synonym errors deal with the students’ wrong selection for the right linguistic sign; non-equivalent errors, on the other hand, deal with the students’ failure in giving a correct translation for a given word.

Figure 1 shows that the participant students made sixty nine (69) mistakes when they translated the Arabic sentences into English. Of these 69 mistakes, 27 were syntactic, 27 were non-equivalent lexical mistakes, and only 15 were synonymy mistakes. As presented in Figure 1, the most frequent errors were syntactic (39%), and non-equivalent lexical errors (39%), with synonymy errors constituting about (22%) of the total mistakes.

These mistakes are scrutinized in more detail below.

![Figure 1. Types of student errors in percentages.](image-url)
3.2.1 Syntactic Level Errors

Syntactic level translation errors are those made at the grammatical structure level. At this type of errors, it has been noticed that the total number of this kind of errors was 27. It is noticed that the majority of errors at syntactic level were relevant to the use of the definite article ‘the’, followed by the incorrect use of the preposition ‘of’ in some translations, and finally the wrong structure for some translated sentences into English. The misuse of the definite article ‘the’ is because the text is rendered by students for whom English is not their L1. It was revealed that the majority of the students were still confused when they translated definite articles from Arabic into English. They appeared to believe that Arabic has the same grammatical structure as English. Thus, they tended to put the articles in their translated sentences relying on their competence of Arabic, not English and how authentic English functions. However, such mistakes do not generally affect the general meaning of the TT. For instance, the definite article “the” is used to refer to a particular member of something. The translations provided by the participant students suggested that they thought that the definite article in Arabic, ‘ال’ can be used to refer to both a particular member of something; and when we talk about something in general. They applied word-for-word translation when rendering the Arabic sentences and that resulted in major deficiencies in the English versions they produced.

As previously noted, sometimes syntactic errors do not affect the meaning of the target text; however, we should not turn a blind eye to the TL grammatical structures and rules. The definite article ‘the’ in English has many usages. However, the most important use for the definite article in English is when we specify something. McCarthy, [18]. The Arabic word “الفن” is a general term that refers to many types of interesting things such as music, drama, painting, etc. The ST mentions this term in general. Therefore, it might be wrong if we render ‘ال’ into ‘the’ as most of the participants did. Let us consider the following example:

---The art is the method of healthy expression

Since the Arabic ST contains a definite article ‘ال’ and can be used to refer to generalisations, it is more accurate to render it into English as an indefinite in order to follow English grammatical rules. Therefore, the above term was translated by the 20% of the participants into English as follows:

- Art is a healthy picture for the expression.

Another frequently made syntactical mistake in the participants’ attempts to translate the sentences from L1 into L2 was the incorrect usage of the preposition ‘to’. As is in the following examples:

- The art to comfort from pressure.
- Art to rest from stress.
- Art to rest of the pressure.

The participants, in these cases, used the prepositions ‘to’ and instead of ‘for’. The Arabic preposition ‘ل’ is sometimes translated into English as ‘for’. The English preposition ‘to’ is used to refer to something moving toward something else.
case of an infinitive, the ‘to’ needs a verb in order to be the object of the verb. The above sentences are structured as follows: subject + to infinitive + complement. This structure stands odd in English. The incorrect choice of the above preposition was the result of L1 interference. Consequently, they presented a weak translation for the preposition. Students needed to pay more attention to the grammatical structure of the TL when they rendered from their own language.

3.2.2 Semantic errors: Lexical Non-Equivalence

As previously noted, syntactic errors affect the meaning of the TT. They may constitute a little confusion for the target readers but they still comprehend the intended meaning, at least, in its broadest sense. Unlike syntactic errors, non-equivalent lexical errors can affect completely the intended meaning of the TT. The translation process becomes even more challenging when the translators are working on two distant languages such as Arabic and English. They are completely different with regard to syntax, structure and even semantics. Most of the participant students provided incorrect translations. The percentage of this kind of errors was 39% of the total number of errors. Around 80% of them provided incorrect translations for the following sentence because they were affected by L1 interference. Thus in Arabic sentence number 5, Participants encountered problems when attempted to render the Arabic “ترجمة” into English as ‘translation’. We can deduce that the participant students resorted to the bilingual dictionary and picked up the word ‘translate’ as a translation for the word, “ترجمة”. They may not know the most suitable L2 equivalent for this word in the target language. The choice of the equivalent word might be a challenge to the translators as there are multiple possibilities in the target language. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to choose the correct and equivalent one.

According to Pokorn [21] “The TL should be the translator’s mother tongue, since he qualifies the language and culture the translator is supposed to translate into as ‘domestic’, and the SL culture as ‘foreign’. In terms of context, the Arabic, “ترجمة” does not mean the “translation process” as the students guess. Instead, in this context, it means ‘to express’ because the sentence is intended to mean "the effect of the arts on the emotional states of humans".

Another example of L1 interference can be found in the students’ translation of Arabic sentence number 3:

100% of participant students have rendered the Arabic ‘رياضة’ into English as ‘sport’. Let us consider the following sample translation:

- The art for sport.

In its most commonly used Arabic equivalent the word (رياضة) is translated into English as (sport), but the Arabic word here has a context. The context plays a decisive role in the process of translation and is largely connected with semantic translation. According to Newmark [20]: “Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original”. In their translations, the participant students made errors due to their misunderstanding of the term ‘sport’ in English which refers to activities including all kinds of sports such as football, tennis, volleyball, etc. The participant students translated ‘رياضة’ into ‘sport’ because they
immediately resorted to a bilingual dictionary and selected the first word on the list of the equivalent words without paying any attention to the context. A suitable translation for the Arabic term here and according to the context would be ‘exercises’. This is because this term refers to movement of the body. This cannot be comprehended unless students translate into their L1 in order to avoid problems of picking non-equivalent lexical errors.

Some other non-equivalent translations of the work of the participant students in the sample show that the participants failed to produce the exact equivalent semantic translation. It seems that they understand the ST, which is their L1; however; the incorrect translation of words in these sentences can have a negative effect on its intended meaning. Examples include:

- The art is a true image of the expression.
- The art allows you to translate current emotional contexts.
- Art for convenience of pressure.
- The art allows you to express how do you feel.

In their translation of the above sentences, students were confused with the underlined terms. They used these words because they did not have the ability to produce the exact equivalents since they are translating from their L1 into L2. The participant students were not sure if it were the correct semantic equivalent in the other language or not.

### 3.2.3 Semantic errors: Synonymy

Generally speaking, choosing the right synonym is a huge part for successful translation. In this regard, Kussmaul [15]: argues: “To pick out the meaning of a polysemous word which fits into the context is the essential to an adequate translation. The next step would be finding an adequate equivalent”. Synonymy errors constituted 22% of the total errors in this study. When the same problem was discussed with the participant students the of using collocation while translating was highlighted. This problem can be seen in the students’ translations of Arabic sentence 1:

Three of the participants translated the underlined word as ‘picture’. Another four rendered it as, ‘image’:

- Art is a healthy picture to express. (30%)
- Art is a healthy image for expression. (40%)

In the process of translating this sentence, students did not understand the ST’s intended meaning although it was in their L1. The original 'صورة' means 'form' in Arabic, which is ‘form’. This is because, the context says that art is a ‘form’ not an ‘image’ or a ‘picture’. In Arabic, the word 'صورة' can also mean ‘form’. The students encountered a major challenge here because they did not read the ST first, analyse it, and then transfer it into the TL.
The word ‘image’ cannot affect the meaning in general. However, it does not provide the precise synonymy. ‘Form’ would be a better choice for the reason that this is more suitable and acceptable by the target audience.

4. Conclusion

When teaching students to translate from L1 into L2 we should train them on how to mind the differences between languages and avoid the influence of their L1 on their production of the L2 text(s) when they translate.

When students translate from their L1 into another language (English in our case), they encounter grammatical, lexical and syntactic issues. In order to overcome these difficulties and sustain the quality of the translation output, the translators should avoid translating from their L1. They should also learn as much as possible about the L2 culture and environment. This can be adequately achieved by actually living (and preferably studying) in an English speaking society for at least one year. Their knowledge of the target culture would tremendously improve and therefore their abilities to produce more “natural” English texts improves as well.

The Arabic sentences used in the intervention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic Sentences</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- الفن هو صورة صحية للتعبير</td>
<td>The art is a healthy form of expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- الفن لراحة من الضغوط</td>
<td>The art relieves stress/ Art for stress relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- الفن للرياضة</td>
<td>Art for exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- الفن قادر أن يخفف من حالة الضغوط النفسية</td>
<td>Art can ease your psychological pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- الفن يسمح لك بترجمة حالات العاطفية الحالية</td>
<td>Art allows you to express your current emotional state.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The art is the method of healthy expression
Art is a healthy picture for the expression
The art is a true image of the expression
Art is a healthy picture to express. (30%)
Art is a healthy image for expression. (40%) .

The art to comfort from pressure.
Art to rest from stress.
Art to rest of the pressure.

The art for sport.

Art for convenience of pressure.
Art allows you to express your current emotional state. The art allows you to translate current emotional contexts. The art allows you to express how do you feel.

80% of them rendered the Arabic word ‘الفن‘ into English as: ‘the Art’. This is actually a very subtle point in English - we don’t talk about the art but we do talk about the Arts!

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