

OBSTACLES THAT TRANSLATORS ENCOUNTER WHEN TRANSLATING POLITICAL SPEECHES FROM ENGLISH INTO ARABIC

Rawsan K. Waseej¹, Bader S. Dweik²

¹Independent Researcher, IRAQ;

²Emeritus Professor of Linguistics, JORDAN.

¹rawsank@yahoo.com, ²drdweik@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating the obstacles that graduate students majoring in English encounter when translating political texts from English into Arabic. The study is based on translating (12) statements extracted from a speech of the king of Jordan i.e. His Majesty King Abdullah II, delivered at the European Parliament in France (January 15, 2020). The sample of the study consisted of (20) graduate students majoring in English enrolled in one of the Jordanian universities, selected for participation on grounds of convenience. Results of the study revealed that the participants encountered several obstacles such as resorting to literal translation rather than functional translation, which renders the equivalent meaning of the source text and relying on guessing the meaning rather than understanding the context. Furthermore, the results revealed that the participants showed unfamiliarity with political terminology and stylistic devices in the source language and the target language as well. Some obstacles stemmed from the linguistic and cultural differences between Arabic and English. Such differences cause negative transfer or interference.

Keywords: Obstacles, English, Arabic, Translation, Political speech.

INTRODUCTION

Translation is a method of rendering a text's context, ideas or messages from one language to another. This process is based mainly on the accuracy, consistency, and naturalness of the meaning and concepts. It is important that the target text readers receive and accept the same information as the source text readers do (Nugroho, 2007).

Translation is critical in understanding global relationships in arts, science, law, economics, literature, technology and politics. Translation becomes unavoidable as it fosters human experiences, experiments and findings. It recreates and intensifies life's channel and diversifies human activity (Al-Zu'bi, 2012). Translation requires clarity and accuracy whereby any little mistake in translation may be costly and may lead to huge consequences. Recently, the need for political translators has grown widely due to global political circumstances, which perhaps may explain the growing interest in political translation that deals with political conflicts as seen in territorial disputes and drafting international political agreements (Sarcevic, 2000).

Newmark (1991) argues that politics is the most universal aspect of human activity. He also argues that politics often reflects on language and appears in powerful emotive terms or important jargon. Politics represents the most general and universal aspects of human activity. Translating political discourse is important because of the cultural, linguistic and psychological diversity. Political translation deals with topics related to political speeches,

political programs, political agreements, public relations, protocols, official events, ceremonies, historical and societal phenomena as well as treaties among others. It also involves doctrines, ideologies, policies, conferences, international organizations and governments.

However, many issues are expected to emerge in the translation of political discourse. Ghazala (1994) gives an example of these obstacles such as long sentences, vague language and ambiguity. Political discourses are difficult to translate because politicians do not deliver their speeches to be translated for foreign audiences. Sárosi-Márdirosz (2014) argued that in some cases, translators are not able to produce parallel texts that are identical in meaning, or unable to produce the political and historical effect.

Statement of the problem

Translation requires different kinds of knowledge such as knowledge in the source language and the target language, knowledge in the fields under investigation, knowledge in methods of translation and others. The political language involves cultural, linguistic and psychological diversity. Because translating political discourse requires diverse kinds of knowledge, translators may encounter obstacles that affect their work.

Objective and question of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the obstacles that graduate students encounter when they translate political texts and speeches from English into Arabic. The study tries to answer the following question:

What are the obstacles that graduate students majoring in English face while translating political texts and speeches from English into Arabic?

Significance of the study

Politics and political issues are so important in our life. In most cases, politics is communicated through English. In order to understand these issues, there is a need for accurate translation. Although research regarding politics is conducted in the world, there is little research performed in Jordan which addresses the obstacles that face translators in Jordan. The study may be of benefit to students, translators and researchers as well.

Limitations and limits of the study

Results of this study are limited to the sample and instrument used in this study and may not be generalized to all graduate students since the sample does not include all graduate students in Jordan. It is only limited to the political speech included in the test. The study was conducted in 2020.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Lederer (2003, p. 36), defines translation as "the process of trying to establish equality between two texts expressed in two different languages". By definition, these equivalents always depend on the nature of the two texts, the purpose, and the relationship between the two cultures.

Nida (2001) states that translators ought not to know the meaning of all words the way they are listed in a comprehensive dictionary nor need to analyze the grammatical structures of every single word. Instead, they ought to adequately understand the text they want to translate. This indicates that the context is an important dimension in translation and that translators should consider both the text and what is beyond the text. Thus, some students fail to render

the assigned political excerpts although they look up the meaning of the new lexis because the context is not available. All previous linguists and translation theorists agree that translation is transferring the Source Language Text (SLT) into the Target Language Text (TLT). They also point to the different approaches and treatments of the ST per the contextual factors of the ST. More importantly, translation theorists reveal out either explicitly or implicitly the significance of the translation range, in which translators may keep close to the ST or they may not be based on the ST type and the purpose of the translation. It is assumed that the text type is a determinant factor that steers the translator's strategy of how to handle the ST.

Baker (1992) points out that one of the main obstacles that translators often face is the lack of equality or inequality. Baker notes that in some cases it is difficult for translators to assign TL equivalent to the terminology of SL because the two languages (SL and TL) are not the same. Because translation occurs culturally and linguistically between two different languages, translators often encounter obstacles related to lack of parity.

Although linguists and translation theorists have classified translation obstacles differently, the consensus among them is that these obstacles exist in all types of translated texts, but to varying degrees. In general, these obstacles can be classified differently. Some of them are related to the linguistic or cultural implementation of these two languages. Others are related to the type of text, context, and the use of language. In general, these difficulties are more attractive in political discourse, because there are two different cultures and audiences, and they have two different linguistic styles and characteristics. In addition, privacy is unique in practical political discussions.

Wallmach & Kruger (1999) believe that translation from one language to another often results in errors that result in incorrect connections to the original text. Errors are usually caused by the transfer of languages that receive semantic correspondence between two languages. Language transfer causes negative translation effects by introducing language structures for target language readers that are either unknown or lacking.

Empirical studies

Salih and Dweik (2021) investigated the level of adequacy of using some translation procedures in reflecting the ideas presented by the source writers in political texts. It also aimed to explore the obstacles that the translators encountered in the translation of political and cultural expressions. A purposive sample of 20 novice EFL medical students at AL-Nahrain University of Iraq was chosen for the purpose of answering the research question. The data were collected by employing a translation test. The test included 10 statements with a total of 22 political and cultural expressions. The findings of this study showed that the translators succeeded in rendering adequate translations for proper nouns and names of organizations since these expressions can be translated in a variety of procedures. However, they failed to adequately translate stylistic features such as proverbs, idioms, metaphors, and collocations. The results also revealed that the major obstacles that the translators encountered were related to (1) their knowledge of the context, (2) lack of experience and knowledge in translation procedures, and (3) lack of competence in their SL and/or TL linguistic knowledge.

Dweik and Othman (2017) explored language interference obstacles in translating written texts from Arabic into English. They conducted a translation test given to graduate students at a Jordanian university. The test included a variety of cultural expressions, mainly political, historical and religious. The results showed that lexical and grammatical interference

occurred because of students' lack of knowledge and awareness of the source and target languages.

AShubbak (2013) explored how Arab translators rendered sensitive news items from English into Arabic. The researcher examined news reports rendered from English into Arabic in five news agencies and daily newspapers, namely the BBC, AFP, Reuters, France 24, and Alrai Jordanian Daily Newspaper. Furthermore, a twenty-five item test was conducted to graduate students enrolled in English language programs at two Jordanian universities. The results showed that Arab translators used addition, omission, mediation (semantic change) and dynamic equivalence as manipulative strategies when they rendered controversial news items. AShubbak also indicated that manipulative strategies varied between experienced and inexperienced translators due to the policy of the news agencies; and novice translators' translation decidedly affected by their political and cultural affiliations. Their ideological intervention was consciously used and not for lack of knowledge or incompetency.

Al-Zu'bi (2012) examined the difficulties that students faced when translating political expressions from His majesty King Abdullah II's speech titled 'Our Last best Chance'. Al-Zu'bi also explored the strategies used in translating political texts. A thirty-item translation test was designed and given to 40 graduate students in two Jordanian universities. The study showed that most students faced difficulties because of their unfamiliarity with political expressions, producing improper equivalence in the TL, and using to literal translation.

Al-Otوم (2011) discussed the rhetorical and lexical obstacles encountered when translating three American presidential inaugural speeches. Al-Outum pointed out that finding an adequate rhetorical and lexical equivalence in rendering English political speeches into Arabic formed serious challenge to Arab translators. The study showed that the students who translated the speeches have difficulties in rendering the meaning rather than conserving the style while rendering the rhetorical devices as metaphors, repetition, similes among others. They resorted to literal translation especially in rendering idioms and phrasal verbs.

METHODOLOGY

Sample of the study

The sample of the study consisted of twenty M.A students majoring in English language studying at a Jordanian university, during the academic year 2019/2020. The sample was selected on grounds of convenience and availability. The demographic background of the participants is presented in presented in Table (1). It included social data such as age, gender, nationality, level of education.

While some copies of the test were handed in personally, others were distributed via email to the participants. The participants were given enough time to translate the items of the test and were allowed to use available dictionaries, books or other resources.

Table 1. Demographic data of the participants

Age		Nationality	
22-27	5	Jordanian	14
28-33	6	Others	6
34 and above	9	Level of Education	

Gender		Bachelor	-
Male	09	Master	20
Female	11		

The translation test

The researchers circulated a translation test to the twenty participants. The test aimed to investigate the possible obstacles they encountered while translating political texts/expressions. The test included twelve statements which were chosen from His Majesty King Abdullah II's speech, delivered at the European Parliament in France (January 15, 2020). The respondents were required to translate them from English into Arabic.

The test was corrected by showing the percentages of the adequate and inadequate answers along with examples from the received translations. The basis for correcting the translations was the official translation of the speech presented in His Majesty King Abdullah II's official website (<https://kingabdullah.jo>).

- [1] Translations are performed adequately (correct) if they are equivalent to the ST syntactically and semantically.
- [2] Translations which are considered inadequate (wrong) if the received translation is syntactically and semantically wrong.

Validity and reliability of the test

The test was validated before it was distributed to the sample by a panel of jurors who were requested to comment on the suitability of the content and the form of the test items. As for measuring the reliability of the test, a test and retest procedure was conducted by giving the test to six students who were excluded from the sample of the study. Two weeks later, the test was handed in again to the same students and the results of the test were reliable and stable.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the question of the study, which is:

What are the obstacles that graduate students in English face while translating political texts and speeches from English into Arabic?

ITEM (1): The people who have entrusted us with their hopes and fears

This statement was translated adequately by 90% of the participants as

الذين انتمنونا على آمالهم ومخاوفهم
الناس الذين اوكلوا الينا آمالهم ومخاوفهم

It is equivalent to the model of translation presented in His Majesty King Abdullah II's official website. Only 10% of the students provided inadequate translations as

الذي عهدنا بآمالهم ومخاوفهم

Such a translation includes grammatical and lexical errors, namely *الذي* and *عهدنا*.

ITEM (2): So, let me start with our region's deepest wound.

This item was translated adequately by 90% of the students as

لذلك ، أسمحوا لي أن أبدأ بأعمق جرح في منطقتنا
إذا أسمحوا لي أن أبدأ بأعمق جرح في منطقتنا

Such translations are equivalent to the model of translation presented in His Majesty King Abdullah II's official website. Only 10% of the students provided inadequate translations as (لذا، أسمحوا لي أن أبدأ بمنطقتنا الأكثر دماراً). This translation does not match the intended meaning of the ST. The translator here added the word دماراً which is not mentioned in the source text.

ITEM (3): Seventy-plus years of conflict have played havoc with hopes for justice.

Eighty percent of the students translated this item adequately as

إن أكثر من سبعين عاما من الصراع قد أودت بأمال تحقيق العدالة
لقد تسبب الصراع الذي دام أكثر من سبعين عاما في دمار الأمل في تحقيق العدالة

The first translation is equivalent to the model translation provided and the second translation matches the ST meaning. Yet, 20% of the students translated it incorrectly as

لعب الصراع لأكثر من سبعين عامًا دمارًا مع الأمل للعدالة

by using the literal translation and deletion.

ITEM (4): Today, one-state proponents are actively seeking to impose an unthinkable solution on the region and the world—one state, propped up by structural inequalities, with Palestinians as second-class subjects.

Ninety percent of the students translated it adequately as

واليوم، يسعى مناصرو حل الدولة الواحدة إلى فرض حل لا يمكن تصوره على المنطقة والعالم: دولة واحدة مبنية على
أسس غير عادلة، تضع الفلسطينيين في مرتبة مواطنين من الدرجة الثانية
(يسعى المناصرين إلى فرض حل لا يمكن تخيله على المنطقة والعالم وهو مبني على أساس غير عادل قائم على جعل
الفلسطينيين مواطنين من الدرجة الثانية)

. However, ten percent of the students translated it incorrectly as

(واليوم ، يسعى الإحصائيون الواحدون بنشاط إلى فرض حل لا يمكن تصوره على المنطقة والعالم كدولة واحدة، يدعمها)
عدم المساواة الهيكلية مع الفلسطينيين و معاملتهم كرعايا من الدرجة الثانية).

The translators may have guessed the meaning without referring to the contextual meaning of the underlined words. They also used literal translation as in الواحدون and الهيكلية.

ITEM (5): Can we afford to rob Christians and Muslims alike of the spirituality, peace, and coexistence that this city symbolizes, and instead allow it to descend into political conflict?

Ninety percent of the students provided adequate translations such as

(هل يمكننا تحمل عواقب سلب المسلمين والمسيحيين على حد سواء من الروحية والسلام والعيش المشترك التي ترمز
إليها. هذه المدينة، والسماح لها بدلا من ذلك بالانحدار إلى صراع سياسي؟)
(هل يمكننا ان نحرّم المسيحيين والمسلمين على حد سواء من الروحية والسلام والتعايش التي ترمز إليها هذه المدينة ،
وبدلاً من ذلك السماح لها بالانحدار إلى صراع سياسي؟).

These translations are equivalent to the model of translation presented in His Majesty King Abdullah II's official website. However, 10% of them provided inadequate translations such as

(هل يمكننا تحمل سرقة المسيحيين والمسلمين على حد سواء من الروحانية والسلام والتعايش الذي ترمز إليه هذه المدينة، وبدلاً من ذلك السماح لها بالانزلاق في صراع سياسي؟).

They used literal translation and addition سرقة بالانزلاق في.

ITEM (6): Now, let us move to the most recent standoff between the United States and Iran. What if, next time, neither side steps away from the brink, dragging us all towards untold chaos?

Eighty percent of the students translated it adequately as

(الآن، دعونا ننقل إلى ما يحدث اليوم، وإلى المواجهة الأخيرة بين الولايات المتحدة وإيران. ماذا لو، في المرة القادمة، لم يبتعد أي من الجانبين عن حافة الهاوية، متسبباً بانزلاقنا جميعاً نحو فوضى لا توصف؟)

(لننقل الآن إلى المواجهة الأخيرة بين الولايات المتحدة وإيران ماذا لو في المرة القادمة لم يبتعد كلاهما عن حافة الهاوية مما قد يؤدي إلى جر الجميع إلى فوضى لا يمكن وصفها؟).

Such a translation is equivalent to the model translation. Only 20% of them translated it inadequately as

(من الآن فصاعداً باتجاه المواجهة الأخيرة بين الولايات المتحدة وإيران ماذا لو لم يبتعد أي من الجانبين في المرة القادمة عن حافة الهاوية ليسحبنا جميعاً في فوضى لا توصف).

The received translation included addition and literal translation من الآن فصاعداً باتجاه.

ITEM (7): An all-out war jeopardizes the stability of the entire region.

90% of the students translated it adequately as

نحو حرب شاملة تهدد استقرار المنطقة بأسرها

إن الحرب الشاملة تهدد استقرار المنطقة برمتها

Such a translation is equivalent to the model translation. Only 10% of the students translated it inadequately as (التي حرب هائلة تهدد الثبات في كل المنطقة) by guessing the meaning as الثبات instead of استقرار.

ITEM (8): And I ask you another "what-if"; what if Iraq fails to realize the potential and aspirations of its people and slips back into an erratic, seventeen-year cycle of recovery and relapse, or worse yet, conflict?

Ninety percent of the students translated it adequately as

(دعوني أسألكم سؤالاً افتراضياً آخر: ماذا لو فشل العراق في تحقيق تطلعات شعبه والاستثمار في إمكانياته، وانزلق مرة أخرى إلى حلقة مفرغة من سبعة عشر عاماً من الانتعاش ثم الانتكاس، أو إلى ما هو أسوأ من ذلك، إلى حالة الصراع؟)

(اسمحو لي ان اسالكم سؤالاً اخر بصيغة ماذا لو: ماذا لو فشل العراق في التوصل الى تحقيق اهداف شعبه وان يستثمر في امكانياته ثم تدهور مرة ثانية الى حلقة مفرغة من سبعة عشر عاماً من الانتعاش ومن ثم الانتكاس او الى ما هو اسوء من ذلك الى صراع).

Such a translation is equivalent to the model translation. Only 10% of the students translated the item inadequately as

(وأسألك "ماذا لو" آخر؛ ماذا لو فشل العراق في إدراك إمكانات وتطلعات شعبه وانزلق مرة أخرى إلى دورة انتعاش غير منتظمة استمرت سبعة عشر عاماً وانتكاساً، أو أسوأ من ذلك، الصراع؟)

The received translation distorted the meaning of the ST. This translation included several errors such as reference (singular) instead of (plural), deletion "ماذا لو" آخر, literal translation غير منتظمة, and addition استمرت.

ITEM (9): Syria may be out of the headlines, with its suffering out of sight and out of mind, but the crisis is far from over.

90% of the students translated the item adequately as

(قد تكون سوريا خارج التغطية الإعلامية، ومعاناتها بعيدة عن البال، لكن الأزمة لم تنته بعد)

(وقد تكون سوريا خارج العناوين الرئيسية، حيث تعاني بعيدة عن الأنظار وبعيدة عن البال، ولكن الأزمة لم تنته بعد).

These translations are equivalent to the model translation. Yet, only 10% of the students translated it inadequately as

(قد تكون سوريا خارج النطاق الاعلامي في هذه الفترة ولكن ازمته لم تنتهي بعد نرح اكثر من نصف مليون شخص خلال التسعة اشهر الماضية وكلهم لاجئون في الاصل).

This translation added so many words which are not mentioned in the English text. Such addition is underlined in the received translation in the above example.

ITEM (10): Let this reflection upon “what-if” scenarios be a productive exercise, one that can pre-empt countless tragedies and safeguard our people along their journey.

Ninety percent of the students translated this item adequately as

(فلنجعل من التأمل في هذه الأسئلة الافتراضية تمريناً مثمراً، يمكننا استباق حدوث مأس لا حصر لها، وحماية شعوبنا في مسيرتهم نحو المستقبل).

دع هذا التأمل في سيناريوهات "ماذا لو" يكون تمريناً منتجاً، يمكن أن يستبق المآسي التي لا تعد ولا تحصى وأن يحمي شعبنا على طول رحلتهم .

These translations are equivalent to the model translation. Yet, only 10% of them provided inadequate translations

(وليكن هذا التأمل في سيناريوهات "ماذا لو" ممارسة منتجة، قادرة على إجهاض مآسي لا حصر لها وحماية شعبنا في رحلتهم الطويلة).

The received translation included guessing the meaning as in إجهاض without taking into consideration the contextual meaning, and using literal translation as in رحلتهم الطويلة.

ITEM (11): Leadership, however, demands the very opposite- reflection, wisdom, and the long view. More than ever, we need patient politics.

Seventy percent of the students translated it adequately as

ولكن القيادة تتطلب عكس ذلك تماماً، فأساسها التفكير العميق والحكمة والاستشراف. وأكثر من أي وقت مضى، نحن بحاجة إلى سياسة مبنية على الصبر والتأني

(لكن القيادة تتطلب العكس - التفكير، والحكمة، وبعد النظر أكثر من أي وقت مضى، نحن بحاجة إلى سياسة صبورة).

These translations are equivalent to the model translation. However, thirty percent of the students translated it incorrectly as

(نحن بحاجة الى سياسات صبورة من قبل القيادة التي تتطلب حكمة التفكير المعاكس للغاية والرؤية الطويلة اكثر من اي وقت مضى).

The received translation failed to convey the intended meaning presented in the ST and included using literal translation صبورة and الرؤية الطويلة instead of providing the political expressions equivalent to the original text. This shows that the students are not familiar with political terminology in the SL and TL.

ITEM (12): My father, the late King Hussein, taught me that peace making is always the harder but the higher path. And a tough road is best walked with our friends.

Seventy percent of the students provided adequate translations as

(علمني والدي المغفور له، بإذن الله، الملك الحسين أن صنع السلام هو دائما الطريق الأصعب، ولكنه الطريق الأسمرى. والسير على الطريق الصعب أفضل مع الأصدقاء).

(علمني والدي ، الملك الراحل الحسين ، أن صنع السلام هو دائما الطريق الأصعب ولكنه الطريق الأسمرى. وأن السير على الطريق الصعب مع الأصدقاء هو الأفضل) .

Such translations are equivalent to the model translation provided officially. Yet, 30% of them provided inadequate translations as

(لقد علمني والدي الملك الراحل حسين أن صنع السلام هو دوماً الطريق الأصعب ولكنه المسار الأعلى. وأفضل طريقة للسير مع أصدقائنا هي الطريق الوعرة).

The received translation failed to convey the meaning of the original text as it includes stylistic errors حسين, literal translation المسار, and reversing of the meaning as

وأفضل طريقة للسير مع أصدقائنا هي الطريق الوعرة

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Results indicate that adopting and deciding on an appropriate translation method is a major difficulty that faced graduate students. As shown in the translation test, students used literal translation or guessed the meaning due to their lack of knowledge in political terms and their intended meanings. There were also grammatical obstacles that result from the differences between Arabic and English. During the translation from SL to TL, translators used wrong shifting techniques such as translation from singular to plural, from past to present, etc. The students relied in many cases on guessing the meanings and not on understanding the context. Despite the importance of context, students did not benefit from the contexts of political terms and expressions. This result corresponds to that of Salih and Dweik (2021) who concluded that their respondents' encountered obstacles related to lack of knowledge of the context. Results indicate that translators did not have good command in their mother tongue as well as in English. Such results are clear in the literature. For example, Salih and Dweik (2021) and Dweik and Othman (2017) noticed that their respondents were not at a good level of linguistic knowledge in both the SL and the TL. Also, translation errors occurred as a result of several main reasons such as lack of familiarity with political concepts, terminology, and expressions. This result agreed with Baker (1992) who noted that translators may not find equivalents to SL terminology. Lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge in the source language as well as the target language led them to encounter obstacles in selecting the appropriate glossary in TL. In this regard Al-Zu'bi (2012) made a similar observation. Al-Zu'bi (2012) concluded that most of their participant students faced difficulties due to their unfamiliarity with political expressions, producing improper equivalence in the TL, and using to literal translation.

Furthermore, the translators did not understand the content of the text which led to a poor translation. Additionally, adopting an incorrect translation style is another difficulty faced by students. Wallmach and Kruger (1999) suggested that incorrect connections between the ST and the TT negatively affected translation. Also Al-Otoum (2011) reported that her participants resorted to literal translation especially in rendering idioms and phrasal verbs.

There is also a problem in understanding the role and function of translators. This is consistent and agrees with the ideas and beliefs of Newmark (1991), who stated that the role

of translators is to clarify the intended meaning rather than to make it vague. The researcher also found that students have trouble with cultural terms due to a lack of equivalence between languages or due to the gap between them. The results also showed that being aware of how to use translation strategies and methods can ease the task of translators and students. Most of the students opted for literal translations as they feel this type is more reliable and more faithful than other types. According to Newmark (1988, p. 69), the literal translation is correct in legal texts but should be avoided if it includes a reference and a factual equation of the original. This means that literal translation is an acceptable strategy if it conveys SL's communicative intention. Meanwhile, Newmark (1988) argues that such a literal translation would distort the meaning, "This may happen due to a lack of cultural awareness during the translation process." Translators must know when to use a literal translation and when to avoid it. Otherwise, it may lead to the distortion of the intended meaning.

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