

LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL INTERFERENCE IN THE TRANSLATION OF WRITTEN TEXTS FROM ARABIC INTO ENGLISH

Bader S. Dweik¹, Zainab A. Othman²

¹Al-Ahliyya Amman University, Amman, & ²Ministry of Education, JORDAN.

¹drdweik@yahoo.com, ²zeinabothman@live.com

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore interference in translating written texts from Arabic into English. The study raised the question: What problems arise from the interference of Arabic when translating different written texts from Arabic into English? To achieve the goal of the study and answer this question, the researchers analyzed students' errors in written translation texts. Results showed that the problems that arise from interference are lexical and grammatical. The results also showed that these kinds of interference occurred because of students' lack of knowledge and awareness of the source and target languages. The study recommends that further research may be conducted on other types of interference, such as cultural interference which occurs as a result of the differences between Arabic and English.

Keywords: Interference, Translation, Lexical, Arabic/English

INTRODUCTION

Languages existed since the dawn of time and were used by people throughout history to communicate and build relationships. Since people use and learn languages, contact is ought to occur and mistakes emerge. The difference between the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) leads to interference. Havlaskova (2010) described interference as a phenomenon that may occur at the level of a word, a phrase, an idiom, a metaphor or a term of a whole syntactic structure when translators transfer some source texts into target texts influenced by aspects of the source language. This term is seen by others as the influence of the native language (L1) on the learning of the second language (L2) and the transfer that occurs (Erarslan & Hol, 2014). Interference errors can be clearly seen in translation. Translation is considered to be a very important tool in all fields of knowledge, 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 wouldn't notice the error.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Newmark (1988) describes translation as rendering and transferring meaning from the native language into the target language as it is intended by the original writer. Similarly, Gaber (2005) adds that the aim of translation is to communicate ideas of the text in the source language to the readers of the target language. Accordingly, the reader of the target text will read the text as if it is written in the target language believing that the text contains the source language writer's true intentions.

Brown (2007) defines transfer as the influence which occurs between the native language (L1) and the second language (L2) because of the similarities and differences between them. He also adds that transfer is viewed as the interaction between previous linguistic knowledge and present learning process which facilitate the new learning task. Similarly, Mitchell and Myles (2004) state that this transfer is also known as cross-linguistic interference and that is the speakers' or writers' knowledge of their L1 is used as a way to acquire L2.

Vannestål (2009) explains that interference is the contact which takes place between a native (L1) and a foreign language (L2). This interference may cause deviations in the target language like syntactic, grammatical, lexical, semantic or pragmatic which were the most frequent causes of interference. These deviations or interferences are caused by the transfer from (L1) to (L2). She also adds that interference could be found more frequently in the translations of humanities, social sciences and history than technological and natural sciences. She states that lack of clarity or understanding from L1 to L2 has shown to be one of the main reasons for the problems in translation. Although the syntactic structure of the statements is important, partial transfer of information is noticed in the translations of novice translators.

Diab (1996) has examined lexical, grammatical, syntactic and semantic errors made by Lebanese students. The researcher selected 73 Lebanese native speakers of Arabic taking an intermediate level English course in their sophomore year studying at the American University of Beirut. She analyzed their English writings through error analysis to show the degree of mother tongue (Arabic) interference that occurred in them. As a result of the examination, it was noticed that there was a great influence of the Arabic linguistic structure on the English writings of the students. Therefore errors were classified into lexical, grammatical, semantic and syntactic. The analysis revealed the existence of 558 grammatical errors which include articles, prepositions and singular and plural, 217 lexical errors, 106 semantic errors and 193 syntactic errors that included word order, coordination and omission of the copula had occurred in most of the students' writings. Most errors occurred where the students felt that Arabic and English were similar whereas fewer errors were committed where there were clear differences between the two languages.

Bloem, Bogaard & La Heij. (2004) investigated semantic interference which was found in word-translation. A group of 26 university students who were native speakers of Dutch and highly proficient in English participated in the experiments that included 32 high frequency English words which were familiar to the Dutch students. The results showed that semantic interference was found at the lexical level and there were clear indications of the influence of (L1) on (L2).

Maros, Hua and Salehuddin (2007) dealt with interference and its effect on (L2). The researchers followed Norrish's (1992) approach in conducting error analysis and identifying, describing, explaining and evaluating errors. The sample was chosen from six different local schools and the student's written essays were analyzed. The results showed that despite having gone through six years of learning English in schools, the learners were still having difficulties in using correct English grammar in their writings. The three most frequent errors made by the students were in grammar, and the most frequent ones were the use of articles, subject-verb agreement and copula 'be'.

Havlaskova (2010) analyzed interference in students' translations. The researcher used a translation test which consisted of six texts that were assigned to the students for translation in the two courses; cultivating Translation Skills and Text and Discourse Analysis as weekly homework, three texts each course. Seventy-seven translations were analyzed presented in tables. A questionnaire asking students about their views of interference was conducted. They

completed it anonymously and on spot. The questionnaire included 18 questions inquiring about the students' awareness and perception of interference. The first 4 questions were general asking for students' demographic information. Questions from 5-17 asked about students' perception of interference and the last question challenged them to express their suggestions and observations concerning the topic. The results showed that there were many types of interference found in students' translations such as lexical, syntactic, grammatical and typographical. The results from the analysis of students' translations showed that lexical and syntactic interferences occurred with the greatest frequency. Nevertheless, according to the answers from the questionnaires 74% of students considered syntactic interference the most frequent type. On the other hand, lexical interference was in their opinions the most serious one. According to the analysis of both instruments it was concluded that although students may be aware of the influence of interference, it would still cause the many difficulties especially when they occur on the level of syntax and lexis.

Dweik (2013) identified the difficulties students faced when translating cultural and literary expressions from English into Arabic. A translation test was developed and semi structured interviews were conducted. The test included an English political text entitled "Power needs clear eyes". He used a sample of 20 university English language major students. The researcher also conducted interviews which consisted of three questions that aimed to find out the difficulties that students faced in their translations. The results showed that the students committed many lexical, syntactic and cultural errors due to their lack of awareness and knowledge of the target language and culture. Also, they misused dictionaries in the process of getting suitable meanings for the words.

SattiHamad and Yassin (2015) investigated lexical errors and their effect on university students' writings. The researchers used a descriptive analytical approach, and they conducted a questionnaire which was given to 67 university English language teachers from different universities in Sudan. A composition test was given to 150 university students whose L1 was Arabic and majored in English from different English departments. They were asked to write an essay about Sudan. The results showed that the lexical errors that occurred were classified as; word choice, transliteration, omission, misspelling and redundancy. These errors were mainly influenced and caused by interference of the mother tongue.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers selected a purposive sample of twenty BA senior students majoring in translation. The sample was selected from two courses at MEU during the first semester 2016/2017. Students were asked to translate different written texts from Arabic into English. Their translations were analyzed, marked, pointed out the interferences, classified them according to their types and were discussed in accordance with the previous literature.

The grammatical interference included verbal and nominal sentences, passive, omission of the copula, subject-verb agreement, relative pronouns and the use of prepositions. Lexical interference included errors in lexis due to the differences between the two languages (Arabic and English) and the assigned meanings for each word.

RESULTS

Lexical Interference

Lexical interference occurs mainly because of literal translation of lexicons. In this type, the researchers dealt with words and how they were translated by students. Most students' errors were due to the incorrect translation of words or inappropriate selection of the correct equivalence in the target language. Making such inappropriate choices occurred because

students didn't consider that a word might have more than one meaning and just relied either on their previous limited knowledge of the target language or chose one of the first meanings listed for the word in the dictionary. Most students didn't even consider the context and only focused on the words and not on the sentence as a whole. They only applied the meanings that were usually given for the same words without considering the situation they were used in. As a result of the inappropriate choice of words, the whole meaning of the context was rendered incorrect or distorted. This means that the essential role of translation of conveying the meanings and communicating ideas among different languages was lost. Students should have used and checked different sources in order to obtain the most suitable meaning and should have borne in mind that relying on one's knowledge isn't enough. They should expand their range of expertise in the practical field of translation. Literal translation is considered one of the main causes of lexical errors.

There are some words in the source language that do not have clear equivalents in the target language or are concepts that must be explained or expressed by using several words. Students tried to find a one word expression without considering that the meaning they chose in the target language may refer to something different from the source text. As a result, readers of the translated text might misunderstand the translated concept. The translator's job as a communicator or a mediator between the two languages would be compromised.

Grammatical Interference

This kind of interference occurs on the level of rules and structures of both languages. Most translations are influenced by the students' mother tongue's structure. They did not consider the differences between the systems of Arabic and English. Students divided sentences into words and translated them individually rather than a whole entity. In addition to that, they transferred the structure of the source language into the target language. Most students had problems using the copula, prepositions, passive voice and subject-verb agreement. The main reason for these errors was that students injected the structure of Arabic into their translations of English texts.

The first error that occurred in students' translations was the omission of copula (verb to be). This kind of error is widely spread among Arab students since the copula does not appear explicitly in Arabic. Therefore students ignore or forget using it when translating texts from Arabic into English.

Active/passive structures constitute another problem. The structures of the passive voice differ from Arabic to English. While there is only one structure used in Arabic, English has many in which verb to be is used with the past participle of the verb with all tenses. In Arabic there is no mention of the agent in the sentence but English may and may not mention the agent according to the situation.

Agreement between subject and verb, noun and adjective is highly noticed in Arabic. Verbs agree with their subjects in number (singular or plural), gender (masculine or feminine) and person (first, second or third). Therefore, students tended to make a few subject-verb agreement errors in their translations especially when the number is confusing. The differences between Arabic and English structures led the students to inject some Arabic features into their translations of English

In their translation, students didn't follow the English structure which states that singular subjects in the simple present must take the verb with (s/es) and instead they treated the subject as it was in the state of plural and used the verb without the proper addition.

Relative pronouns are also some of the most common errors made by the students since there are multiple relative pronouns in English (who, whom, where, when, which, whose) that

correspond to the same relative pronouns in Arabic. The Arabic relative pronouns are used with singular, dual and plural. There is a set of pronouns for each gender used with animate and inanimate subjects. English relative pronouns are used according to the subject with singular and plural regardless of gender. For example, in English "who" is used with an animate subject to refer to a person or a group of people; "whom" is used with an animate object to refer to a person or a group of people; "where" is used to refer to a place or a location; "when" is used to refer to time; which is used to refer to inanimate subjects and "whose" is used to refer to possession. Therefore students encountered a problem translating these pronouns since they used the equivalent Arabic relative pronouns to express the English ones.

Students encountered many problems in translating the Arabic relative pronouns and choosing the most appropriate English pronoun for them. The Arabic relative pronoun 'Allathe' might be used with singular, masculine, place, time, animate and inanimate subjects and this poses a problem in English since there is a pronoun for each usage. Thus students must read the sentence with much care and decide the most appropriate pronoun upon the subject used in the sentence.

A frequent error made by students was in translating prepositions. Arabic prepositions may be translated into different English ones depending on the situation. Sometimes the same Arabic preposition might be an equivalent to more than one English preposition. Therefore students might get confused in choosing the most suitable preposition for the sentence.

CONCLUSION

Results showed that the problem of interference has clearly affected the translations of students when they attempted to translate texts from Arabic into English. Results showed that the most frequent interferences that occurred in the students' translations were the lexical and grammatical interferences. This outcome came as a confirmation to Havlaskova (2010) and Erarslan (2014) who agreed that these two kinds were the most frequent ones found in students' translations.

Analysis of the statements showed that lexical interference occurred due to literal translation and to the students' incorrect choice of equivalents, misuse of dictionaries and sources. Grammatical interference occurred because of students' injection of the rules and structures of Arabic into their translations in English. Most of the results found in this study go side by side with other researchers which indicate that the problem of interference can be considered as a global problem. As it was discussed earlier every language has its own sets of rules and lexis and even if they share some of them with other languages, interference occurs and affects both languages.

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