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Problems Of Translating Islamic Religious Terms Among Iraqi Students

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Abstract

This study concerns with analyzing the Iraqi students' translation of some selected religious texts in regards to the fact that they are learners of English as a foreign language. The study is qualitative in nature and is done randomly. That is, a questionnaire of fifteen Arabic religious terms are randomly chosen and are offered to fourteen college students (of AL- Anbar) who are randomly selected from the third and fourth years. It aims to answer the following questions 1) To what extent the students have the ability of translating Islamic terms from Arabic into English? 2) What are the solutions needed to improve students' ability of translating Islamic terms from Arabic into English? The study adopts Liao's (2010) model of classification of translation errors, in order to achieve the aims of the study. Based on the analysis of the data, the study finds out that, although most of the students managed to translate the required terms, errors are found. Two types of errors were found: rendition errors and language errors. They are related to misinterpretation of the source text and unawareness of its Islamic terms and also their poor syntax and semantics knowledge of English in addition to other reasons like there is no separate course for translation especially of religious texts or its limited number per week. Therefore, on the basis of these findings, some suggestions are put forward at the end of this study in order to develop students' proficiency of translation.

Problemas De Traducir Términos Religiosos Islámicos Entre Estudiantes Iraquíes

Resumen

Este estudio se refiere al análisis de la traducción de los estudiantes iraquíes de algunos textos religiosos seleccionados con respecto al hecho de que aprenden inglés como lengua extranjera. El estudio es de naturaleza cualitativa y se realiza al azar. Es decir, un cuestionario de quince términos religiosos árabes se elige al azar y se ofrece a catorce estudiantes universitarios (de AL-Anbar) que son seleccionados al azar del tercer y cuarto año. Su objetivo es responder las siguientes preguntas 1) ¿En qué medida los estudiantes tienen la capacidad de traducir los términos islámicos del árabe al inglés? 2) ¿Cuáles son las soluciones necesarias para mejorar la capacidad de los estudiantes de traducir términos islámicos del árabe al inglés? El estudio adopta el modelo de clasificación de errores de traducción de Liao (2010), para lograr los objetivos del estudio. Basado en el análisis de los datos, el estudio descubre que, aunque la mayoría de los estudiantes lograron traducir los términos requeridos, se encuentran errores. Se encontraron dos tipos de errores: errores de interpretación y errores de idioma. Están relacionados con la mala interpretación del texto de origen y el desconocimiento de sus términos islámicos y también su pobre sintaxis y conocimiento semántico del inglés, además de otras razones como que no hay un curso separado para la traducción, especialmente de textos religiosos o su número limitado por semana. Por lo tanto, sobre la base de estos hallazgos, se presentan algunas sugerencias al final de este estudio para desarrollar el dominio de la traducción de los estudiantes.

Introduction

Translation plays a significant role in our life since it discusses about the method of transferring the exact meaning of spoken or written ideas from one language to another. Napier (2002) defines translation as:

"the process by which concepts and meanings are translated from one language into another, by incorporating cultural norms and values; assumed knowledge about these values, and the search for linguistic and cultural equivalents".

 Hence, translators translate different kinds of texts such as political,

religious, legal, and historical and others. Among these types is the translation of the religious text which has been essential in spreading the divine message throughout history and was utilized for teaching to convert the principles of religion and reflecting the beauty of faith around the world (Elewa, 2014:25).

 She (ibid) added that religious translation is considered as a powerful tool for missionary means, hence, translators should understand the source language (SL) and transfer the message into the target language accurately and faithfully without omitting or adding any idea to the original text. However, Mohmaed and Mahmoud (2015) confirmed that the existence of definite items in any language that are unique to that language or to the culture associated with that language. These items are called as 'culture-specific or culture-bound items', according to Schwars (2003). Schwarz (2003 :14) defined culture-bound terms as:

 "concepts in any language that are unique to that language or to the culture associated with that language and create a cultural gap between speakers of different languages."

 On the other hand, Newmark (1988:94) stated that culture-bound terms are predominately:

"tied to the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression."

According to Mohmaed and Mahmoud (2015), religious translation is one of the most difficult types of translation because it requires much more cautious and precision. That is, religious texts are so sensitive because of being holy. Religious texts have a special meaning that is different from any other text since they evoke the language and the heart at the same time, which is really considered as a big problem for translators to consider conveying the exact meaning perfectly (Khammyseh, 2015; Bahameed 2014). Translators of translation Islamic religious texts also need to be bilingual or multilingual and to be multicultural and bicultural as well. In addition, it is not easy to

translate religious texts since translators face many problems such as syntactic structure, equivalence and other obstacles that are related to this genre of text (Agliz, 2015). Cultural challenges in translating religious texts have been addressed in many translation studies. Abdul Raouf (2005), for example, explored the problem of translating religious texts and has addressed the concept of linguistic and cultural "untranslatability" (Catford, 1965: 93) when providing the meaning of the Qur'an. He confirmed that the Qur'an is set in an Arab context of a culture that is totally different from the culture of any target language. He (ibid: 163) also reported that:

 "the context of culture, the natural habitat of words, needs to be preserved in order to achieve a successful ethnographic translation" This study deals with the challenges that Arab translators are facing when translating religious texts, Agliz (2015) found that Arab translators should take into their account for paragraphing, redundancy and grammatical equivalence as the most essential key elements needed to produce an accurate translation. He believed that Arabic language supported the use of a considerable number of words to convey a certain meaning to achieve 'stylistic decorativeness' unlike English language which qualified this as irrelevant and redundant. In another study, Alajlan (2016) explored the translation strategies used to translate Arabic da'wah texts. Eight strategies have been found in his study. The most frequently used strategies are literal translation, transliteration, and translation by omission. Other strategies included cultural transplantation, translation by definition and translation by addition. The translator uses 'translating by definition' to translate the terms that are probably unknown to the target reader, for example, the Islamic term التوكل/tawakul/ is translated as "total dependence upon Allah" because this term does not have an equivalent word in the TL. In another example, 'transliteration' in translating the most common terms that are likely to be known to the target reader, for example, the term السنة/al-sunnah/ which refers to the sayings, actions, and agreements of the Prophet Muhammad. He also emphasized that one of the most difficult challenges translators faced during translation is culturally bound words due to the cultural differences between the SL and the TL.

Semantically speaking, Hassan (2016) explored translation versus transliteration of Islamic terms in English as terms that include names of Allah, names of prophets, named of holy places and terms related to Islam's rituals and pillars. He pointed out that translation of religious terms into English is only proper when the words of the SL and the words of the TL are cross-culturally equivalent, whereas transliteration is proposed when the words of the SL and TL are partially-equivalent or non-equivalent. Furthermore, Khammyseh (2015) found some obstacles that M.A students faced of translation in translating terms used by Jordanians in Islamic occasions. These obstacles included the lack of experience in the culture of the TL and the lack of knowledge in the structure of both languages.

Since translating religious terms or expressions configures a kind of challenging for translators in general, and students who study English as a second language in particular. This study aims to investigate whether or not students face any difficulties in understanding and translating Arabic into English Islamic terms. The study also aims to classify the type of translation errors they make. Hence, this study aims to answer the following questions:

 (1). To what extent the students have the ability of translating Islamic terms from Arabic into English?

(2). What are the solutions needed to improve students' ability of translating Islamic terms from Arabic into English?

The Methodology of the Research

The participants of this study are fourteen students of the English language department at AL-Anbar University. However, those students study English as a second language and Arabic language is their own native language. They are randomly selected from the third and fourth year. To achieve the purpose of the study, a questionnaire which consists of fifteen Arabic religious terms was distributed. Those terms are selected randomly from "a dictionary of Islamic terms" by Alkuhli (1989). The participants are asked to translate those terms into English. That is, the study will analyze the translating of the students' outputs of Islamic translation from Arabic into

English to explore the range of their ability and their knowledge. The Islamic terms are shown in appendix (1). Hatim (2001) stated that there are no 'fixed models' to classify translation errors since the causes of such errors are varied. Liao's (2010) model of classification of translation errors was opted to fulfil the objective of the study. Liao proposed a model in which errors are classified into three categories, namely, rendition, language, and miscellaneous errors. Each category identifies different error types, as shown in Table (1) below.

Rendition Errors
R1: Misinterpreting the source text.
R2: Insufficient rendering, which differentiates the translation from the original text.
R3: Excessive rendering, which differentiates the translation from the original text.
R4: Subtle difference of meaning between the source and target texts; insufficient accuracy.
R5: Misinterpretation due to unawareness of terms.
Language Errors
L1: Grammatical mistake or ungrammatical syntax of target language
L2: Awkward expression, including ambiguous meaning, mismatch, redundant words and unnecessary repetition, etc.
L3: Inappropriate register.
L4: Excessive literal translation, which leads to ambiguous translation.
L5: Excessive free translation, which differentiate the translation from the original text.
L6: Incorrect character, improper punctuation marks or inconsistency in term translation.
Miscellaneous Errors
M1: Missing parts in the target text; omission.

Table (1): Categories of Error Types Adopted from Liao (2010)

In addition, two interviews are conducted with two translation professors who have a wide experience in teaching translation at Al- Anbar university, see appendix (2) for interview questions. The purpose of such interviews is to get insights about translation teaching methods that are used in the department students belong to. In this way, suggestions for improving the students' ability of translating Islamic terms from Arabic into English could be drawn out.

The Major Findings

It can be seen from table (2) below, that 68 of the terms are translated correctly, whereas 33 of them are translated with partial errors which preserve the main idea of the source term. On the other hand, 103 terms have been improperly translated by the students. The most prominent acceptable translated terms are /khair al-bariyah/ (The best of creatures), which scores 10 out of the total outputs, followed by /khalifah fi al-ard/ (vicegerent on earth) and /radiyah mardiyah/ (well-pleased and well-pleasing) where both terms score 6 out of 14. The latter terms are chosen since

the acceptable terms score a higher number than the wrong outputs. It is also found that the prominent outputs with partial errors are /ifk muftarah/ (invented falsehood) which scores 10 out of 14, followed by /asatir al-awaleen/ (myths of the ancients) which scores a number of 6 out of the total translated terms. It is also worth noting, the outputs which are considered as acceptable as 50% since they partially convey the entire meaning where they do transfer the specific intended message due to improper syntax, semantic, or style. Furthermore, the most apparent incorrect outputs are /ajal musamah/ (appointed-term) which scores 12 out of 14, followed by /dar al-maqam/ (home of settlement) which scores 10 out of 14, and /husn maa'b/ (pleasant place of return). Moreover, a limited number of terms are left with no answer.

	Correct	Wrong	50%	No answer
ذكرى للذاكرين	6	7	2	-
خير البرية	10	4	-	-
خليفة في الأرض	6	5	3	-
أجل مسمى	1	12	2	-
راسية مرتبة	6	5	3	-
دار المقام	4	10	-	-
أولو العزم	5	8	-	1
أولو الألباب	4	7	3	-
حسن مآب	2	9	2	-
أئمة الكفر	5	8	-	-
إفك مفترى	1	3	10	-
أساطير الأولين	4	4	6	-
خير الماكرين	6	8	-	-
الطامة الكبرى	4	7	2	2
الأمر يتجمع وقت	3	6	2	2

Table (2): The Distribution of Correct, Wrong, Partial errors and No Answer

Apart from the previous examples, Table (3) below reflects the variety of errors in translation, which leads to confusion and miscomprehension of the transferred message. The absolute number and percentage of the errors made by the students: 74 rendition errors (47.7%), 66 language errors (42.5%), 15 miscellaneous errors (9.6%), as shown in figure (1).

Terms	Rendition Errors	Language Errors	Miscellaneous Errors
ذكرى للذاكرين	1: R1/R4/R5 1: R1/R4 2: R1/R5 1: R1/R4/R5	1: L1/L4 1: L1 1: L1/L2 1: L2 1: L2	1: M1
خير البرية	3: R1/R5	1: L1/L2 1: L4	-
خليفة في الأرض	5: R1/R5	2: L1/L2/ L4 2: L2	-
أجل مسمى	1: R1/R4/R5 1: R1 (misreading) 1: R2/R5 1: R1/R5	4: L1/ L2 1: L4 1: L2/L5	4: M1 5: M1
راضية مرضية	3: R1/R5 (misreading 1: R4 1: R1 /R5	3: L1 1: L1	1: M1
دار المقام	10: R1/R5	1: L1/ L4 2: L5 2: L4	2: M1
أولو العزم	8: R1/R5	6: L2	-
أولو الألباب	1: R1/R5	1: L1/ L5 1: L1/ L5 1: L4	-
حسن مآب	9: R1/R5	7: L1	-
أئمة الكفر	4: R1/R5	5: L1 1: L2	-
افك مفترى	1: R1/R5	2: L2	1: M1
أساطير الأولين	3: R1/R5 1: R4	1: L1/ L2	-
خير الماكرين	7: R1/R2/R5 1: R1/R5	4: L1/L4 1: L1 2: L4	-
البشة الكبرى	7: R1/R5	5: L1/ L2	-
الأمر بالمعروف	-	3: L4	1: M1

Table (3): The Variety of Islamic Terms Outputs with Total Errors

- 74 Rendition Errors 47.70%
- 66 Language Errors 42.60%
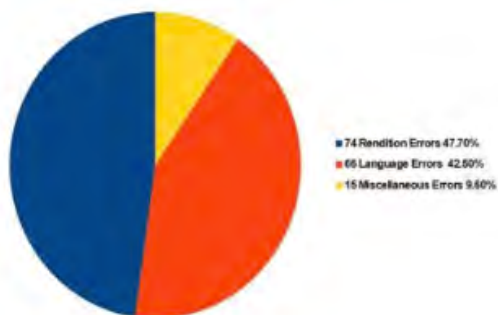- 15 Miscellaneous Errors 9.60%

Figure (1)

The error types adopted from Liao (2010) are demonstrated as follows,
Rendition Errors
As shown in figure (1) above, rendition errors are the most occurring er-
rors, which recur 47.7% of the total number of errors. Apparently, R1 and
R5 are the most frequent types of rendition errors, where R1 stands for
(misinterpreting the source text), and R5 stands for (misinterpretation due
to unawareness of terms).
Examples of rendition errors include misreading, homonymy, translitera-
tion, lack of Islamic terms knowledge, and misconception. The misreading
errors defined as those mistakes made due to the wrong way of reading
word/s. This appears in the output of the term /radiyah mardiyah/.The sec-
ond part of the term /mardiyah/ was read as /maradiyah/ which relates to
pathological cases, translated as 'morbidity'. However, the original mean-
ing relates to satisfaction matters. This issue has remained since Arabic
has many words with homographs, which means, they have same forms
but different pronunciations (Attia, 2008:31). In addition, homonymy er-
rors appear in terms such as / al-amr bil ma'rouf/, /dar al-maqam/, /khair
al-bariyah/, and /khair al-makireen/. That is, it is obvious failure to grasp
the significant meaning of the term. For example, the second part of the
former term is translated as (known) instead of (good). Likewise, the first
part of the terms /khair al-makireen/ and /khair al-bariyah/ are translated
as (goodness/good) instead of (the best) where the word /khair/ represents
a superlative adjective and an attributive of something. Homonymy is de-
fined as a word or a phrase that has one form, same pronunciation and
more than one meaning (Fromkin et al, 2003, p. 71). Furthermore, translit-
eration errors appear in the terms /aulu al-azm/ and /dar al-maqam/. They
are transliterated by students, perhaps because they think that such terms
have no equivalent term in English.
The findings also showed that other errors are mainly related to miscon-
ception such as; in the outputs of the fowling terms: /khair al-makireen/, /
zikra lil-zakireen/, /khalifah fi al-ard/ and /al-batshah al-kubrah/. For ex-
ample, the term /khair al-makireen/ means (the best of planners), and it has
a positive connotation referring to Almighty God, however, it is translated
as (cunning/ cheating/shifty) which connotes negative meaning. In another
example, the term /al-batshah al-kubrah/ which refer to a punishment from
Almighty God, however, some students translated it incorrectly, such as;
(big sin) and (great end) with no reference to punishment.

Language Errors

The findings reveal that L1 and L2 are the most frequent types of language errors. L1 stands for grammatical mistakes, and L2 stands for awkward expression. It is important to highlight that among the language errors both semantic and syntactic errors are observed. Yet, we put them together regarding to the language components' errors. Regarding to the syntactic errors, it is revealed that grammatical errors appear on the outputs of 12 terms out of the total terms. These errors include errors in the use of prepositions, singular and plural, the definite article 'the', disorder of the modifiers (noun and adjective). For example, in the term /al-batshah al-kubrah/ which is incorrectly translated as (the best of machetes big), there is a disorder error where the noun (machetes) precedes the adjective (big). In another example, in the term /aulu al-albab/ which is translated as (smartest people), the definite article 'the' of the superlative form is not used.

Regarding to the semantic errors, it is revealed that L2, L4, and L5 appeared among the classification of semantic errors of Liao (2010). L2 stands for awkward expression, L4 stands for literal translation, and L5 stands for free translation. An example of awkward expressions included the output of the term /aemat al-kufr/ where the second part /al-kufr/ means (unfaith) is translated to (infidelity) which mismatched the original meaning of the term. Literal expressions appeared in terms such as /dar al-maqam/ where the students literally translate the term word by word: (standing house, the house of standing). In the aforementioned term, free translation errors appear: (place of happiness, the home of peaceful). In another example, in the term /aulu al-albab/, both literal and free translation errors appear; literal translation errors are demonstrated with the output (the brain's owners) and free translation errors are demonstrated with the outputs (smartest people, they people have mind, but they do not believe in the messenger of god).

Miscellaneous Errors

They are the errors were clearly found where the students missed part of the output. For example, in the term /ajal musamah/, the first part of the term is left out without being translated. In another example, in the term /al-amr bil-ma'rouf/ the first part of the term is not translated.

In relation to the outputs which are translated with partial errors, Table (4) reflects the variety of errors in translation which misleads the intended message. As noted from the table, language errors are the most frequently occurred errors. It is worth mentioning that these outputs have partial errors which may cause a little ambiguity in the meaning, that is, not the entire meaning. An example which involves partial errors is the term /ifk

muftarah/, where the outputs have grammatical errors that preserve the entire meaning but do not convey the specific meaning accurately. The aforementioned term is translated as (a lie that forged, fabrication-belying, and fable fabricated), where, the outputs are syntactically improper. In another example, the outputs of the term /asatir al-awaleen/ have partial errors, where it is translated as (the stories of the ancient) and (the myths of the first). In both outputs, the second part of the term /awaleen/ which means (ancients) is translated as 'the ancient' and 'the first', respectively, in a singular form instead of a plural form which does not totally reflect the accurate meaning. Furthermore, in the term /khalifah fi al-ard/, the preposition /fi/ which contextually means (on) is translated as (in over, of) instead of (on), however, the output is still understandable. Moreover, in the term /al-batshah al-kubrah/, one of the output is translated as (we will seize them with the most seizing), where this output is freely translated by the use of definition which carries the meaning of punishment as expressed by the word 'seize', yet, it delivered the meaning with a bit of ambiguity.

Islamic Terms	Rendition Errors	Language Errors	Miscellaneous Errors
ذكرى للذاكرين		3: L4	-
خير البرية	-		-
خليقة في الأرض	-	3: L1	-
أجل مسمى		1: L4	-
راضية مرضية	-	1: L1/ L4 4: L1/ L2	1: M1
دار المقام	-		-
أولو العزم	-	-	
أولو الألباب	-	1: L1 1: L5	-
حسن مآب		1: L1 1: L5	-
أئمة الكفر	-	3: L1	-
أفك مفترى	1: R1/R5	10: L1	-
أساطير الأولين	-	3: L1 3: L4	3: M1
خير الماكرين	-	-	-
البطشة الكبرى	-	1: L1/ L5	-
الأمر بالمعروف	-	1: L1 1: L5	-

Table (4): The Variety of Islamic Terms Outputs which are Translated with Partial Errors.

Discussions and Conclusions

Building on the previous considerations, it is clearly shown that the outputs with errors are the most salient among other outputs. Indeed, the high-

est frequency of translation errors was represented by rendition errors, followed by language errors. The rendition errors mainly appeared due to misinterpretation of the source text and unawareness of its Islamic terms. In addition, the poor performance of students' translation that causes language errors mainly refer to their poor syntax and semantics knowledge of English. Despite of these errors, students have made an effort to translate the terms since the answers which were left are very few.

One might think that the factors that contribute to the failure in translating the Islamic terms are not teaching translation as a separate course, the limited number of the course unit per week, or the less percentage of teaching religious text translation. Therefore, to be more realistic we conducted an interview with two translation professors who have been teaching translation at university of Al-Anbar, which revealed that the aforementioned factors are not the main reasons behind the students' inability to translate Islamic terms. That is, other factors needed to be investigated.

The findings showed that there is an absence of continuous training program for translation module. Although the interviewees confirm that they focus on both theoretical and practical methods in teaching translation, the results showed that theoretical methods might be used more than practical ones. This agreed with one translation professor who suggested that students should expose to an actual translation practice.

Therefore, the following suggestions are proposed to be reconsidered through teaching translation in order to upgrade the students' proficiency of translation:

1.   The teacher of translation as a subject at schools or colleges should take into consideration improving the students' level of source and target language. That is, students should have enough knowledge of the source and target language and the differences between them in terms of culture, language usage and style.

2.   The teachers should also pay enough attention to the strategies and approaches that are used in different genre of translation including Islamic terms.

3.   Adding to the previous points, they should not depend only on the textbook as a source of teaching Islamic terms, but rather they should diversify the material by using other external sources such as; translated texts from the Quran, visual or audial aids such as; reading religious stories. This might help to expand students' analytical creativity in relation to Islamic terms.

4.   The teachers should explain to their students the reasons software

dictionaries' usage is not recommended, since such software dictionaries are not always accurate.

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