



A Contrastive Analysis of Some Cultural Ecological, Material and Religious Problems of English/Arabic Translation

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Abstract

This research presents a contrastive analysis of some cultural problems of English/Arabic translation. The significance of the study stems from the fact that it concentrates on some of the cultural ecological, material and religious differences between English and Arabic. These differences form a hindrance in the translation process if the translator is unaware of. The analysis pinpoints some of the points of conflict in order to provide translators and second language learners with insights that would make the translation process more effective and fruitful. For instance, it is noticed that some ecological terms may have different meanings and connotations in both languages, i.e. English and Arabic. Moreover, the most outstanding problem in both material and religious cultures is that, in many cases, there is an absence of equivalents in the target language culture. Thus, the literal translation of such terms results in a misleading translation.

Keywords:

Contrastive Analysis, Translation, Culture, Ecological Problems, Material Problems, Religious Problems.

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1 Introduction

There are many problems hindering the process of translation. They can be classified as structural, lexical, stylistic and cultural ones. Language is a reflection of a certain culture. Therefore, they are closely interrelated, i.e. we cannot separate a language from its own culture. As a matter of fact, both Arabic and English languages belong to two different language families. In other words, Arabic is a Semitic language whereas English is Indo-European. Thus, it is noticed that they are different in the syntactic, phonological and semantic levels. Hence, their cultures are unrelated.

It is important to stress that this outstanding difference between the two cultures may produce a misleading translation and hinder the meaning that transferred from one language into another. In other words, literal translation of culture-specific terms might lead to inadequate translation. Thus, culture-oriented problems need special attention in English/Arabic translation.

This research presents a contrastive analysis of some culture-oriented problems concerning both English and Arabic. This analysis helps translators as well as FLLs to have the sufficient knowledge of both cultures and avoid making mistakes.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Definition of Contrastive Linguistics/Analysis

Contrastive linguistics or contrastive analysis is a field of applied linguistics which allows us to investigate the differences between native and foreign languages. Thus, it enables us to catch a glimpse of these discrepancies in both the process of second language acquisition and translation. Contrastive analysis can be more effective if the two compared languages have a socio-cultural link. In this regard, contrastive linguistics is referred to as "a branch of linguistics which studies two or more languages synchronically, with the aim of discovering their differences and similarities (especially the former) and applying these findings to related areas of language study or practice" (Ke, 2019, p.8).

2.2 Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

Simply speaking, this hypothesis points out that foreign language learners (FLL) transfer their native language rules, meanings and even culture into the target language. This transfer can be negative or positive. If the patterns of both SL and TL are similar, transfer is positive as it makes it easier to understand TL. However, it can be negative just in case the patterns are different since this diversity between patterns lead to misunderstanding of the TL, and, consequently, this affects the processes of foreign language learning and translation, and this type of transfer is called interference.

In this context, Lado (1957 as cited in Xiaorong & Jian, 2011, p.16)) stated that "individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture". According to the above quotation, Lado (1957) noted that FLL transfer their mother-tongue culture to the target language. Hence, if the SL and TL are of different cultures and there is a lack of awareness of these differences, this will cause a glitch in both second language leaning and translation processes.

In other words, literal translation of patterns, regardless of their cultural background, may result in the loss of the intended meaning and therefore, this causes negative transfer which affects the processes of second language learning and translation. A literal translation from English into Arabic, of

1. She is like a golf widow.
2. He is a big fish.

Sentence (1) has a deep-down meaning than the outer one. In English culture, the idiom 'golf widow' refers to a wife whose husband always leave her alone and goes to play golf (Walter, 2008). This sport is well known in English society.

Sentence (2) indicates that the person is very important in a company or organization (Walter, 2008).

The above sentences indicated that a lexis must not be separated from its cultural background. The importance of contrastive analysis between languages of different cultures is very crucial as it can pinpoint points of difference that

enable translator as well as foreign language learners to avoid making mistakes. In other words, FLLs transfer their mother-tongue culture to the target language and this leads to the 'interference' between languages and this leads to the emergence of errors. Consequently, the main aim of contrastive analysis is to describe and contrast systems in languages so as to make it clear for FLLs and then, it predicts where interference occurs. Consequently, CA gives insights to FLLs as well as translators to have knowledge of the differences between languages and this will help in the process of reducing errors committed by them. In this regard, Lado (1957) stated that:

The plan of the book rests on the assumption that we can predict and describe the patterns (of L2) that will cause difficulty in learning and those that will not cause difficulty , by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student. (as cited in Fauziati, 2014, p.2)

According to the above quotation, there are some steps in order to attempt a contrastive analysis of languages. The following lines pinpoint procedures of contrastive analysis.

2.3 Procedures of Contrastive Analysis

Procedures of contrastive analysis refer to the steps done by the linguist to make a contrastive analysis of languages. In this connection, Whitman (1970) argues:

A contrastive analysis must proceed through four steps: description, selection, contrast and prediction. Most analyses are weakened by insufficient care at one or more of these steps, each of which is beset with problems. A basis for making selections, a format for contrasts, and a means of relating contrast and prediction is suggested. (p.191)

Whitman (1970) has proposed four steps in order to carry a contrastive analysis claiming that they are all important to attempt contrastive analysis and the absence of one of them might lead to deficiency in the process of analysis. These steps will be discussed in some detail below:

1) Description: This stage includes an organized description of the two languages under study.

2) Selection: In this phase, it is required to pinpoint certain issues or items to be compared.

3) Comparison: In this step, the selected issues are compared and contrasted.

4) Prediction: This stage includes sorting out areas that cause errors. Contrastive analysis can predict errors caused by mother-tongue interference, i.e. interlingual errors.

2.4 Definition of Translation

Newmark (1988) describes translation as: a) conveying what's meant by the author into another language and b) a skill represented in rephrasing a written statement from in the original language by the same statement in another language. Based on his definitions, Newmark(1988) focuses on transferring the intended meaning by the auther without augmentation or handicap. Ghazala (2008) alludes translation, commonly, to all the procedures and techniques carried out to deliver and handover the meaning expressed in the original text into the target one in a close, perfect and precise manner to the greatest extent possible. Accordingly, it could be argued that meaning is the key element to ensure translation which meets the purpose. Thereby, it may be concluded that translation is an effort to relocate a message from one language into another, bearing in mind the intended meaning in the original language without any deletion or addition, and that's through finding proper equivalents in the target languages.

2.5 Culture and Translation

The main aim of translation is creating a communication among different languages. Consequently, translation transfers cultures from one language into another. Larson (1984) argues that "language is a part of culture and, therefore, translation from one language to another cannot be done adequately without a knowledge of the two cultures as well as the two languages structures"(p.431). Larson (1984) asserts the relationship between culture and translation. In this connection, the relationship between culture and translation is

a reciprocal one. More to the point, the more the translator knows about culture, the better translation provided by him/her will be. As a result, cultural awareness forms a real challenge for translators and foreign language teachers. In this regard, Nida (1964) argues that "differences between cultures may cause more serious problems for the translator than do differences in language structure" (p.130). A literal translation, from Arabic into English, of "الذهب الأبيض" as "white gold" leads to a misleading translation because this expression in the Arab culture refers, simply, to cotton.

2.6 Culture-Bound Terms (CBTs)

Every society has its own values, beliefs, rules and habits which form its own culture that may differ from one to another. This diversity, in culture, creates a hindrance when translating as there may exist no equivalences for some terms in the target culture. These terms are referred to as culture-bound terms (CBT). CBT are simply defined as terms that are deeply rooted in the culture of a certain society and, consequently, differ from one culture to another. In this regard, Harvey (2000) defined CBT as the terms which "refer to concepts, institutions and personnel which are specific to the source language" (p.2).

2.7 Classifications of CBTs

Classifications of CBT vary from one researcher to another. CBTs can simply reflect all aspects of culture in a certain society; they can refer to environment, history, religion, habits and values. Moreover, they can refer to some specific expressions in the language represented in idioms, metaphors, collocation, proverbs...etc. Leppihalme (1997) sees that CBT can be divided into two main categories, in this regard he argues:

Some researchers have focused on mainly extralinguistic phenomena, from natural (topography, flora and fauna, etc.) to man-made (social institutions, buildings, trademarks, etc.) ... Others see culture-bound translation problems as mainly intralinguistic and pragmatic (involving idioms, puns, wordplay or ways of, for instance, addressing a person, complimenting him/her, or apologizing). (p.2)

According to Leppihalme (1997), CBT are categorized into 'extralinguistic' categories and 'intralinguistic' ones. Nida (1964), in his model of cultural items, **concentrated** only on 'extralinguistic' aspects represented in ecological, material, social, political, religious and psychological cultures. In his book, *A Textbook of Translation*, Newmark (1988) gives an adaptation of Nida 's categorization of cultural elements:

- 1) **Ecology** : this refers to flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills,...etc.
- 2) **Material culture:**
 - a) Food
 - b) Clothes
 - c) Houses and towns
 - d) Transport and communication
- 3) **Social culture- work and leisure**
- 4) **Organisations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts**
 - a) Political and administrative
 - b) Religious
 - c) Artistic
 - 5) Gestures and habits (p.95).

Other researchers, for instance, Lefevere (1992) and Bassnett (1998) classified cultural bound terms into 'intralinguistic' terms that are embodied in the language expressions including metaphors, idioms, proverbs, etc...

3 Review of Related Literature

There are many studies which tackle the different cultural problems of English/Arabic translation. Some of these studies will be discussed in order to bridge the gap between these studies and the present study.

Dweik & Suleiman (2013) have done a study that aims at investigating the encountered problems that faced Jordanian graduate students specializing in the English language when translating culture- bound expressions. A sample consists of 60 graduate students were asked to translate 20 statements from Arabic into English. The researchers attempt interviews with some translation experts so as to gather much additional information in relation to the subject matter. The results of the study indicated that

problems of translating culture-bound expressions are due to the insufficient knowledge of cultural expressions, the failure to find equivalence in the target culture, the vagueness of some cultural expressions and the lack of familiarity with different translation techniques and strategies.

Almubark, Manan and Al-Zubaid (2014) have conducted a study to pinpoint the problems faced by undergraduate students in Sudan majoring in English language when translating some culture-bound concepts from Arabic into English. A sample consists of 100 undergraduate students were selected to carry out a translation test that consisted of 18 sentences. Each sentence includes a culture bound expression. Interviews were carried out by researchers in order that they could find additional information concerning the subject matter. The results of the test are similar to the previous study.

Al Shehab (2016) has done a study to investigate the ability of some Jordan undergraduate students at Jadara University to translate some English proverbs into Arabic. The sample consists of 20 students enrolled in the department of English language and Translation at Jadara University in Jordan. The test consists of 25 English proverbs taken from Oxford Dictionary of proverbs edited by John Simpson and Jennifer Speake. The results obtained from this study revealed the student's unfamiliarity with English proverbs and their failure in achieving the proper equivalent in Arabic.

All the above previous studies have something in common. More to the point, results revealed that the unfamiliarity of culture-bound terms cause difficulties in rendering the proper meaning in translation which leads to the poor performance of FLL when translating such terms.

4 Questions of the Study

The study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are the cultural ecological, material and religious differences between English and Arabic?
2. How do these differences affect translation if the translator is not familiar with?

3. How does contrastive analysis help avoid falling into such cultural problems in translation?

5 Problem of the Study

Cultural translation is different from other kinds of translation. It is one of the most difficult kinds as it needs much more knowledge of both the source language and the target language cultures. Thus, this study concentrates on some important types of cultural problems that form a hindrance for the translator. More to the point, this study attempts a contrastive analysis of some cultural ecological, material and religious problems of English/Arabic translation in order to facilitate the translation process by underscoring some points of dissimilarities between the two languages under discussion.

6 Methodology

The study is a descriptive one. The data are prepared, organized, reviewed and then explored in a contrastive basis. First, a description of the two languages under discussion is made. Then, elements to be compared have been identified in both languages. Thereafter, previously identified elements are compared. Finally, the areas where mistakes will occur have been predicted.

7 Analysis

7.1 A contrastive Analysis of Some Cultural Ecological Differences

According to Vinokurov et al (2007), ecology can be defined as "the study of the interactions of organisms to their physical environment and to one another"(p.42). In other words, ecology is considered the relationship between plants and animals and between their environment or the people around them. Newmark (1988) argues "When there is a cultural focus, there is a translation problem due to the cultural 'gap' or 'distance between the source language SL and the target language TL"(p.94). In this context, it is emphasized that there is a translation problem owing to the cultural gap or distance between the source and target languages.

It is noticed that ecological culture is one of the major problems concerning translation in general and

English/Arabic translation in particular as long as SL ecological terms may have different meanings and connotations from those of the TL. The same term in both cultures may have a complete different meaning and if the translator 's knowledge of this ecological cultural difference is not enough, this will lead to a misleading translation. In this regard, Ilyas (1989) states that:

A translator of English-Arabic texts may come across some Problematic ecological- based idioms and expressions. Some Such items acquire different connotations in both languages.

What may a connotatively favorable expression in Arabic Could have a pejorative sense in English, and vice versa. as cited in Al Saidi, 2013, p.36)

Generally speaking, both Arabic and English languages belong to two different ecological environments and thus it is expected that there will be a cultural difference between the two languages regarding ecology. In other words, Arabic belongs to an ecological culture where hot and dry climate is dominating whereas English belongs to an area where the dominating climate is both cold and wet. As a result, the translator should be aware of this shift from English into Arabic and vice versa, i.e. he/she has to know the proper equivalents in the target language culture that suite the intended meaning in the source one.

The Arabic expression, for example, /"خبر يثلج صدري"/ Lit. (News that freezes my heart) has an ecological connotation that differ from that of the English ones. In fact, Arab people live most of the year in a hot and dry climate. Therefore, 'snow' is something favorable for them; it is considered a source of happiness. Hence, the proper translation of this expression is " News that pleases my heart". The literal translation of this expression which is "News that freezes my heart" would be misleading since the environment of English language is dominated by snow and the word 'freezing' is something unacceptable in that culture. The above example shows the different connotations of the same words in different ecological environments. Thus, an inexperienced

translator would mislead the TL readers because of his/her use of literalness in translating such cultural –bound terms.

7.2 A contrastive Analysis of Some Cultural Material differences

Material culture refers to man-made objects including food, clothes, houses, towns, transport, tools, etc.

A) Food

In Arab culture, specific food cultural terms such as (الملوخية) and (حلبة) form a difficulty to the translator as they are culture-specific terms. Similarly, 'pork' is translated into Arabic by adding the word /lahm/ (meat) before 'pork' to become 'pork meat' /lahm al khanzir/ (لحم الخنزير).

B) Clothes

The term (جلابية) is an Arab clothes worn by men specially in Egypt and Morocco. In addition, the term /hijab/ (حجاب) is an Islamic veil worn by Arab Muslim women to cover their hair and neck. Both Arabic terms are transliterated into English. On the other hand, 'pullover' and 'jacket' are also names of clothes related to the English culture; they are transliterated into Arabic as 'جاكيت' and 'بلوفر'.

C) Houses

The terms 'diving room, living room, drawing room' are translated into their functional equivalents in Arabic as /ghurfat al-ta'am غرفة الطعام/, /ghurfat al-julus غرفة الجلوس/, /ghurfat al-istiqbal الاستقبال/ respectively.

7.3 A contrastive Analysis of Some Cultural Religious Problems

Religion is considered a main element in shaping cultures. Both English and Arabic languages belong to two different religions. In other words, Arab culture is reshaped and dominated by Islamic culture whereas the English society is dominated by Christianity. Thus, it is expected that the culture of those two different religions will be reflected in the written as well as the spoken language represented in the use of vocabulary and expressions that are used to reflect feelings,

morals and beliefs of a certain society. Therefore, the translator faces a big challenge when rendering these culture-bound religious terms into another language of different religious terms. This is due to the fact that those terms have no equivalents in the target language culture. In this regard, Larson (1984) states:

Terms which deal with the religious aspects of culture are usually the most difficult, both in analysis of the source vocabulary and in finding the best receptor language equivalence. The reason in that these words are intangible and many of the practices are so automatic that the speakers of the language are not as conscious of the various aspects of meaning involved (p.180).

To illustrate this point, some examples that are peculiar to the Arab religious culture are given below:

- A) /om el khabaeth/ أم الخبائث (Lit. the mother of all vice): This term refers to wine.
- B) /el bait el haram/ البيت الحرام (Lit. the forbidden home) : This term refers to the Ka'ba
- C) /alquibla/ القبلة : This term refers to Muslims when pointing their pray to God only.
- D) /ali'tikaf/ الاعتكاف : An appropriate rendition of this term is given by Qaazi (1979), he states :
"Al?itikaf is an Islamic term that denotes seclusion inmosque during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan for the purpose of worshipping Allah. Amuslim who performs this ritual is not allowed to leave the mosque except for a very short period of time and only for urgent purposes such as going to the toilet "
(p.27).
- E) /ism Allah alek/ اسم الله عليك (God 's name be upon you) : Arabs said this expression because of their belief in God's name and power as a source of protection. (El.Barouki,1985,116). Therefore, the proper English equivalent of this term can be as "God protects you".
- F) /wudu'/ وضوء : This term means to wash parts of the body in prepatation for obligatory prayers (salat). However, the English equivalent "ablution" does not convey its true

meaning. The term "ablution" is defined in Merriam Webster Dictionary as; a) the washing of one 's body or part of it, b) the act or action of bathing.

Similarly, some examples of culture-bound religious terms that are related to the Bible are presented below:

- A) 'Lift horn' is a biblical expression which means to defy God.
- B) 'You will go to your fathers' is another expression that means that you will die at the end as your fathers.
- C) 'Good Friday': this term refers to the day on which Jesus Christ had been "crucified". It can be rendered into Arabic to "الجمعة العظيمة".

To conclude, the main problem concerning culture-bound religious terms is that, in many cases, there is an absence of equivalents in the target language culture. As a result, researchers suggest many strategies to render such specific terms into one language to another.

7.4 Discussion and Conclusion

This research seeks to answer three main questions. The first question is "what are some of the cultural ecological, material and religious differences between English and Arabic?". The study reveals that ecological differences between English and Arabic are often due to the fact that English belongs to a cold and wet climate. Meanwhile, Arabic is affiliated with hot and dry climate. This diversity has an influence on the emergence of the different connotations of the same terms in both languages. Concerning the material and religious problems, the results reveal that the problem lies in the absence of equivalents in the target culture. These results agree with the findings of the study of Dweik and Suleiman (2013). The second question of the study is "how these differences affect the process of the translation if the translator is not aware of?" The findings show that these differences cause obstacles in the translation process if the translator has not the sufficient knowledge of. This result agrees with the findings of Almubark, Manon and Al-Zubaid (2014) that the unfamiliarity of these differences causes the weak performance of the participants of the study. The third

question of the study is " how does contrastive analysis help in solving this problem?". The researcher recommends that attempting a contrastive analysis of these problems helps in avoiding such problems and would make the translation process more concise, accurate and simplified.

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تحليل تقابلي لبعض المشكلات الثقافية البيئية والمادية والدينية عند الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية والعكس

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المستخلص

يعرض هذا البحث تحليلاً تقابلياً لبعض المشاكل الثقافية التي تظهر عند الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية والعكس. وتكمن أهمية هذا البحث في التركيز على الاختلافات الثقافية البيئية، المادية والدينية بين الإنجليزية والعربية وذلك لأن هذه المشاكل تشكل عائقاً في عملية الترجمة في حالة عدم إلمام المترجم بها. ويوضح التحليل التقابلي لهذه المشاكل نقاط الاختلاف لكي يمد كلاً من المترجمين ومتعلمي اللغات الأجنبية برؤى تجعل عملية الترجمة أكثر فعاليةً وإثماً. فعلى سبيل المثال لوحظ أن بعض المصطلحات البيئية ربما تختلف معانيها وإيحاءاتها في كلا اللغتين. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك فإن المشكلة الأكثر وضوحاً فيما يتعلق بالاختلافات المادية والدينية تكمن في غياب المعادل أو ما يقابلها في ثقافة اللغة المترجم إليها ولذلك فإن الترجمة الحرفية لتلك التراكمات الصعبة الثقافية ستؤدي إلى ترجمة مضللة.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

التحليل التقابلي، الترجمة، الثقافة، المشاكل البيئية، المشاكل المادية، المشاكل الدينية.

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