Original article

Reasons for Variation in Rendering the Arabic In/definiteness into English

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Abstract

This article explores the reasons for variation in rendering the Arabic in/definiteness into English. It presents some of the findings of my Ph. D. dissertation (2015). Three approaches are followed in analyzing data of this study; syntactic, semantic and functional. In terms of syntax, the study is limited to analyzing the in/definite subjects and in/definite predicates. In terms of semantics, it is limited to analyze the functions and purposes of the rhetorical style of in/definiteness in the qur'anic verses of Al-Baqara and Al-A'raf. The study uses Nord's functional approach to translation. The results of this study show that context and the syntactic position in a sentence are influential factors in addressing in/definites. The study also reveals that there are some differences in rendering Arabic in/definite nouns into English. Some reasons for these differences are: unlike Arabic, English can express uniqueness by using a capital letter at the beginning of a unique noun instead of using definite article, can use bare-noun phrases to denote genus, and can use 'all' instead of the definite article when used with plurals to denote real inclusiveness. In addition, English does not use the definite article to denote genus and type in negative sentences however Arabic does. Furthermore, unlike Arabic, English uses the generic indefinite article to pick out a member as representative of a certain class.

Key words: Translating Definites, In/definite Functions, Qur'anic Studies, Cross-language Studies.

1. Introduction

Translating in/definite noun phrases from Arabic into English is not an easy task. Also, analyzing qur'anic data is a very difficult job. It needs a deal of great accuracy. Functions and purposes of Arabic in/definite nouns are various. This makes the job of rendering these functions more difficult. These purposes need to be considered in perceiving the meaning of an Arabic text, especially the Qur'an. It is also important to be aware of these functions in rendering the in/definite nouns in the verses of the Qur'an into English. This certainly helps rendering the correct meanings and denotations of this glorious text especially as it is full of in/definite noun phrases. However, many of Arabic definite nouns are not rendered as definites in English, and many of the indefinites are not translated as indefinite nouns. The reasons for these differences need to be tackled and addressed.

2. Significance

Addressing these reasons paves the way to contrasting Arabic to English in terms of in/definiteness. Differences are not only the manifestations of in/definiteness in each language but also are the different functions and purposes of in/definite articles across languages. In addition, differences are related to how each language expresses those functions and purposes within its own structure. Different purposes can be expressed by using different linguistic tools. Therefore, most of the various reasons addressed in this study are linguistic; these are mostly language-specific. In addition, they depend largely on context. However, in terms of addressing the Qur'an, the job requires paying greater attention to the interpretation and meanings of its verses. The study of its semantics makes it possible to attain the different functions of a linguistic item. In addition, addressing the reasons for variation between the Arabic and English uses of in/definites requires considering how translators render the purposes and functions of these in/definite noun phrases from Arabic into English.

3. Questions of the Study

This article attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do translators render the purposes and functions of in/definite noun phrases in Al-Baqara and Al-A'raf into English?

2. In the case of difference in rendering Arabic in/definite noun phrases into English, what are the reasons for this variation?

2. The ways according to which the purposes and functions of Arabic in/definite nouns are rendered into English

4. Method of research

In the process of assessing how in/definite nouns in the Qur'an are translated into English, Nord's approach to translation (1997) is used. Below is an outline of Nord's approach and how it is used in this study:

- Nord distinguishes two processes of translation; documentary (informative), and instrumental (producing new communicative interaction in the target text).

- Nord uses four types of texts: referential, expressive, appellative, and the phatic function.

- Nord focuses on the three aspects of functionalism: translation brief, source-text analysis, and translation problem hierarchy.

1. The importance of the translation brief; it gives information about:

- The text function(s) and the target-text addressee(s)

- The time and place of text reception and the medium over which the text is transmitted

- The motive for the production or reception of the text.

2. The role of source-text analysis:

- Subject and content (meanings and consistency)

- Presuppositions: real-world factors of the communicative situation presumed to be known to the participants from the verses preceding or following the verse under study. (Translations of verses are taken from Al-Hilali and Khan 1996)

- Non-verbal elements: illustrations, marks of pausing (obligatory or optional), etc.

- Lexical linguistic units including specific terminology, and suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, stylistic punctuation, assimilation, elision, ghunna, etc.).

3. The classification and hierarchization of translation problems:
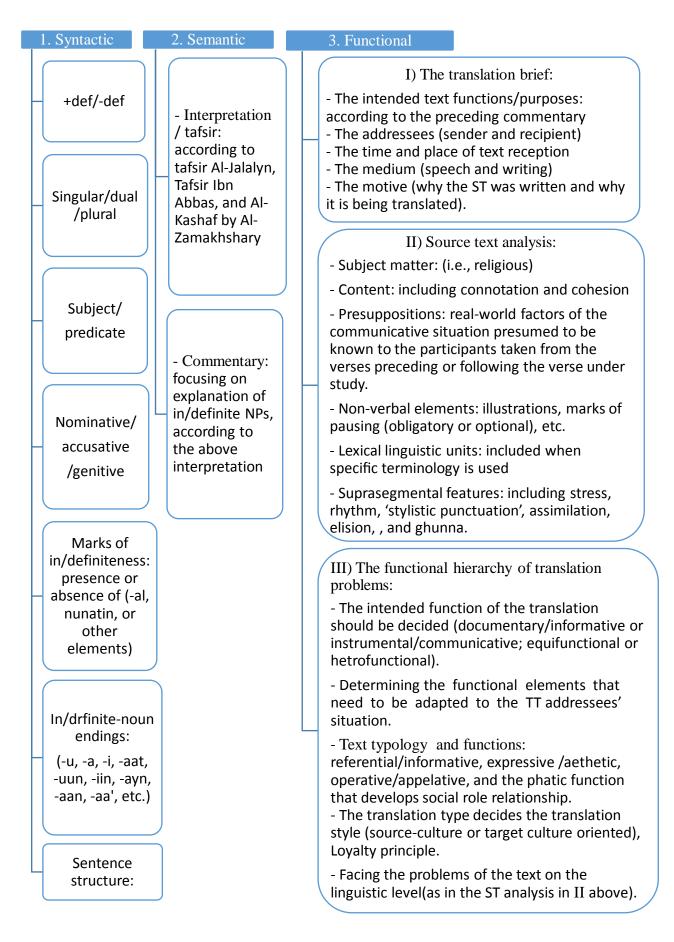
- Determining the function needed

- Determining the functional elements that suit the addressees' situation

- Determining the type of translation: source-culture or target-culture oriented

- Then facing the problems of the text on the linguistic level: the problems of the text can then be tackled at a lower linguistic level

The approach used in this study is summarized below:

Approach to translating the in/definite articles (Figure 1)

(Note: In/definite NPs are categorized according to purpose and function)

1. Syntactic	2. Semantic	3. Functional

1. Syntactic

- +def/-def

- Singular/dual /plural

- Subject/ predicate

- Nominative/ accusative /genitive

- Marks of in/definiteness: presence or absence of (-al, nunatin, or other elements)

- In/drfinite-noun endings: (-u, -a, -i, -aat, -uun, -iin, -ayn, -aan, -aa', etc.)

- Sentence structure:

2. Semantic

- Interpretation / tafsir: according to tafsir Al-Jalalyn, Tafsir Ibn Abbas, and Al-Kashaf by Al-Zamakhshary

- Commentary: focusing on explanation of in/definite NPs, according to the above interpretation

3. Functional

I) The translation brief:

- The intended text functions/purposes: according to the preceding commentary
- The addressees (sender and recipient)
- The time and place of text reception
- The medium (speech and writing)
- The motive (why the ST was written and why it is being translated).

II) Source text analysis:

- Subject matter: (i.e., religious)

- Content: including connotation and cohesion

- Presuppositions: real-world factors of the communicative situation presumed to be known to the participants taken from the verses preceding or following the verse under study.

- Non-verbal elements: illustrations, marks of pausing (obligatory or optional), etc.

- Lexical linguistic units: included when specific terminology is used

- Suprasegmental features: including stress, rhythm, 'stylistic punctuation', assimilation, elision, , and ghunna.

III) The functional hierarchy of translation problems:

- The intended function of the translation should be decided (documentary/informative or instrumental/communicative; equifunctional or hetrofunctional).

- Determining the functional elements that need to be adapted to the TT addressees' situation.

- Text typology and functions: referential/informative, expressive /aethetic, operative/appelative, and the phatic function that develops social role relationship.
- The translation type decides the translation style (source-culture or target culture oriented), Loyalty principle.

- Facing the problems of the text on the linguistic level(as in the ST analysis in II above).

5. Procedures of Data Analysis

It is necessary noting that data of this study are organized and classified according to the purposes and functions of the Arabic in/definite noun phrases under study. The purposes and functions of Arabic indefinite noun phrases are summarized as: 1) undetermined referent through singularization, 2) unidentified quality through unfamiliar type of reference, 3) aggrandizement or despising through increase of power, rank, wealth or importance, or of complete lack of respect, 4) increase and multiplication through increase in quantity, 5) decrease in quantity, 6) non-restriction and non-identification (unfamiliarity), and 7) generality in negative contexts. On the other hand, the purposes and functions of the Arabic definite article are summarized as: 1) identifiability and familiarity through: uniqueness, common knowledge (mental familiarity), second mention, post mention, implicit referent, physical present objects, and situation (part-whole relationship), 2) generic function denoting type or genus, 3) inclusiveness (real, conventional, or figurative), 4) fact assurance and proof, and 5) restriction denoting matchless and uniqueness. The procedures followed are stated below.

The data of this study are analyzed functionally on the syntactic and semantic levels according to the following steps in the same order:

1. The in/definite nouns are extracted and highlighted in the chosen verse.

2. Syntactic and semantic analyses of that verse are conducted.

3. Different purposes and functions of in/definite nouns are identified

4. An analysis is conducted by applying Nord's functional approach to translation to assess the four translations under study, and finally,

5. Findings are stated.

6. Findings and results

As for indefiniteness, the findings indicate that most Arabic indefinite nouns are rendered into English as indefinite nouns and zero-article nouns. Rarely, they are found as definite nouns. This is largely dependent on the context, functions and the noun itself (singular/plural, countable/uncountable).

Regarding the first group, it has been found out that the indefinite nouns that are usually rendered into English as indefinites are: nouns denoting unidentified quality (*and on their eyes is a covering*), nouns indicating glorification and aggrandizement (*Surely we will indeed have a reward in case we ourselves, are the over comers*), nouns denoting obscurity (*To every nation a term*), nouns denoting generality and unfamiliarity (*who, when they are visited by an affliction, say, 'Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return*), nouns denoting singularization (*why does not a sign come to us?*) and nouns denoting disdain and affront (*Do you know that Salih is an Emissary from his Lord?*).

Regarding the second group, it has been found out that the indefinite nouns that are usually rendered into English as zero-article nouns are mostly plurals (*upon those rest blessings and mercy from their Lord*), and uncountable nouns (*No compulsion is there in religion*). These examples show that the reason for rendering the Arabic indefinite nouns as English zero-article nouns is due to the rules of the English language.

Other indefinite nouns that are rendered into zero-article counterparts are singular nouns within negated phrases (*when no soul for another shall give satisfaction*). It is worth noting that in some contexts translators tend to express the different purposes of the Arabic indefinite nouns using other linguistic tools. Some of these are: when rendering Arabic indefinite-nouns used in comparatives ('*I am better than he*) and sometimes when to render singularization (*yet, in case the two are not two men, then one man and two women*).

As for the manifestation of Arabic indefinite nouns as English definite nouns, these are very few cases, and are ascribed to translators' misperceptions of the purposes of the Arabic indefiniteness. Some of these are: *(the same number (should be made up) from other days)* instead of *a same number* which denotes that each has to fast days that are similar in number as the broken-in days but not fixed for everyone, *(They indicate the periods for [various doings of] mankind, including the pilgrimage),* instead of *signs* which denotes non-restriction as they are marks for people to recognize time, and *(Upon those are the prayers from their Lord, and mercy)* instead of *blessings* which denotes increase in quantity. Another example of unsuccessful ways in rendering indefinite nouns from Arabic into English is that the way of rendering the indefinite noun '*ħayaatun'* as bare noun; *(In retaliation there is life for you),* in which the

bare noun indicates general use. However, indefinite noun denotes unidentified quality of life, however great, that would be a result out of retaliation.

As for definiteness, it can be concluded that Arabic definite-nouns are rendered into English as definite nouns, zero-article nouns and sometimes as indefinite nouns. These three cases are dependent on context and the purposes of these definites.

Regarding the first case, it has been found out that definite nouns that are usually rendered into English as definites are: unique objects (*the All-Knower*), nouns and objects mentioned for a second time (*lightning – the lightning*), nouns indicating real inclusiveness, (as *the fools believe*), singular nouns indicating genus and type in positive sentences (*the earthquake*), nouns denoting restriction (*either you throw or we shall be <u>the throwers</u>*), predicate nouns that tend to confirm a fact (those who are *<u>the prosperers</u>*), predicate nouns denoting referents that already exist (*this is <u>the paradise</u> which you have inherited for what you used to do*), nouns that are definite due to context; situational use (*let him who incurs <u>the liability</u> 'the debt' dictate*) and nouns that are to be definite due to requirements of the English cotext (*<u>the chiefs</u> of Pharaoh's people*).

Regarding the second case, the findings indicate that the definite nouns that are usually rendered into English as zero-article nouns are: singular nouns denoting genus and inclusiveness ('*<u>Praise be to Allāh, Who guided us to this</u>*'), nouns denoting conventional inclusiveness (d*<u>ivorced women</u> shall wait by themselves for three periods*), nouns denoting mental familiarity; homophora use of *al-* (*Gardens under which <u>rivers</u> flow, when <u>death</u> was approaching Jacob*), singular nouns denoting genus and type in negative sentences (*and <u>no evil</u> would ever have touched me*), nouns denoting genus and type when frequently happen (*But whenever <u>good</u> came to them, they said: 'Ours is this'*), sometimes, plural nouns denoting genus and type in case of non-restriction (*Believe just as <u>mankind</u> has believed*) and nouns denoting genus and intensification (*then be conscious of the fire whose fuel is <u>human beings</u> and stones*). In addition, the name of '*Allāh*' is, sometimes, rendered as '*God*'. This is because English can use capital letter in the beginning of a word to denote uniqueness and identification which is not found in Arabic.

Regarding the third case, it can be concluded that the definite nouns that are rendered into English as indefinite nouns are few. One of them is singular nouns indicating genus and class-representative (*The

vegetation of <u>a good land </u>comes forth easily by the Permission of its Lord). In some contexts, translators tend to express the different purposes of the Arabic definite nouns using other linguistic tools. Some of these are: nouns denoting real inclusiveness when used emphatically (*all <u>matters</u> are returned to Allāh*) and singular nouns denoting to genus and inclusiveness (*that all <u>power</u> belongs to Allāh*).

The different ways according to which the purposes and functions of in/definite noun-phrases are handled deserve to be addressed and explored to get and attain the best out of them. Knowing all these ways in rendering in/definite noun phrases from Arabic into English surely gives a considerable and contrastive idea about the possible linguistic tools one can use in rendering the different functions and rhetorical purposes of in/definiteness from Arabic into English. This helps in producing a more precise piece of work while trying to render the possible tremendous functions of the in/definite articles, especially from the Qur'an, into English.

3. Reasons that lead to variance in rendering purposes and functions of Arabic in/definite noun phrases into English

Some reasons for the differences in rendering Arabic in/definite nouns into English are stated below:

1. English can express uniqueness by using capital letter at the beginning of a unique noun instead of using definite article. This is not found in Arabic.

2. English can use bare-noun phrases to denote genus. This is the generic use of the zero-article in English which can be used with mass and uncountable nouns. Unlike English, Arabic uses the definite article with mass nouns to denote genus. ('*Praise be to Allāh'* for *alħamdu lellaah*).

3. Arabic uses the definite article with plural nouns to indicate conventional inclusiveness. The English definite article can also be used in order to denote conventional inclusiveness. However, it is not recommended in some contexts where it may denote the meaning of '*all'* instead of some.

4. Arabic uses the definite article largely in denoting the indivisible nouns and plural nouns to indicate mental familiarity (homophora). Unlike Arabic, English uses zero-article to denote the same substances, (death, rivers for *almawtu, al 'nhaaru*).

5. In negative sentences, English does not use the definite article to denote genus and type; however, Arabic does. ('no **evil** would ever have touched me' for *wa ma massaniya **assō'** *).

6. English definite article with singular nouns signifies a recognized referent while it is not generic. However, Arabic uses generic definite article in referring to substances to indicate frequent occurrence of these substances, ('*good'* for *alħasanatu*).

7. English uses bare uncountable nouns in rendering Arabic definite plurals denoting genus; ('mankind' in rendering *annaasu*).

8. English uses bare plural nouns in rendering the Arabic definite plurals denoting genus and non-restriction; ('human beings and stones' in rendering *annaasu wa ˆalħijaarah*).

9. English uses the generic indefinite article to pick out a member as representative of a certain class. However, it uses the generic definite article to take the members of the class as a unit. Unlike English, Arabic uses the generic definite article before a singular count noun which is used as a representative number of a class; ('a good land' for *al baladu ˆuṭṭayibu*).

10. English uses '*all*' instead of the definite article when used with plurals to denote real inclusiveness when emphasis is needed; ('all matters' for *al-umuuru*). However, Arabic uses the definite article in the same context even in the existence of the modifier '*all*'.

11. Arabic uses the definite article with mass nouns to denote both genus and inclusiveness. Unlike Arabic, English uses bare mass nouns to indicate genus and the definite article with mass nouns to denote inclusiveness. Yet, both cannot be used in order to denote genus and inclusiveness. Therefore, English may use '*all praise'* in rendering *'al ħamdu'* as to denote both genus and inclusiveness.

12. English plural nouns do not take indefinite articles. However, Arabic plural nouns take indefinite markers, ('gardens' for *jannaatun*).

13. English uncountable nouns do not take indefinite articles. However, Arabic uncountable nouns take indefinite markers, ('compulsion' for *ikraaha*).

14. Singular indefinite nouns do not denote genus in English negative sentences. They denote singularity instead. Unlike English, Arabic can denote both through singular indefinite nouns; *laa* which negates genus, and *laa* which negates singularity. Both are used with singular indefinites in Arabic.

15. English does not use indefinite nouns to compare between two things. Adjectives are used in English comparatives. English comparatives are either '-*er....than*' or '*more ...than*'. Unlike English, Arabic can use both adjectives and indefinite nouns in comparatives, ('better than' for *khayrun min*).

16. English can use the word '*one*' instead of the indefinite article to denote singularity. In fact, Arabic can use the same word but along with the indefinite article when emphasis is maintained, ('one man' for *rajulun waaħidan*).

17. Misperception and misunderstanding of the specific purposes and functions of Arabic in/definites by translators of the Qur'an occur infrequently in the results of this study.

By recognizing the reasons and differences stated above, researchers can develop their abilities in understanding source text, understanding different meanings, functions, purposes, and so on. Moreover, they can render the correct functions putting in mind the various reasons of variation.

The findings indicate that even in cases of similarities of the uses and manifestations of in/definiteness in Arabic and English, still some of the English translations do not denote the proper functions. This is, partly, due to the large number of functions and purposes. In addition, it is, partly, due to the inability of the English in/definite or zero-article to indicate the same functions of the Arabic in/definites. Most times where some functions are not rendered properly through English in/definiteness other linguistic items (words, adjectives, functional words etc…) are used between brackets.

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Appendix

Transliteration conventions:

The following convention is used in transliterating Arabic words in this article:

Arabic symbols 1	ء	ب	ت	ث	ج	ح	خ	د	ذ	ر	ز	س	ش	ص	ض	ط	ظ	ع
English equivalent symbols 1	'	b	T	Th	j	ḥ	kh	D	dh	r	z	s	sh	ṣ	ḍ	ṭ	ẓ	c
Arabic symbols 2	غ	ف	ق	ك	ل	م	ن	هـ	و	ي	ـَ	ـِ	ـُ	آ	و ~	يـ~	او	اي
English equivalent symbols 2	gh	f	Q	K	l	m	n	H	W	y	a	i	u	ā	Ō	*Ē*	aw	ay

Long vowels and geminate consonants are indicated by doubling the relevant symbols.

ᵔ is used to denote Arabic assimilation.

Notes:

This article is excerpted from my Ph. D. dissertation titled '*Evaluating the Rendering of Definiteness and Indefiniteness in Al-Baqara and Al-A'raf into English: A Syntactic and Semantic Study*', submitted to the Department of English, Helwan University, Egypt, 2015.