Translation Problems Encountered by MA Students at Arab Universities

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□ ABSTRACT □

This paper addressed the major problems and difficulties encountered by many of the MA students of translation at Petra University, Jordan; Damascus University, Syria; and the Arab Higher Institute of Translation, Algeria. It focused on their linguistic errors and cultural mismatch cases in translating from Arabic into English. The major aim was to reveal the aspects of deviation that have been more problematic: the linguistic errors or cultural mismatch cases? These deviations were classified into linguistic errors and cultural discrepancies. The linguistic errors embraced the syntactic and morphological aspects of language, on the one hand, and the semantic features of word choice and collocation, on the other. The cultural mismatch cases reflected two different sets of social values in the native speakers of Arabic and English in the first, religious, text; but were minimal in the present, political text. Some of the linguistic errors and the cultural mismatch cases, however, induced pragmatic failure in understanding the English target text, but at different degrees. Finally, although it was impossible to mention and tabulate all of the deviations spotted out in the respondents' translations, these errors and/or mismatch cases were evaluated in terms of *frequency* and *degree* of causing pragmatic failure; solutions were suggested.

Keywords: MA students, Arabic-English mistranslation, linguistic errors: grammatical and semantic, cultural mismatch, pragmatic failure.

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مشاكلُ الترجمة التي يواجهها طلبة الماجستير في الجامعات العربية

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□ ملخّص □

غايةُ هذا البحث إلقاءُ الضوءِ على المشاكل الرئيسة التي يواجهُها طلابُ الماجستير في الترجمة في جامعاتَ عربية ثلاث: جامعة البترا، عمّان، المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية؛ جامعة دمشق، الجمهورية العربية السورية؛ والمعهد العالي العربي للترجمة التابع للجامعة العربية في الجزائر. لذلك، ركّز البحثُ على الأخطاء اللغوية وحالات التنافر الثقافية عند الترجمة من العربية إلى الإنكليزية. وكان الهدفُ الرئيسُ من البحث الكشفَ عن الانحرافات المسببة لأكثر المشاكل في الترجمة: الأخطاء اللغوية أم حالاتُ التباين الثقافي؟ ولقد صنِّفت هذه الأخطاءُ على أنها انحرافاتٌ لغوية أو تباينات ثقافية. شملت الأخطاءُ اللغوية الجوانب النحوية والصرفية من ناحية والخصائص الدلالية في سوء اختار الكلمة أو التلازم اللفظي، من ناحية أخرى. لقد عكست حالاتُ التنافر الثقافي مجموعتين مختلفتين من القيم الاجتماعية المتنوعة لدى الناطقين بالعربية والانكليزية في النص الأول، الديني؛ ولكنها كانت ضئيلة في النصّ الحالي، السياسي. وقد أَدَّت بعضُ الأخطاء اللغوية وحالات التباين الثقافي إلى فشل عملي لفهم النصّ الهدف، ولكن بدرجات مختلفة. وأخيراً، وعلى الرغم من استحالة ذكر وجدولة جميع الانحرافات في ترجمات المستجيبين، فقد جرى تقويمُ الأخطاء اللغوية وحالات التباين الثقافي جميعاً من حيثُ تكرارُها ومدى تسببها في الفشل العملي لفهم النصّ المترجم. واقترحتُ حلولاً لتلك المشاكل.

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Theoretical Background

This paper is confined to the study of translation problems encountered by MA students at three Arab universities, Petra University, Jordan; the Higher Institute for Translation and Interpreting, Damascus University, Syria; and the Higher Arab Institute for Translation, Algeria. The term *problem* refers to any sort of actual error or deviation from the norm, whether on the level of linguistic tools used for explicating or implicating meaning, or on the level of cultural mismatches inducing some degree of pragmatic failure in the understanding of the target text. This may result in mistranslation of the source text or part of it. The researcher does not confine himself to certain categories, linguistic or textual, in the discussion of the problems encountered (see Shunnaq, 1998). However, I rather attempt to let the data speak for themselves in making ostensible these problems in terms of both *frequency* and *significance*. I am aware that frequency of errors may differ from one text or type of text to another; it simply relies on how frequently a language-specific term, an unusual structure, or the expression of a culture-specific concept occurs in a given source language text (SLT). The significance of a 'problem', i.e. the degree of deviation from the norms of a native language, in this case in the target language text (TLT), is measured against how far it induces mistranslation or misunderstanding, i.e. pragmatic failure.

It is common sense that "where the linguistic and cultural distance between source and receptor codes are least, one should expect to encounter the least number of serious problems" (Nida, 1964: 160). This implies that "if there is a high degree of cultural equivalence, there is a case for literal translation" (Newmark, 1981: 79). On the other hand, "when the concept to be translated refers to something which is not known in the receptor culture, then the translator's task becomes more difficult" (Larson, 1984: 163). It is this distance – but as embodied in linguistic representation - between these two ends of linguistic representation that the researcher is probing, testing, and measuring in this research.

The major assumption in this study is that *though linguistic errors in the translations of MA students under study can be numerous, the cultural mismatch cases are more likely to lead to definite pragmatic failure in the understanding of the target text*. Culture in this context rests on the social values practiced within the boundaries of a given language community. According to Hervey and Higgins (1992: 28), "translating involves not just two languages, but a transfer from one culture to another and some translation techniques necessitated by the transfer from one cultural mode of expression to another involve compromise and compensation" (cited in Fukushima, 2000: 162).

It could be true that "[W]ith culture, you can communicate with rocky grammar and a limited vocabulary" (Agar, M., 2012: 23). However, many scholars (e.g. Scollon and Scollon, 1995; Sarangi, 1995; Fukushima, 2000) do not see that the term *culture* has been well defined in cross-cultural studies. They do not even believe that the very concept of culture is equally understood by different scholars writing on culture, nor do they see any consistency in the very understanding of culture. This is partly true because individuals see themselves as independent human entities despite the social bond tying them up to a language community. In fact, without such differences between individuals on the one hand and the higher hierarchy, i.e. society, on the other, human society would remain static and unable to change.

However, Hofstede (1991: 5) describes culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another", but he only sees it through the dichotomy of individualism and collectivism. In this

context, I find myself in agreement with Holliday (1999), who refers to what he terms *small* and *large* cultures: "a *small culture* paradigm attaches 'culture' to small cohesive social groupings or activities wherever there is behaviour, and thus avoids culturist ethnic, national or international stereotyping" (Holliday, 1999: 237). However, I differ from him in the categorization of 'small' and 'large' cultures. A 'small' culture is, in my opinion, part and parcel of the relevant 'large' culture, with the differences between the two marking off the boundaries between what is traditionally imposed from without and the changes taking place initially within individuals who change even their 'large' culture with the passage of time. In this way, one can also speak of a culture and subcultures in one and the same language community.

It is also taken for granted that culture is learnable and not innate in humans. In other words, it is not born with people, but acquired with some modifications in each generation and even individual. Culture, according to Mead (1994), includes **systems of values** that are characteristic of a group of people. This means that each of these 'cultures' has its own values and identity. Rokeach (1973) developed a *Value Theory* resting on the relationship between beliefs, values and attitudes; these values and beliefs have obvious influences on text production, interpretation and translation into another language (see also Aust, 2004; Shammas, forthcoming).

Consequently, in this research, as elsewhere, I define *culture* as *a socio-cognitive composite of values and beliefs that identifies a group of people speaking the same language for the same ends in similar contexts*. This definition is more related to the anthropological view of *culture* (see Barnouw, 1982; Hofstede, 1991; Bøgger, 1992; Fukushima, 2000). In addition, the *order* of such *values* (see Thomas, 1983; Shammas, 1995) is also of crucial significance in determining how and to what extent the linguistic signals used by the members of the same speech community are indicative of their identity. It is these values and beliefs that compose the *social context* of translating a given text. Sperber and Wilson (1986a/1995: 15 - 16) define context as:

"a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world. . . . . expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation" (see also Gutt, 1991).

This should mean that there are value and belief discrepancies between any two cultures of any two speech communities. In this context, *culture* is confined to a well-defined *speech community*[1] characterized by a specific code of social values and linguistic expression (see Shammas, forthcoming).

In short, it is these common features in one culture, whether small or large, which are supposed to compose the right context of interpretation and translation. In fact, they rather account for mistranslation and the number, kind, and degree of all sorts of errors and deviations (see *Data Analysis* below).

The other component of any text translation or verbal communication is certainly language. In this study, Sperber and Wilson's (1986a/1995: 172) definition of language as a set of "*semantically interpreted well-formed formulas*" is adopted.

Language, in this sense, embodies *Grammar* composed of its two cornerstones, syntax and morphology, and *Semantics* being confined to the study of linguistic meaning outside context (see Leech, 1980; 1983; Levinson, 1983; Shammas, 1995). In other words,

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[1] **Labov (1972: 513) believes that a "speech community is defined not by the presence or absence of a particular dialect or language but by the presence of a common set of normative values in regard to linguistic features. (One might speak of a criterion of social rather than mere 'referential' intelligibility)".**

semantics in this study is subsumed under language for the interpretation of meaning in translation and all sorts of cross-cultural verbal communication.

Therefore, the problems of translation are generally classified into: 1) Linguistic and/or 2) pragmatic. The linguistic errors can be grammatical and/or pragmatic; the pragmatic deviations are concerned with mismatches between cross-cultural values reflected in discrepancies in the view of the world, beliefs and attitudes, and other contextual features, such as time, place, participants, etc. (see Figure 1 below).
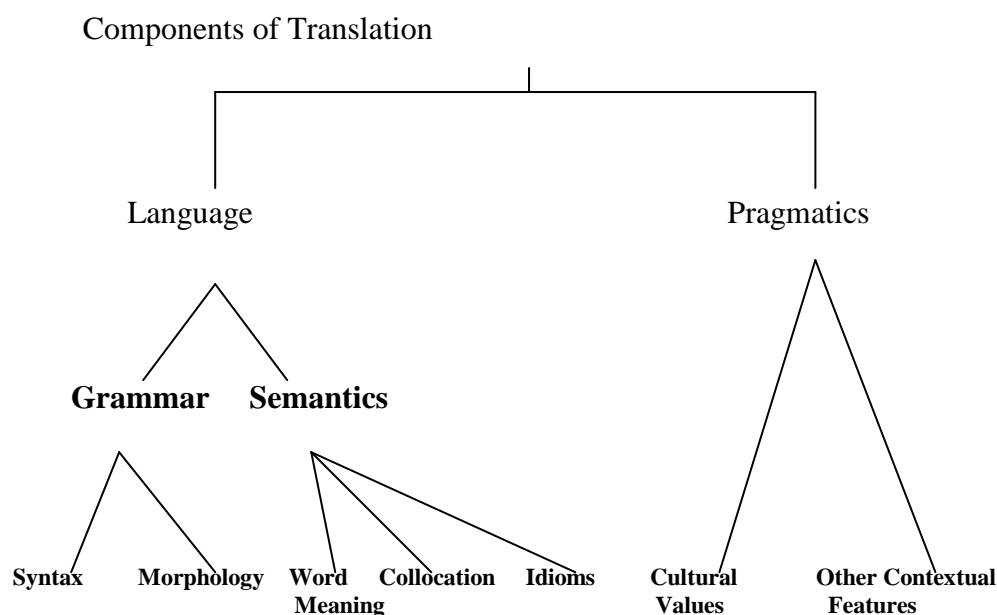
Components of Translation

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                    Components of Translation
                              |
              ┌───────────────┴───────────────┐
          Language                         Pragmatics
            /\                                 /\
           /  \                               /  \
      Grammar   Semantics                    /    \
        /\        /|\                        /      \
       /  \      / | \                      /        \
   Syntax  Morphology  Word  Collocation  Idioms  Cultural    Other Contextual
                       Meaning                     Values       Features
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Figure 1: Problematic Areas in Translation

Grammar in figure 1 above embodies all possible relations or errors likely to occur in the sentence structure, such as subject-verb agreement, incorrect usage of adjective-noun modification, adverbs, forms of words, prepositions, tenses of verbs, and even wrongly-spelt words, particularly when this is likely to lead to misunderstanding the word intended or to any level of mistranslation. Semantic inappropriateness has to do with incorrect choice of words, inappropriate collocation, misplaced usage of idioms, etc.

On the pragmatic plane, the cultural values relate to the *beliefs* people hold in a given culture and how they express these beliefs and their *attitudes* to them. Other contextual features link to other situational factors, such as the *time* of the speech activity or text, *place*, the *topic* discussed and the *participants*. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that context is crucial to the interpretation of text and, consequently, to translating it appropriately and relevantly. In fact, Vinay and Darbelnet (1995: 255) believe that "the need for creating equivalences arises from the situation and it is in the situation of the SL text that translators have to look for a solution".[2] This is further emphasized by other scholars and theorists. For example, Ivir (1996: 155) believes that

"Equivalence … emerges from the context of situation as defined by the interplay of (many different factors) and has no existence outside that context, and in particular it is not

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[2] **For a thorough examination of different types of equivalence, see Catford (1965), Nida (1964), Newmark (1988) among others. However, equivalence, although central to translation, is a term, on which linguists seem to have agreed to disagree.**

stipulated in advance by an algorithm for the conversion of linguistic units of L1 into linguistic units of L2".

As stated in the very title of this research, I intend to examine the main problems encountered by MA translation students in an Arab context. Details of errors, such as those of subject-verb agreement, coordination used instead of subordination, or misrepresentation of time reference will only be exemplified. In short, these problems should be either linguistic or cultural. They could be a mixture of both, but with one of them outweighing the other. The data and their analysis will reveal the other side of the coin, that is, which factors of mistranslation are more likely to induce pragmatic failure. According to Gile (2004: 9),

"[W]hen performing experiments, translation researchers tend to rely on surface characteristics and on an overall impression of what might be or might not be difficult for students, depending on the level of technicality of the text, on background knowledge believed necessary to understand it, on sentence complexity, on the presence of rare words, etc."

This is definitely true as far as the first text initially chosen for the data of this research is concerned, in comparison with the present one. The first one was highly religious and culture-specific. I replaced it with the present one, a political text, for the impossibility of even understanding what the respondents said in their translations of the first text. In it, misunderstanding was almost 90% of the total number of utterances in the target texts (see II, Data and Respondents below).

Many scholars (e.g. Duff, 1981; Pym, 1993; Shunnaq, 1998; Gile, 2004; to mention only a few) have dealt with such possible problems and classified them in different ways.[3] For example, Shunnaq (1998) discusses errors made on the level of number and gender, syntactic problems, relative clauses, nouns, pronouns; Duff (1981) approaches both the micro- and the macro-level components of language, such as idioms, structures, style, meaning, etc. On the other hand, Pym (1993) deals with theories and approaches to translating rather than mere linguistic errors that the trainees can perhaps avoid after some practice in class with their tutors.

In short, scholars and researchers (e.g. Abdel-Hafiz, 2000; Ayoub, 1994; Ghazala, 2004; Al-Jabr, 2006; Homeidi, 2004; Bahumaid, 2006; Aveling, 2002, among others) have tackled various questions in translating from Arabic into English. These problems were both lexical and grammatical in addition to certain textual features; they appear under subheadings, such as deletion, multiple meaning, word order, reference, tense and aspect, prepositions, coordination, subordination, punctuation, and even the definite article, etc. Other scholars (e.g. Pym, 2004; Homeidi, 2004) examined the cultural role in the process of translating from one language into another. Such cultural characteristics and functions are manifest in linguistic signals used by translators and other communicators. This is what has traditionally been termed 'culture-specific'. In this context, Baker (1992) says that

"the source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. The concept in question may be abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food. Such concepts are often referred to as 'culture-specific'." Baker (1992: 21)

Furthermore, Larson (1984: 180) strongly believes that

"terms which deal with the religious aspects of a culture are usually the most difficult, both in analysis of the source vocabulary and in finding the best receptor language equivalents. The reason is that these words are intangible and many of the

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[3] For studies on translation from English into Arabic, see Shudooh (1984), Ayoub (1994), Al-Jabr (2006), among others.

practices are so automatic that the speakers of the language are not as conscious of the various aspects of meaning involved".

At the same time, even those concepts, which are available in different cultures, may not have adequate linguistic signals to express them verbally in one language, or are expressed quite differently. This is best explicated in the following two sets of examples given by Ayoub (1994: 75):

Literal English	**Original text**	**Pragmatic connotation**
The forbidden house**:**	= البيتُ الحرام	The Ka'bah
The old house:	= البيتُ العتيق	The Ka'bah
The house of God:	= بيتُ الله	The Ka'bah
and		
Mother of Malice:	= أمُّ الخبائث	wine or alcohol
Mother of sins:	= أمُّ الآثام	wine or alcohol
Mother of great sins:	= أمُّ الكبائر	wine or alcohol

(Ayoub, 1994: 75)

Above all, Ayoub (1994) also sees that such culturally different terms are not limited to the religious context, but can also show considerable differences on the level of political terms. Thus,

"The term 'وزير العدل', Minister of Justice in Jordan, is 'Lord Chancellor' in Great Britain and it is 'Attorney General' in the United States. The term 'وزير المالية', Minister of Finance in Jordan, is "Minister of Treasures" in Australia; 'Chancellor of the Exchequer' in Great Britain; 'Secretary of the Treasury' in the United States. The term 'وزير التجارة', Minister of Trade in Jordan, is 'President of the Board of Commerce' in the United States" (Ayoub, 1994: 84).

Discussion of such details as the above is attainable in this research only as far as space limitations and the data collected allow for them. This is because the present data propose an incredible amount of linguistic errors in addition to other unexpected problems (see *Data Analysis* below). In other words, because of the classification of *Language in Use* into its major linguistic components and pragmatics, as in Figure 1 above, the errors picked up in the data collected will be analyzed in line with this classification and the categories embedded therein, i.e. grammar, semantics and pragmatics. However, it could be necessary first to shed light on the respondents and the data collected.

II. The Data and Respondents

Initially, I distributed a highly religious, very culture- and language-specific text to 24 MA students to translate into English. All of them were in their second, i.e. final, year of their MA study at that time. They had to translate it in class within a time limit of 75 minutes. The text consisted of 532 words. They were eleven (11) students from Petra University in Amman, Jordan, and thirteen (13) from the Higher Institute for Translation and Interpreting at Damascus University, Syria. This text was selected in a way as to reflect many cultural characteristics of Arab culture for testing the trainees in how they would respond to the peculiarities available in such a context. The respondents had the chance of using all sorts of dictionaries and encyclopedias, but many terms were not even available in those references. In fact, many concepts were not available in the target culture, i.e. English. After the translations were collected, the respondents were requested to comment on the problems they met during the process of translating this text on a separate sheet of paper. This was mainly for testing the degree of their awareness of their

own errors and/or the problems they faced and whether they had adequate strategies to overcome them.

When two professors of translation were requested to assess the MA students' errors in their translations, they were stunned at the incredible number and degree of deviations, linguistic and cultural, from the meaning as intended in the original text. Both of them said they hardly understood anything from the translations. To them, the outcome was a composite of both linguistic and nonlinguistic deviations. In this, I find myself in agreement with Gile (2004: 4) saying that

"it is sometimes difficult, when reading a student's translation, to judge by the sole target text which is an error and which is only a strategy, albeit one that the instructor would not necessarily choose him/herself."

After reading the paper at the "*2ⁿᵈ Jordan International Conference on Translation: Science, Art, or Skill*? 30 November – 2 December 2010", I was advised by the two assessors to replace the text by another, linguistically simpler, text dealing with everyday issues in current Standard Arabic (SA); this, they said, would enable the assessors to have more objective examination of the students' errors and to offer their advice on how to analyze and overcome them. I was immediately convinced of this suggestion and chose the text at hand (see Appendix I) in political standard Arabic. I also developed the idea of having more respondents and a third Arab university, the Arab Higher Institute of Translation in Algeria. This new text consisted of 354 words in Arabic. It was distributed to 100 students, but I received back only 33 translations of the new text. The total number of words of the new text is 11682 (see Table 1 below). Analysis of deviations focuses on the translations of this last text only.

III. Method of Analysis

Both quantitative, i.e. statistical, and qualitative, i.e. analytical, methods were used in this research. This should reflect the number of deviations of linguistic errors and cultural mismatch cases of the respondents and the reasons behind such mistranslations. These deviations are tabulated and classified in accordance with the main divisions in Figure 1 above. Subcategories of the major labels mentioned in the figure are at times detailed. The errors and cultural mismatch cases are measured against the standard translation generously offered by two colleagues teaching at another Arab university, from which no respondent comes. This is for the purpose of objectivity. Finally, interpretive interviews were conducted with six respondents for checking the reasons for any possible errors they made in their translations. Analysis of the findings in *section IV* below focuses on revealing the categories of linguistic errors and cultural mismatch cases in addition to the reasons for such deviations; examples of different categories of these deviations have been quoted and solutions suggested.

IV. Results and Discussion

Apart from multiple deviations in certain mechanics, such as punctuation, spacing, indentation, abbreviation, acronyms, etc, inconsistency in the use of such mechanics in one and the same translation or among the respondents in general was the rule rather than the exception. Above all, the major errors, linguistic and non-linguistic, were many more than expected from MA students at the three Arab universities, Petra University, Jordan; Damascus University, Syria and the Higher Arab Institute for Translation affiliated with the Arab League, Algeria, despite some discrepancies among them. The differences in deviations between one Arab university or institute and another are not the right subject to

be discussed here. At the same time, I fully agree with House (2001: 255), who believes that **"passing any "final judgement" on the quality of a translation that fulfills the demands of scientific objectivity is very difficult indeed"**.

Unlike the nature of the first 'religious' text replaced by this one, the present text is simple in its terms and is in no way culture-specific in its concepts. It is not of a very high (formal) or low (informal) variety of text or register. It is rather political and somewhat argumentative, but it is in no way language-specific or a specialized type of text. Because of this, the greatest majority of the errors were linguistic, i.e. grammatical and lexical. There were numerous syntactic and lexical errors, but even prepositional phrases were not appropriately used at times. Consequently, linguistic cohesion and textual coherence were in many instances missing (see Tables 3 and 4 below).

As soon as I finished correcting the 33 answer sheets, I was shocked to see the incredible number of errors on all levels of linguistic details, structural and lexical. I was in particular astounded at the great overlap of errors in a way that made sorting out the errors almost impossible. I immediately discovered that reproducing the message of the original text in the target language would require **"a good many grammatical and lexical adjustments" (Nida & Taber, 1974: 12).** Consider this sentence, which respondent 1 suggested as a translation of the Arabic text under it as an example:

Respondent's translation: **"According to the members of the new Egyptian <u>trend</u>, <u>the trend</u> aims to <u>meet</u> the Islamists and the military. <u>It was announced in Egypt on Thursday the establishment</u> of a new civilian <u>trend represents</u> democratic forces whose main objective is "<u>state-building and equality</u> among citizens, regardless of religion, color or sex." (My underlining**)

يهدف التيارُ المصري الجديد بحسب أعضائه إلى مواجهة الإسلاميين والعسكريين. أعلن في مصر اليوم الخميس عن تأسيس تيار مدني جديد يمثل قوى ديمقراطية هدفها الرئيسي "بناء الدولة وتحقيق المساواة بين المواطنين، بصرف النظر عن الدين أو اللون أو الجنس."

It is obvious that mother tongue interference (see Lado, 1957; James, 1980) is one of the main reasons behind the numerous pitfalls and deviations from the target language norms in the translation above. Notice, in particular, the non-functional repetition of the term "trend" in the translation above - which made the referent of the second "trend" sound different from that of the first, as if there were TWO trends confronting the Islamist and the military. In other words, the referential, i.e. semantic, meaning is not appropriate nor is the connotation, therefore. The use of "meet" is also of the same problematic nature that does not produce the same effect intended in the source text. Worse still is the fronting of the subject and the predicate in the second sentence of Respondent 1 above, meaning that the **"establishment of a new party was announced";** in fact, a different meaning is produced in the translation. A fourth error lies in the relationship between "trend" occurring after a preposition and the verb "represents" with a missing relative pronoun supposed to function as a subject. This is literally a copy of the Arabic structure without any modification. A fifth error lies in the lack of what is termed in the study of textual structuring 'syntactic recurrence or *parallelism*'; this was represented in the Respondent's phrase of "**state-building and equality"** (see Aziz & Shammas, forthcoming).

In short, below is the alternative translation of the text above as suggested by the informants, i.e. the professors, who translated the whole text for the sake of comparison:

According to its members, the new Egyptian bloc aims at confronting both the Islamists and the Military. The establishment of a new civil bloc representing democratic forces, whose main aim is to "to rebuild the state and achieve equality

among all citizens, regardless of religion, color or sex", was announced today, Thursday, in Egypt.

Another, perhaps more interesting, example of students' translations is quoted below as presented by **Respondent 12**:

"The Former Member of Parliament Basim Kamil said that "the <u>trend created because of 15 millions Egyptian</u> who <u>were voted</u> in the last elections, <u>in spite of they wouldn't</u> like to vote <u>to</u> Mursi <u>nor</u> Shafiq , therefore <u>all of them supposed</u> to have a good <u>presenter to their thought</u>." (My underlining)

The quotation above was a translation of this Arabic text:

وقال باسم كامل عضو مجلس الشعب السابق إن "التيارَ نشأ نتيجة وجود قرابة 15 مليون مصري صوتوا في الانتخابات الأخيرة، بالرغم من عدم رغبتهم في انتخاب 'مرسي' أو 'شفيق'، وبالتالي كل هؤلاء كان لابد أن يمثلوا تمثيلاً حقيقياً يعبرُ عنهم وعن أفكارهم."

In fact, the problem here is not confined to the number of errors, but the whole pragmatic effect of the source text is lost in the translation above. Although the errors are seemingly grammatical, i.e. syntactic and lexical, the very mixture of errors makes it extremely difficult for the reader of such translation to decipher what was meant by what was said. In other words, the whole *context* of the source text has changed. Needless to say, all of the verbal structures meant to be in the passive (e.g. **<u>trend created</u>**, **<u>all of them supposed)</u>** or active (e.g. **<u>were voted</u>),** the use of lexical items (e.g. **<u>presenter</u>**), of prepositions (e.g. **vote <u>to</u>**, **presenter <u>to</u>**), clauses (e.g. **<u>in spite of they wouldn't</u> like**), etc, in addition to pitfalls in punctuation and plural forms, are all of a high degree of deviation and, consequently, lead to misunderstanding. House (2001: 243) believes that

"in trying to assess the quality of a translation one also addresses the heart of any theory of translation, i.e., the crucial question of the nature of translation or, more specifically, the nature of the relationship between a source text and its translation text."

For the sake of comparison, the **informants' translation** is given below:

"Basem Kamel, former MP, said that "the Trend emerged as a result of having about 15 million Egyptians cast their votes in the last presidential election despite their unwillingness to have either Morsi or Shafiq elected. Consequently, these people must be truly represented and their ideas must be expressed".

A final example of such unreasonable errors is presented below. It is taken from **Respondent 33**. It is mainly characterized by the illogical length of 'sentence' in English in addition to numerous errors on the level of structure, punctuation, word choice, collocation, prepositions, and culture-specific terms and names:

"In the same context, <u>the</u> General Adel Abdel Maksoud Afifi, President of the <u>Originality</u> party <u>minded Salafi,</u> <u>cleared</u> that the aim of this <u>mass civilian</u> is to terrorize the Islamic trend<u>, it</u> also serves as a pressure <u>from</u> this force to keep <u>them out of the candidate</u> Dr. Mohamed Morsi, and <u>then</u> the Islamic trend <u>must not to respond</u> to such people so as not to <u>give them any size</u>." (My underlining)

Although I do not believe in back translation, I gave this last 'sentence' to a colleague of mine, other than the two informants, to try to decipher its intent, but he could not. It is obvious that carelessness was one reason for several pitfalls in the respondent's translation; he did not even bother himself to look up the denotation, i.e. dictionary meaning, of certain words, the collocation of others, or reconsider the syntactic order of other words, or punctuation marks to be used in that 'sentence'. The Arabic text for the 'sentence' above is:

في السياق ذاته، أوضحَ اللواء الدكتور عادل عبد المقصود عفيفي، رئيسُ حزب الأصالة ذو التوجه السلفي، إن الهدفَ من هذه الكتلة المدنية هو إرهابُ الناس من التيار الإسلامي، كما أنه بمثابة ورقة ضغط من هذه الكتلة لإبعادهم المرشح الدكتور محمد مرسي، ومن ثَمَّ على التيار الإسلامي عدم الرد على أمثال هؤلاء حتى لا يعطوهم أيَّ حجم.

The informants' translation is this: **In the same context, Major General, Dr. Abdulmaqsoud Afifi, President of the *Salafi* (ancestor)-oriented Asala Party, clarified that the aim of this civil bloc is horrifying people away from the Islamic Trend, and it is a kind of pressure for alienating the candidate, Dr. Morsi. Therefore, the Islamic Trend has to disregard such people in order to cut them down to size.**

(See Appendix II for the **informants'** translation of the whole text.)

In short, one could go on like this almost endlessly. The six personal, interpretive, interviews did not introduce any changes in the evaluation or categorization of errors. The respondents simply repeated, more or less, the same expressions, such as **"I don't know; I thought that was correct; is that wrong?"** Therefore, instead of going ahead with these personal interviews after the written 'test', I resorted to tabulating the percentage of the students' errors. As it is clear in Table 1 below, only a general categorization has been favoured. The reason for this is that the text in the case of each respondent could have more errors than the number of sentences in it. Another reason is the difficulty of having agreement on one definition of 'sentence', particularly in Arabic – which could lead to a different linguistic issue that does not have much in common with translation. This tabulation of errors is followed by what the respondents themselves deemed erroneous in their own translations. Table 1 shows the number of words translated and of the errors made in accordance with Figure 1 above:

Table 1: General Distribution of Translation Errors

Number of words translated	Total Number of Deviations	Grammatical errors: relations and structures of 'sentences'	Semantic Inappropriateness: Word Choice, collocations, etc.	Cultural Mismatch Cases, etc.
11682	1562	772	691	99

The number of words translated is that of the original text multiplied by the number of the respondents translating the text, i.e. 354 x 33 = 11682 words. The total number of what I termed 'deviations' is that of all sorts of linguistic errors and cultural mismatch cases, i.e. 1562 deviations. This means that the situation is extremely grim and difficult. However, such a number of errors cannot be precise unless what is meant by error is explained. If each student translated one word, e.g. *salafi* (ancestral), wrongly, then it is taken to compose 33 errors, in accordance with the number of the respondents. Another example relates to sentences. One sentence could be too long in English, and therefore, many mistakes are embedded in it. Such errors could be related to spelling, the misuse of the definite or indefinite articles, inappropriate collocation, incorrect usage of a word class, mistaken meaning, subject-verb agreement, relationship between reference words and supposed antecedents, coordination used instead of subordination, etc. In this case, each deviation from the target language norms is considered an error. Thus, one 'sentence' as used by the respondent may contain 1 to 10 errors in it because of the overlap among the various components of one and the same grammatical and/or semantic structure.

Cooperating with the 6 respondents I interviewed, and in accordance with the written comments of all the respondents, I have classified the actual problems they encountered in translating the text concerned, and labeled them, as described by the respondents, in Table 2 below. Most, if not all of these deviations, were linguistic in nature, and had nothing to do with procedures, strategies, techniques, or methods of translation (see, Nida, 1964; Newmark, 1988; Mason, 1994; Bardaji, 2009, among others). Hence my focus is on the actual problems that the MA translation students themselves deemed problematic and actually had in their translations. The number against each deviation in the table below stands for the number of respondents referring to such an error or problem. However, all of the deviations referred to and tabulated below are less than one third of the actual deviations the respondents actually had; they are only 433 in number.

Table 2: Respondents' Classification of Problems

1. Culture-specific Terms	2. (a) Unfamiliar Terms	3. (b) Grammatical Relations	4. Long Sentences & Complex Structures (23)
All instances & No. of Occurrences	All instances & No. of Occurrences	Examples	Examples
1) التوجه السلفي 29 2) حزب الأصالة (23) 3) حزب النور: 24	1) مواجهة الإسلاميين /19 2) تيار وطني ثالث: 28 3) تيار مدني: 26 4) بحسب: 30 5) جمع: 19 6) نكاية في: 32 7) التيار الإسلامي: 23 8) تعبئة جماهيرية: 21 9) تغليبَ: 27 10) الكتلة المدنية: 22 11) عدم الرد: 18 12) يعطي حجماً: 33	None	1) في السياق ذاته، أوضحَ اللواء الدكتور عادل عبد المقصود عفيفي، رئيسُ حزب الأصالة ذو التوجه السلفي، إن الهدفَ من هذه الكتلة المدنية هو إرهابُ الناس من التيار الإسلامي، كما أنه بمثابة ورقة ضغط من هذه الكتلة لإبعادهم المرشح الدكتور محمد مرسي، ومن ثَمَّ على التيار الإسلامي عدم الرد على أمثال هؤلاء حتى لا يعطوهم أيَّ حجم. 28 2) وقال يسري حماد، المتحدث الرسمي باسم حزب النور، في اتصال مع بي بي سي، إن تأسيسَ القوى المدنية لكتلة مدنية في هذا التوقيت ما هو إلا "إعادة لما كان يردده نظامُ الرئيس السابق مبارك، والذي يهدفُ إلى تقسيم المجتمع المصري"، مشيراً إلى أنه كان "يتمنى من هذه الكتلة المدنية تغليبَ مصلحة البلاد على المصالح الشخصية والحزبية". 31

Table 2 above shows some of the cases in which the respondents encountered problems dealing with the Arabic text. This is only what *they* admitted – which is restricted to various levels of semantic problems and a few grammatical difficulties.

In separate comments, the respondents I interviewed added other notes. They said they were encountered by the following difficulties on the *linguistic* level:

i. *clauses embedded* in others in a rather complicated way, but they gave no examples other than those mentioned in Table 2 above;

ii. nouns joined together by commas instead of *coordinators*, as in paragraph 5 of the source text;

iii. difficult use of *punctuation* in the source language text, Arabic, but they gave no examples.

iv. *words that are close in meaning*; some respondents mentioned the term تيّار;

v. expressions that are stylistically *difficult to render* into English, such as أيَّ يعطوهم لا حجم ضغط ورقة and; therefore, they said they used the dictionary quite often;

vi. figuring out the right *time reference* was not easy; but they gave no examples.

However, for the sake of objectivity, I asked two professors to assess the errors that I marked in red in the Respondents' translations. They both agreed on the classification of errors into two major types other than the formal errors or mistakes that did not impede understanding: a) those that led to misunderstanding the intent of the translator in the target text; and b) those that that required more effort to get what the translator meant by what s/he said, without necessarily leading to pragmatic failure. Therefore, my classification of these deviations was limited to 3 types only: 1) errors inducing misunderstanding; 2) errors requiring more processing effort (see Sperber and Wilson, 1995); and 3) formal errors that can be disregarded in terms of understanding the intended meaning of the source text via its translation. It is interesting that most respondents did not even recognize the major difficulties they encountered or the errors they made (Table 3).

Table 3: Degree of Translation Errors

Errors inducing misunderstanding	Errors Requiring greater Processing Effort than Contextual Effects	Formal errors that can be disregarded
87	147	1328

I then ascribed these errors to their actual sources and categories in accordance with Figure 1 above. These deviations have actually prevented the informants from understanding the intent of the translator in comparison with what was meant in the source text. In other words, these errors, as categorized in Table 4 below, were the ones that induced pragmatic failure:

Table 4: Types of Errors Inducing Pragmatic Failure

Grammatical Errors Causing Misunderstanding	Semantic errors Causing Misunderstanding	Cultural Mismatch Cases
31	45	11

However, the errors leading to greater processing effort on the part of the reader were indeed a mixture of semantic and structural deviations, according to the informants and to my examination of the results.

It is now obvious that the teaching of translation theories, strategies, techniques, or procedures to MA students, whose English is inadequate for writing correctly and appropriately, can only *partly* be useful. The findings, in short, emphasize that knowledge of the target language is essential for any sort of cross-cultural communication, one type of which is translation itself.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the fact that the Respondents' comments are not adequately realistic and do not reflect the status quo of the findings in this research, the findings do reflect the respondents' abilities in translating and their knowledge of English as a foreign language

very realistically. This is because the text is simple in its structure, wording and concepts and is of a somewhat low register in Arabic. Other genres of text and different linguistic registers may yield different, more disappointing, results of the same MA students. At the same time, I must mention that some of these respondents were recent graduates from one of the three universities mentioned; others are now doing their MA dissertations after two years of postgraduate study; students in the third group are in their second, i.e. final, year of MA study at university. This shows us that the syllabus design and teaching materials in the MA courses and the years preceding it can influence performance in translation in the MA course itself.

Although one can be touched by this quotation taken from Aveling (2002), a good professor of translation cannot, and should not, ignore the slightest errors made by his or her MA students:

"Translators are regularly berated by various critics for their apparently endless 'mistakes'. All of us who are practising translators know this well. We labour for years to translate a text, in a sensitive and caring way, only to be told that "there is a comma missing on page 45", "this sort of bird is a pigeon and not a magpie", and "the subjunctive, which is a particular feature of this author's style in the original, is missing in the translation". Mistakes, mistakes, mistakes …" Aveling (2002: 1)

The question here is not a matter of tolerance or forgiveness. It is rather a mission that should be accomplished. The major problem lies in the fact that the errors were not only numerous, but varied and unexpected on all levels of linguistic details and cultural implications related to culture-specific terms and concepts in the target language. Therefore, I suggest that researchers and professors of translation at Arab universities go ahead with their research in narrower areas separately, such as the area of grammatical errors only, the area of collocation only, and the area of culture-specific terms and their concepts in translation, etc. (see Shammas, 2005a). In addition, remedial courses in the areas of weakness for every well-defined group of learners are recommended. Otherwise, the same flood of errors motivated by carelessness, mother tongue interference or teaching-induced errors will continue and professors' complaints will accompany them in their career.

In fact, it is unexpectedly obvious that the major problems in this context had to do: first with the inappropriateness of word choice, secondly with the ill-structured sentences in the target language, and thirdly with the inaccurate translation of culture-specific terms and expressions into English. These three weaknesses have, in particular, to be given special attention at our Arab universities, especially, the MA courses, and students of translation. This may require a reconsideration of the MA syllabi, the methods of teaching and the materials covered.

Finally, I agree with Atari (2005: 188) saying that "the subjects' tendency to dwell on the word, morpheme, phrase and to a lesser extent a whole sentence . . . reflects the extent of the difficulty they have with bottom-up, language-based text processing strategies."

At the end of the day, Arab professors of translation are, in fact, teaching English as a foreign language via the teaching of translation, in addition to some useful strategies and techniques of translating. Therefore, it is highly recommended for professors of translation to pay particular attention to the grammar of the foreign language and its semantic structures in the teaching of translation. It is also interesting and useful to carry out research on English-Arabic translations and to compare the results obtained from the

two ends. This is a lesson I have learned from my experience and research at three Arab universities.

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Appendix I: Source Text

Dear Respondent,

This is a questionnaire meant to serve part of my research on "*Translation Problems Encountered by MA Students at Arab Universities*". Your cooperation in translating the short Arabic text below into English would be highly appreciated. You could consult any sort of dictionary or encyclopedia, but please rely *only on your own knowledge* (and do NOT consult any translator or linguist) in rendering the text attached into English. All information provided will remain *confidential*. Finally, please hand, send, or e-mail your reply at your earliest convenience.

الإعلانُ عن تشكيل "تيار وطني ثالث"

في مصر لمواجهة الإسلاميين

الخميس، 28 يونيو/ حزيران، 2012 - BBC

يهدف التيارُ المصريُ الجديد بحسب أعضائه إلى مواجهة الإسلاميين والعسكريين. أعلن في مصر اليوم الخميس عن تأسيس تيار مدني جديد يمثل قوى ديمقراطية هدفها الرئيسي "بناء الدولة وتحقيق المساواة بين المواطنين، بصرف النظر عن الدين أو اللون أو الجنس."

وقال السيّد إسحاق، الناشط السياسي، إن دورَ التيار الثالث سيكون "جمعَ وتوحيدَ كل المصريين الذين انتخبوا الفريق أحمد شفيق نكاية في الدكتور محمد مرسي مع الآخرين الذين انتخبوا مرسي نكاية في شفيق."

وأوضحَ المشاركون في مؤتمر الإعلان عن تشكيل التيار الوطني المصري بدعوة من الحزب المصري الديمقراطي، أن التيارَ سيحرصُ على وجود حقيقي في مختلف محافظات مصر لاكتساب القدرة على تعبئة جماهيرية وشعبية للضغط من أجل تحقيق أهدافه.

وقال باسم كامل عضو مجلس الشعب السابق إن "التيارَ نشأ نتيجة وجود قرابة 15 مليون مصري صوتوا في الانتخابات الأخيرة، بالرغم من عدم رغبتهم في انتخاب 'مرسي' أو 'شفيق'، وبالتالي كل هؤلاء كان لابد أن يمثلوا تمثيلاً حقيقياً يعبرُ عنهم وعن أفكارهم."

وحضرَ المؤتمرَ عددٌ من ممثلي القوى المدنية منهم محمد نور فرحات وعمرو حمزاوي، جورج إسحاق، عبد الغفار شكر، زياد بهاء الدين، باسم كامل، فريد زهران، محمد غنيم.

من جهة أخرى، هاجمَ عددٌ من الإسلاميين "التيارَ الثالث"، مشيرين إلى أنه "يمثلُ خطراً شديداً على مستقبل مصر"، باعتباره يقسم المجتمعَ في هذه الحالة لتيار ديني وتيارٍ عسكري.

وقال يسري حماد، المتحدث الرسمي باسم حزب النورَ، في اتصال مع بي بي سي، إن تأسيسَ القوى المدنية لكتلة مدنية في هذا التوقيتِ ما هو إلا "إعادة لما كان يردده نظامُ الرئيس السابق مبارك، والذي يهدفُ إلى تقسيم المجتمع المصري"، مشيراً إلى أنه كان "يتمنى من هذه الكتلة المدنية تغليبَ مصلحة البلاد على المصالح الشخصية والحزبية".

وأشارَ حماد إلى أن الأحزابَ المشاركة في هذه الكتلة المدنية فشلتْ قبلَ وأثناءَ الانتخابات البرلمانية والرئاسية في التوحد ضد التيار الإسلامي.

في السياق ذاته، أوضحَ اللواء الدكتور عادل عبد المقصود عفيفي، رئيسُ حزب الأصالة ذو التوجه السلفي، إن الهدفَ من هذه الكتلة المدنية هو إرهابُ الناس من التيار الإسلامي، كما أنه بمثابة ورقة ضغط من هذه الكتلة لإبعادهم للمرشح الدكتور محمد مرسي، ومن ثَمَّ على التيار الإسلامي عدم الرد على أمثال هؤلاء حتى لا يعطوهم أيَّ حجم.

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Appendix II: Informants' Translation of Source Text
Announcing the Formation of a "Third National Current"
in Egypt to Confront Islamists
BBC: Thursday 28 June 2012

According to its members, the new Egyptian bloc aims at confronting both the Islamists and the Military. The establishment of a new civil bloc representing democratic forces, whose main aim is to "to rebuild the state and achieve equality among all citizens, regardless of religion, color or sex", was announced today, Thursday, in Egypt.

Mr. Isaac, a political activist, said that the role of the Third Trend "is to bring together and unify all the Egyptians who elected Ahmad Shafiq to spite Dr. Morsi with those who elected Morsi to spite Shafiq".

Called upon by the Egyptian Democratic Party, participants in the conference announcing the Egyptian Third Trend would seek to have actual presence in the various Egyptian governorates to get the right power of popular mobilization and exercise pressure for the achievement of its aims.

Basem Kamel, former MP, said that "the Trend emerged as a result of having about 15 million Egyptians cast their votes in the last presidential election despite their unwillingness to have either Morsi or Shafiq elected. Consequently, these people must be truly represented and their ideas must be expressed".

Representatives of some civil forces attended the conference, such as Muhammad Nour Farhat, Amr Hamzawi, George Isaac, Abdulaghaffar Shukr, Ziad Bahaaddin, Basem Kamel, Fareed Zahran and Muhammad Ghuneim.

On the other hand, some of the Islamists attacked the "Third Trend", pointing out that it "represents a serious danger to the future of Egypt", simply because it divides the nation into two religious and military, trends.

In a conversation with BBC, Yusri Hammad, the Nour Party spokesperson, said that the establishment of a civil block at this time is "just a reiteration of what the regime of the former President, Mubarak, wanted; it aimed at dividing the Egyptian society"; he also pointed out that he "wishes this civil bloc gave priority to the national welfare over personal and partisan interests".

Hammad also stated that the member parties in this civil bloc failed before and during the parliamentary and presidential elections to unify against the Islamic trend.

In the same context, Major General, Dr. Abdulmaqsoud Afifi, President of the *Salafi* (ancestor)-oriented Asala Party, clarified that the aim of this civil bloc is horrifying people away from the Islamic Trend, and it is a kind of pressure for alienating the candidate, Dr. Morsi. Therefore, the Islamic Trend has to disregard such people in order to cut them down to size.

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