

LEXICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND ARABIC: THE ROLE OF THE TRANSLATOR

Eshraq S. Obeidat¹ and Abdel-Rahman H. Abu-Melhim^{2*}

¹Instructor of English Language and Literature, Department of English Language and Literature, Al-Balqa Applied University, Irbid University College, Irbid, Jordan

²Professor of English Language and Literature, Department of English Language and Literature, Al-Balqa Applied University, Irbid University College, Irbid, Jordan

ABSTRACT: *This paper consternates on four types of lexical relations between English and Arabic, namely, synonymy, antonymy, homonymy and polysemy with regard to translation. Specifically, it aims to shed light on the role of translators in handling these lexical relations. Moreover, it tries to reveal how these relations are reflected both in Arabic and English and if they are causing obstacles while translating. A comparative and qualitative analysis is used to analyse the data gathered from different English and Arabic scholarly and academic texts. The study ends with the conclusion that translators have to pay extreme attention to these lexical relations while translating and exert much effort to come up with a valid translation that uncover the problems resulting from the congruence and ambiguity that such lexical relations impose.*

KEYWORDS: Lexical Relations, Synonymy, Antonymy, Homonymy, Polysemy.

INTRODUCTION

Translation is considered to be a challenging activity because it is overwhelmed with so many problems that are seen as insurable by those translators who are not in favor of arduous work. Some of the problems that may face translators are related to the difficulty of finding an appropriate equivalent for the Source Language (SL) lexical item; such problems are called lexical problems. Semantic, lexical or sense relations are designations that are interchangeably used to refer to the same concept by some linguists. They are these associations that are found between the meanings of words or sentences. They were evolved by the linguists, Lyons and Cruse, who believed that such relations are of significance for the study of meaning, the essence of semantics.

Being not reflected by words in isolation, meaning is the outcome of the interactions and correlations of words among each other. In other words, "meaning is use in context" (Belica, Keibel, Kupietz, & Perkuhn, 2010, p. 120). The meaning of a single lexical item alters when involved in different linguistic contexts. These "semantics shifts, if big enough can affect the lexical relationships between any pair of words" (Völker, Haase, & Hitzler, 2008, p. 59). In this paper, we will try to investigate some of lexical problems with regard to four sense relations that can be serious pitfalls if not comprehended and probed adequately by translators. The relations that gain our interest are: synonymy, antonymy, homonymy and polysemy to which and to their contextual meaning utmost care must be paid when handled by translators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the previous studies concentrate on investigating lexical relations semantically and linguistically. With regard to translation, former researchers opt to concentrate their efforts on the factors that lead translators to have lexical problems in their translations and on practical analysis of such problems in certain fields ignoring the role of translators toward them, to the best of the researchers' knowledge. However, the researchers could find a closely related study that, to some extent, concurs with their concerns of translating lexical relations in English and Arabic done by Mansouriin (2012). Mansouri affirms that the translator will not be accurate if he relies only on bilingual dictionaries. In fact, he suggests a new approach to the translation of semantic fields, a group of paradigmatically related lexemes, in English and Arabic based on componential analysis of meaning. This approach depends on contrasting semantic fields in both English and Arabic rather than lexical items in isolation to improve the process of translation. In his study Mansouri explores synonymy, hyponymy, incompatibility, antonymy, complementarity and converseness in English in order to contrast them with the same lexical relations in Arabic.

Ali, Brakhw, Nordin, and Ismail(2012) probes the linguistic difficulties found while translating the Holy Quran. Among the difficulties they explore were polysemy and metonymy, two problematic lexical relations that need utmost attention while translating. They conclude that translators must consult the different commentaries of Quran in order to adequately translate such lexical relations in addition to other linguistic problems. A committee that involves knowledgeable experts who struggle to reflect the intended meaning of the Holy Quran.

Alhihi (2015) explores lexical translation problems faced by the translators of Health Documents in Australia from English into Arabic with relation to the functionalist approach. He finds out that the lexical errors are attributed but not restricted to additions, omissions, compounds, synonyms, collocations and inconsistencies. Moreover, he asserts that such errors are committed by both professional as well as student translators. Inaccurate usage of the lexical items is due to the difficulty that translators encountered with the semantic boundaries and restrictions of these items.

Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2004) states that lexical-semantic sense relations as synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, homonymy, hyperonymy and hyponymy can be adopted to describe lexical items. All of these relations are directly relevant to translation, as declared by her. However, the incommensurability of the SL and TL makes the process of finding appropriate translational equivalences difficult. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk reveals that translation theories depend on various linguistic patterns to conciliate between the systems of the two languages.

Purpose

The study tries to investigate synonymy, antonymy, homonymy and polysemy between English and Arabic in terms of translation and the responsibility of the translators towards them. Furthermore, it examines how these four types of lexical relations are revealed both in English and Arabic in order to judge whether they are problematic for translators while translating. Moreover, the study aims at suggesting some practical steps for translators that would be supportive for their genuine efforts in translating the lexical relations of interest.

METHODOLOGY

The study is comparative and qualitative in essence. It compares both English and Arabic terms of four lexical relations: synonymy, antonymy, polysemy and homonymy to inspect patterns of similarities and differences. A description of these relations is provided within which some practical steps are suggested to be followed in order to deal with the problems resulting while translating them. Some supported examples from both languages: English and Arabic have been analysed to illustrate the most common problems that may emerge during the transformation of such phenomena from one language into another. These examples are consulted from different academic references to contribute to our argument concerning the translation of lexical relations and the role of translators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Synonymy

Since translation concerns of achieving congruity, to some extent, between the SL and the Target Language (TL), it has been described as "a form of synonymy" (Newmark, 1981, p. 101). Synonymy comes to existence because of the growing tendency toward varying in the words being used and not to be restricted by the same word, to enhance lexical cohesion and to enrich the language. Synonyms are these "lexical items whose senses are identical in respect of 'central' semantic traits, but differ, if at all, only in respect of what we may provisionally describe as 'minor' or 'peripheral' traits" (Cruse, 1986, p. 267). This indicates that absolute synonyms are not likely to occur in the language. One example that may illustrate this point can be found in the words 'manslaughter' and 'murder' that are classified as synonyms in thesauri; however, one could not pretend that they are completely interchangeable. 'Manslaughter' is unintentional or accidental killing, and this is not a murder. The absence of perfect synonyms is a common characteristic among all languages. Thus, the fact that no two words exactly have the same meaning makes the job of the translator harder. In English, for example, there are some words that share the same semantic properties in certain contexts but not in others. For example, the words 'deep' and 'profound' are considered synonymous when applied to thought, but when referred to water only 'deep' applies; we say 'deep water' not 'profound water'. Nevertheless, either 'profound or deep mediation' is attested in English.

Correspondingly, "there is no obvious motivation for the existence of absolute synonyms" (Cruse, 1986, p. 270) in Arabic. To highlight this phenomenon, let us consider the following example in which a complete list of words shares the same semantic features of being camels: 'الإبل', 'الهيجن', 'جمل', 'ناقة', 'الأوضح', 'القلوص', 'الشعلاء' and 'السمحاء'. In translating 'الإبل' and 'الهيجن' the translator will face no difficulty because they are used interchangeably in Arabic to refer to both genders and camels of all sizes and kinds, so the translator may easily use the word 'camel' for both of them. Moreover, the distinction that based on gender will also simplify the duty of the translator. For example, when translating 'جمل' and 'ناقة' into English, the translator would render them as 'a male camel' and 'a female camel' respectively. In addition to gender distinction the rest of words can be translated by paraphrasing the camels' distinctive features. For instance, 'الأوضح' that is known of its whiteness will be translated as a 'male white camel', whereas 'القلوص' can be translated as a 'two-year young female camel that can be ridden'. 'الشعلاء' that is distinguished by its redness and fastness will be rendered as a 'red race camel', and 'السمحاء', which is known of its color mixture: red and black, will be translated as a

'black and red camel'. Thus, "words that are *exact* synonyms of one another" (Hervey, 1979, p. 94) are not likely to exist in Arabic as well as English.

Synonyms frequently constitute a combination of two words that occur together in a sequence separated by a lexical item as 'that is to say' or a variety of 'or' in English and by 'و' or 'أو' in Arabic. Such a procedure is done with the aim of "explanation, or clarification, of the meaning of another word" (Cruse, 1986, p. 267). Consider the following examples:

Say good-bye or bid farewell.

He is an industrious that is to say, diligent worker.

In fact, synonymous pairs and strings in Arabic are of great significance for the purpose of emphasis. However, this technique of emphasis seems to be odd and of less value in English that used to convey its ideas in fewer words. For example, the Arabic range 'صلف و غطرسة و عنجهية' can be easily rendered by one word in English that is 'arrogance'.

Synonyms in collocation are found in both languages. According to New mark (1981), this kind of synonyms used to appear traditionally for the purpose of "emphasis or distinction, or it is merely a bad written phrase" (p. 104). 'قسمة و نصيب' and 'صحة و عافية', which can be rendered into English as 'destiny' and 'well-health' respectively, are two examples of word-strings that have this strong tendency of co-occurrence in Arabic. English, which is known of its richness of synonyms, has not been deprived of such kind of synonyms in collocation. 'Last will and testament' and 'without let and hindrance' are vivid examples.

Concerning synonymy, a translator is free to choose the appropriate equivalents for the synonyms at hand, but he must be able "to find objective reasons for preferring one word to another" (Newmark, 1981, p. 102). Thus, in translating synonyms, the personal taste of the translator is of significance. However, to be faithful to the SL, a translator can choose to paraphrase "when a single deep structure can appear in a variety of surface structures" (Mouakket, 1988, p. 50). Consider these sentences that are taken as paraphrases:

1. The question is difficult to answer.
2. It is difficult to answer the question.
3. Answering the question is difficult.
4. To answer the question is difficult.

The above mentioned examples convey the same meaning although they differ structurally. In other words, the same thing has been expressed by more than one possible way. However, Newmark (1981) indicates that paraphrasing should be approached by the translator when there is no other alternative possible:

The translator first job is to transcribe; only when this is not possible, for all kinds of reasons of situational and linguistic context, connotation, etc., must he resort to synonyms, then to componential analysis, then to definition, and finally to his last (but not infrequent) recourse to paraphrase. (p. 101)

Antonymy

Words that are opposite in meaning are called antonyms. Two words can be called antonyms when they share all the semantic features but one. 'Tall' and 'short', for instance, are semantically similar and belong to the same semantic category, which is 'height'. Nevertheless, the property that they do not share is present in one and absent in the other. Antonyms are recognized of "their dependence upon dichotomization" (Lyons, 1977, p. 271) in which binary opposition can be revealed in the form of contradictory pairs.

In both languages, English and Arabic, antonyms often concur. That is, the same words that are seen as antonyms in one of the languages may be regarded as antonyms in the other language. To illustrate, the words 'أم' and 'أب' that considered antonyms in Arabic are also seen as antonyms in English. Although the word 'father' contradicts with the word 'mother' in terms of gender, they share the same semantic feature of being humans. Nevertheless, both of the words may indicate non-humanity when they are jointly used with certain words or expressions. For example, in the English expressions 'mother-tongue or language' and 'Mother Earth', the word 'mother' does not imply the sense that it usually denotes. Furthermore, the word 'father' may be employed to mean more than its natural meaning. Consider this sentence in which 'father' means 'God': 'For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you'. Similarly, in Arabic the same two words of antonymy, 'father' and 'mother', are used to indicate different associations and connotations. Consider the following examples in which the word 'أب' loses its contrary relationship with the word 'أم' and; thus, its natural meaning: 'أبو جعدة', 'أبو بريص', 'أبو جابر' and 'أبو جلمبو' that mean respectively: wolf, gecko, bread and crab. The word 'أم' is also used in Arabic to convey many senses. Some examples are: 'أم عامر', 'أم قويق', 'أم أربع وأربعين' and 'أم أدراص' that are rendered as hyena, owl, centipede and jerboa in a descending order.

As a result of this, a translator must pay attention to the fact that antonyms may be employed in different contexts to refer to a variety of connotative meanings rather than their denotative ones. A translator who is ignorant of the story that has behind the emerging of this proverb: 'كمجبر أم عامر' will literally translate 'أم عامر' as 'Amir's mother' instead of 'hyena'. To avoid such a problem, the translator must not be deprived of further reading that enhances his familiarity with the culture of his mother-tongue and also the TL.

It must be mentioned that the "oppositeness of meaning between lexemes" (Lyons, 1977, p. 271) is relative than absolute in most cases. A lady who is described as being pretty by a certain person might be seen as an ugly one by another. This is attributed to the fact that the standards of beauty and ugliness differ from one society into another with regard to some personal aesthetic tastes and cultural factors. Described as relative, the relationship of oppositeness between a pair of words may be canceled according to the nature of use. However, some antonyms can be described as absolute the whole time. In other words, they do not lose their contrary relationship according to the circumstances of occurrence. For instance, 'death' and 'life' are in contrary relationship the whole time. A dead person in one society will not be regarded as being alive in other societies under different circumstances and conditions.

Another example is that of the two contradictory colors, white and black, which are sometimes used in the Arabic context to convey a different kind of contradiction rather than that of color distinction. To illustrate, let us consider this example taken from the Holly Qur'an: chapter 4, verse 106, sura 3: "يوم تبيض وجوه و تسود وجوه" that can be rendered as "the day when (certain) faces become white and (certain) faces become black" (as cited in Mouakket, 1988, p. 96). As

can be noticed the two verbs 'تبيض' and 'تسود' contradict each other in terms of the goodness and the badness of the deeds conducted by the two different teams specified by the Holy verse as those of white faces to which good and praised actions are assigned and those of black faces to which ugly and evil actions are related. In fact, such translation of the Holy verse deprived it much of its emotiveness and connotations. This can be seen in the expression, 'تسود وجوه', which has been translated as "faces become black". 'Blackface' is a collocation both in Arabic and English. In Arabic 'blackface' symbolizes disgrace and humiliation, whereas in English it denotes anger and fury. A skillful translator who is interested in transferring the meaning exactly as it is will provide a footnote that illustrates this distinction in meaning between the two expressions in English and Arabic. The translator must bear in his mind that he "can often avoid not only errors of usage but mistakes of fact and language simply by applying his common sense and showing sensitivity to language" (New mark, 1988, p. 3). By this sensitivity that is to be shown to the SL and the TL, a translator will reveal an effort that reflects his interest for his translation to be genuine and sincere.

Homonymy

It has been claimed that homonymy is a main source of both lexical and structural ambiguity due to the fact that homonymy may be understood or interpreted in more than one way. To avoid such ambiguity in translation much effort must be exerted in perceiving the context in which the ambiguous word or sentence occur. Words that are same in form and sound but different in meaning are called homonyms. By way of illustration, 'ear', the organ of hearing, and 'ear', the seed-bearing part of a cereal, are complete homonyms. Partial homonymy is represented by homographs and homophones. Homographs are related to these words spelt similarly but have different meanings and pronunciations such as 'minute' /'mɪnɪt/ that refers to a sixty-second period of time and 'minute' /maɪ'nju:t/ that describes something extremely small. Homophones are those words that sound similarly but differ in spelling and meaning such as 'meat' /mi:t/, the flesh of an animal and 'meet' /mi:t/, a verb relating to the act of coming into contact.

Homonymy is problematic for translators in the sense that homonymous words can be interpreted by more than one way if they are not understood. In 'Can you see the bow?' the word 'bow' constitutes a problem for translators because there is no hint that would clarify the intended meaning as well as the exact pronunciation. In this example the noun 'bow' is a vivid example of both complete and partial homonyms. Partial homonyms are exemplified by the homographs 'bow' /baʊ/ and 'bow' /bəʊ/ that under each of which complete homonyms are highlighted. Thus, the translator will not be able to decide whether what is meant is 'bow' /baʊ/, 'the front end of the ship' or 'the movement of somebody's head or back forward to show respect' or 'bow' /bəʊ/ which refers to either 'a weapon for shooting arrows', 'a tool used to play musical instruments with strings' or 'a knot used for decoration'. In such situations, the translator will be confused and uncertain about the interpretation to which he will show conformity. Nevertheless, it would have been easier for him to decide upon the suitable meaning if this ambiguity has been declared by using an additional context that conveys the target meaning without confusion. Undoubtedly, the previous sentence with its multiple meanings will be easily assimilated if the following additional lexical items are adopted:

Can you see the bow of the ship?

Can you see the bow before the curtains call?

Can you see the bow and its arrows?

Can you see the bow of that violin?

Can you see the bow on the gift is tied?

Unfortunately, such clarity is rarely to be found in any language, and homonyms occur without a signal that supports their occurrence; therefore, the translator's job will be complicated especially if he is involved in oral translation.

It is worth mentioning that the ambiguity that results from the using of homonymous words is sometimes deliberately adopted to convey a message. Let us take the following verses from Arabic as a way of illustration:

يا ويح قلبي من دواعي الهوى	إذ رحل الجيران عند الغروب
أتبعتهم طرفي و قد أزمعوا	و دمع عيني كفيض الغروب
كانوا و فيهم طفلة حرة	تفتقر عن مثل أقاحي الغروب

In these lines of poetry, three words that have the same form and pronunciation but different meanings are intentionally used by the poet to give rhyme for the verses and to force the addressee to use his mental processes to distinguish among them; moreover, they are used as a decorative device to enrich the esthetic value of the verse. 'الغروب' is used to refer to three different senses: sunset, a huge bucket that is full of water and a region of a low-land.

It must be known by the translator that the attempt toward resolving the ambiguity that is purposely added is not of his duty. In fact, he must reproduce the same ambiguity or a similar one in order to fulfill the same function intended from the ambiguity, and this can be achieved by providing a footnote that illustrates the implications of the SL homonymous word or through the replacement of the SL ambiguous word by a different but corresponding TL word that employs the same function without forgetting to provide a footnote in which he determines the reasons of following such a procedure.

Polysemy

A polysemous word is "a pattern of distinct but related senses of a lexeme" (Saeed, 2016, p.70). The word 'mouth' is polysemous due to the several connotations that it has: 'The mouth of a bag', 'the mouth of a cave', 'the mouth of a river' and 'the mouth of a human being' are four different contexts in each of which the polysemous word 'mouth' has different meanings.

Like homonymy, polysemy comprises another dimension of lexical ambiguity that proceeds from the difficulty of identifying the exact meaning for the ambiguous word especially when there are no extra verbal and sometimes non-verbal elements that specifies the meaning. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether the ambiguous word is an example of polysemy (one word that has different meanings) or of an absolute homonymy (different words that share the same pronunciation and form). This overlap between polysemy and homonymy has been partially resolved by dictionary makers who used to arrange polysemous words under one entry and to provide a separate entry for homonyms. However, such dictionary representation seems to be invalid because of the randomly derived criteria followed by lexicographers in their classification of these words. Lyons (1977) tried to present three different methods that may help draw distinctions between polysemy and homonymy. One is

by "virtue of the etymological criterion" (p. 550) that depends on the knowledge of the historical derivation of the word. The second pays much interest to the "native speaker's intuitions of relatedness of meaning" (p. 552). The third one involves the application of "a componential analysis of the senses of lexemes" (p. 553). Nevertheless, it seems to be that there is no definite and reliable method that we can rely on in our effort to differentiate between polysemy and homonymy.

Polysemy occurs in Arabic as well as English. For more clarity let us have a look at the following example: The verb 'رمى' is a polysemous verb that has many possible related meanings along with its denotative meaning, 'threw away'. 'Accused of' and 'aimed at' are two possible metaphorical meanings of the verb 'رمى'. They can be distinguished through the appropriate context that manifests their meaning. In the following sentences the verb 'رمى' is clearly understood from the context:

رمى النفايات أرضاً.

رمى صاحبه بالكذب.

رمى إلى تحقيق غايته.

In the first sentence the verb 'رمى' is literally used to signal that somebody threw the rubbish away. However, two figurative meanings can be realized from the following two sentences in which the addition of the propositions has caused the meaning to be different. Thus, 'رمى بـ' means 'he accused him of' whereas 'رمى إلى' is the meaning that is reflected by 'رمى إلى'. A great number of polysemous verbs in Arabic can be determined through the presence of such prepositions. Consider this further example in which "the presence or absence of prepositions determines the meaning of the word" (Mouakket, 1988, p. 75):

He liked it. رغب فيه.

He hated it. رغب عنه.

It is evident from the previous example that polysemous words cannot be understood out of context. However, the context in which the polysemous words occur may not include the necessary information that helps recognize the different meanings of the word. For example, in 'he fired them' a certain kind of ambiguity is caused by the polysemous verb 'fired'. The translator will find a difficulty in translating this sentence because it implies three different senses for the verb 'fired' that can be interpreted as follows:

1. He fired them. 'Fired' here means to 'shoot'.
2. He fired them. 'Fired' here means to 'dismiss'.
3. He fired them. 'Fired' here means to 'excite'.

In such a situation the translator is not sure which sense to adopt. However, to resolve such a problem the translator may provide a footnote in which he explains his uncertainty of the meaning that he depends.

It would be useful to say that polysemous words are described as "language specific" (Mouakket, 1988, p. 77). This means that polysemous forms in one language do not coincide with those of the other language. Consequently, in his attempt to translate such phenomenon

the translator must bear in mind that much of his success is associated with his familiarity with the systems and rules of the SL and TL.

CONCLUSION

The translator must keep in mind that "the relationships of similarity and difference between concepts (and the words that express them) do not necessarily coincide in the languages involved in the translation" (Bell, 1991, p. 91). To find appropriate equivalent for the SL item seems to be impossible since there is no absolute correspondence between languages; however, it is the translator's responsibility to approximate the meaning and to be as close as possible to the original text. As a result when the translator is faced with certain semantic phenomena as synonymy, antonymy, homonymy and polysemy, he must not attempt to choose the equivalent in the TL without thoroughly examining the particular norms prevailed in both cultures regarding the phenomena in question.

REFERENCES

- Alhihi, N. (2015). Lexical problems in English to Arabic translation: A critical analysis of health documents in Australia. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 6(2), 316-328. doi: 10.24093/awej/vol6no2.24
- Ali, A. , Brakhw, M. A., Nordin, M. Z. F., & ShaikIsmail, S. F. (2012). Some linguistic difficulties in translating the Holy Quran from Arabic into English. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 2(6), 588-590. doi: 10.7763/IJSSH.2012.V2.178
- Belica, C., Keibel, H., Kupietz M., &Perkuhn, R. (2010). An empiricist's view of the ontology of lexical-semantic relations. In P. Storjohann (Ed.), *Lexical-semantic relations: Theoretical and practical perspectives* (pp. 115-144). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Bell, R. T. (1991). *Translation and translating: Theory and practice*. London, UK: Longman.
- Cruse, D. A. (1986). *Lexical semantics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hervey, S. G. (1979). *Axiomatic semantics: A theory of linguistic semantics*. Edinburgh, UK: Scottish Academic Press.
- Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, B. (2004). Semantics and translation. In H. Kittel et al. (Ed.), *Übersetzung - translation – traduction: An international encyclopedia of translation studies* (vol. 1, pp. 301-312). Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter.
- Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics* (Vols. 1-2). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Mansouri, A. N. (2012). Semantic fields in English and Arabic: Problems in translation. In N. Al Zidjaly (Ed.), *Building bridges: Integrating language, linguistics, literature, and translation in English studies* (pp. 201-220). Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Mouakket, A. (1988). *Linguistics and translation: Semantic problems in Arabic-English translation*. Damascus, Syria: Dar Tlass for Studies, Translation and Publication.
- Newmark, P. (1981). *Approaches to translation*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. New York, NY: Prentice-Hall International.

Saeed, J. I. (2016). *Semantics* (4th ed.). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

Völker, J., Haase, P., & Hitzler, P. (2008). Learning expressive ontologies. In P. Buitelaar & P. Cimiano (Eds.), *Ontology learning and population: Bridging the gap between text and knowledge* (pp. 45-70). Amsterdam, Netherlands: IOS Press.