

**PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING ENGLISH AND ARABIC LANGUAGES'  
STRUCTURE: A CASE STUDY OF EFL SAUDI STUDENTS IN SHAQRA  
UNIVERSITY**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study reports on the translation problems of English and Arabic languages' structure made by Saudi students of English. The population of this study is Saudi students who learn translation courses in Shaqra University in the College of Arts and community College, Dawadmi. Students' test, teachers' questionnaire, and experts' interview were used for data collection. Then, the researchers use SPSS to analyze the data. The study concluded that Saudi EFL students can not translate English structures properly because they do not have enough understanding of English grammar and structure. This creates so many problems when translating from English to Arabic or vice versa.*

**KEYWORDS:** translation problems, Shaqra University, Dawadmi, source language, structure

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The needs for translation are increasing nowadays due to the continuous development of science, culture, and technology. However, the process of translation is faced by many linguistic problems including grammar, context, culture, etc.

Therefore, the current study attempts to investigate the problems of structure that Saudi students face when translating from English, as a source language, into Arabic, as a target language and vice versa. It is well known that the above mentioned languages are from different family languages. The former is a member of the Indo-European languages, while the later one is Semitic. Thus, this may also cause other problems in translation. These problems have great effects on translation quality.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Translation has always been understood to refer to a written transfer of a message or meaning from one language to another. It had been used since the beginning of life following descendants of Noah, after the huge flood. Since then people began to use and develop meaning and conceptions of translation. For a formal definition, Dubois et al (1973:22) says "*translation is the expression in another language (or target language) of what has been expressed in another source, language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences*". But it has already been suggested by many translation scholars such as Baker (1992) and Newmark (1988:91) that the notion of equivalence is problematic in the study of translation, and to overcome this problem, various translation strategies have been suggested by various authors within the field of translation.

## What is Translation?

Etymologically, "translation" is a "*carrying across*" or "*bringing across*." The Latin "*translatio*" derives from the past participle, "*translatus*," of "*transferre*" ("*to transfer*" — from "*trans*," "*across*" + "*ferre*," "*to carry*" or "*to bring*"). The modern Romance, Germanic and Slavic European languages have generally formed their own equivalent terms for this concept after the Latin model — after "*transfer*" or after the kindred "*traducer*" ("*to bring across*" or "*to lead across*"). Additionally, the Greek term for "translation" "*metaphrasis*" ("*a speaking across*"), (Kasperek: 1983: 83-84)

Discussing from the first step which is "Communication", a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior is at the heart of all human interactions; it is the basis of life, the learner begins the task of learning a second language from point zero (or close to it) and, through the steady accumulation of the mastered entities of the target language, eventually amasses them in quantities sufficient to constitute a particular level of proficiency. Translation is

the transmittal of written text from one language into another. Although the terms *translation* and *interpretation* are often used interchangeably, by strict definition, translation refers to the written language, and interpretation of the spoken word. Translation is the action of interpretation of the meaning of a text, and subsequent production of an equivalent text, also called a translation that communicates the same message in another language. The text to be translated is called the "source text" (ST), and the language it is to be translated into is called the target language (TL); the final product is sometimes called the "target text" (TT). (Al-Essawi: 2010:7).

**Translation as a Process:** Translation may be defined as follows: the *replacement* of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL), he added "Translation is *recoding* of a linguistic text, accompanied by the creation of its new linguistic appearance and stylistic shape".

**Translation as an activity:** Translation is an *activity*, which consists of variable re-expression, converting of the text in one language into the text in a different language, which is carried out by a translator, who creatively chooses variants depending on language variability resources, text type, translation tasks, and under the influence of his (her) own personal individuality; translation is also a *result* of this activity.

**Translation is a Communication:** Translation can be defined as *a way to provide interlingual communication* by the means of creation of a text in the TL (target language), intended to fully replace the original text. Translation is *a social function of communicative mediation* between people, who use different language systems. This function is carried out as a psychophysical activity of a bilingual person aimed at the reflection of reality on the basis of his (her) individual abilities as an interpreter, accomplishing the transition from one semiotic system to another with the purpose of equivalent, i.e. maximally complete, but always a partial transmission of a system of meanings, contained in a source message, from one communicant to another.

**Translation is a Skill:** Translation is *a craft* consisting of the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language of the same message and/or statement in another language". The suggested classification is not a final version and does not include all possible criteria for definition taxonomy. Putting some of the definitions under careful scrutiny may

show that most of the definitions fall into more than one category. According to the classification given here, translation is a process and a result of this process, a type of communication and a skill.

### **The main Theoretical Approaches to Translation**

Theories of Translation are very old Joseph (24) in his article "*Theory for Translation*" and Hodges in his essay "Linguistic Approach to Translation Theory" say that: "*Early attempts at theory can be traced back over 2000 years to Cicero and Horace, with the key question being whether a translator should be faithful to the original text by adopting a "literal" (word-for-word) approach or whether a "free" (sense-for-sense) approach should be taken*" and that large number of theories is due to diversity in languages, cultures, styles... etc.. Nida (20) added, the reason for the large diversity of translation theories and sub theories is the fact that the processes of translating can be viewed from so many different perspectives: stylistics, author's intent, diversity of languages, differences of corresponding cultures, problems of interpersonal communication, changes in literary fashion, distinct kinds of content (e.g. mathematical theory and lyric poetry). Here three major translation theories of the past century ranging from least modern and least current, up to most modern and most current, with an explanation and critique of each.

#### **Structuralism**

This view was supported by De Saussure, which stated basically that the words in each language don't match up with other words in other languages. If you think of a building, in which the "bricks" (words) are different sizes, and then another building in which the bricks are also different sizes (compared to the first building), the notion is that you can't match the bricks. Nolan (2005) says "*No translation is ever "perfect" because cultures and languages differ*". Therefore, according to this view of structuralism translation is not possible because the basic building blocks of the individual languages are different. Words only loosely overlap but do not match. Thus, translation cannot work, and is an illusion. However, this theory has some points of strength and weakness:

A. Strength in this theory is,

- 1) It is kind of true; language "matching" may be an illusion.
- 2) It gets us thinking how unique languages are.

B. The weakness is that ,

- 1) It would mean we could not translate things, which obviously is wrong!(*Bunch: 2011:3*).

#### **Equivalence**

This theory basically states that there is an equivalent- which is opposite to structuralism- (sometimes called "natural equivalent", sometimes called "dynamic equivalent") of a concept, phrase, or word between languages, which can be found." Ein" in Arabic means eye in English, and thus, that is the equivalent. (There is a 3-way equivalence, 2-way equivalence, and there is a 1-way equivalence, etc. In other words, with some words (eye, spy, spring).The view that a good translation mirrors or "is equivalent" to the source text (the text being translated out of). Translation was judged by how "faithful" it was to the source text. Notions like purpose, the

reader, and other contextual aspects were mostly not taken into account. (Baker: 1992). The notion here is that "everything you need is in the source text". If you are "faithful" to the source, you have done your job (the reader can decide for themselves what how to use the text, etc.). But, this theory has some points of strength and weakness:

A. Strength here are,

- 1) It allows us to translate, again (!), and to underscore how important the source text is.
- 2) It is a kind of "honest and clean" theory because it just says: translate the source, and you have done your job. (allows machine translation) (Bunch: 2011:4).

B. Weakness is,

- 1) It naively thinks that in the communicative act, only the source is important, not the reader or the purpose. (Bunch: 2011: 1).

### **Functional Translation / Skopos Theory**

The word 'Skopos' is the Greek word means 'aim' or 'purpose' and was introduced into the translation theory in the 1970s by Hans J. Vermeer as a technical term for the purpose of a translation and of the action of translating. The Skopos theory focuses on the purpose of the translation, which determines the translation methods and strategies that are to be employed in order to produce a functionally adequate result, i.e. functional translation based on the idea that, think of the function of the text which identifies translation. Think of the purpose of the text, think of the reader, the context, and the purpose of the translation. It replaces "faithful to the source" with "loyalty to the stakeholders": the client, the reader, the purpose, etc. There is a lot more going on in translation than just "mirroring the source", or "being faithful" to it. Faithfulness to the author is not the only thing that is important! It can be said that, one source text can be read by some different people different ways. Although, the same text can be read differently by the same reader. Different readers, different purposes, different translations, all from the same source text (Nida: 1991). The strength and weakness points in this theory according to Bunch (2011:5) are:

#### **A. The Strength:**

- 1) It takes both the reader and the purpose into account.
- 2) It is more encompassing than equivalence.
- 3) It is modern and less naive than the other theories.
- 4) It allows for a lot of flexibility in translation.
- 5) It also: supports the human translator, because the machine probably won't and can't take purpose into account, and will translate in a very "equivalent" way, because that is all it knows.

#### **B. The Weakness:**

- 1) It is not able to demonstrate how there is more there than the source.

If you can just "read in" other things, where would that end?

To have a good translation, there must be a good theory that passes all conditions of coherence and integration and this theory according to Nida should be a coherent and integrated set of propositions used as principles for explaining a class of phenomena. But a fully satisfactory theory of translating should be more than a list of rules-of-thumb by which translators have generally succeeded in reproducing reasonably adequate renderings of source texts". Instead of speaking of theories of translation, we should perhaps speak more about various approaches to the task of translating and here Nida agreed to some extent with Skopo's functional theory – different purposes - , different orientations which provide helpful insight, and diverse ways of talking about how a message can be transferred from one language to another. This led to the publication of number books on translating which have focused primary attention on the correspondences in language structures.

### **Ferdinand De Saussure**

The French linguist De Saussure's (1857-1913) "*Course in General Linguistics*" has great effect on the way in which we recognize the language. His work in the 1950's and 60's influenced disciplines like anthropology, Marxist criticism, psychoanalysis, cultural analysis... etc. The consequences of Saussurean influence were also seen on translation as new approaches like formalist and structuralism perspectives started emerging. Saussure was concerned with an objective approach to study linguistic units of every language that ease human communication. Saussure, studied language from a formal and theoretical point of view, i.e. as a system of signs which could be described synchronically and Poythress supported him in this idea. According to Saussure, the basic unit of language is a sign. A sign is composed of signifier (a sound-image, or its graphic equivalent) and a signified (the concept or meaning). So, for example, a word composed of the letters p-e-a-r functions as a signifier by producing in the mind of English-speakers the concept (signified) of a certain kind of rosaceous fruit that grows on trees, viz., and a pear.

## **METHODOLOGY**

**Population:** The sample of this study from which subjects were drawn was divided into three categories, these are: College of science and College of community in Dawadmi (384 students for test and questionnaire) , 50 EFL who teach those students and 7 EFL experts

**Methods of Data collection:** The researcher used three instruments in this research. For both teachers and students a questionnaire was used, a test was given to the students followed by an interview for EFL experts. The questionnaire and the interview were judged by the researcher, and long experience jury members. Reliability and validity have been calculated for the questionnaire by using Cronbach's Alpha and Pearson's correlation coefficient. This shows that the tools used in this research have a high degree of reliability (.825) and validity.

**Data Analysis:** The current study is experimental. After data collection, the researchers use SPSS to analyze the data. Accordingly, discussion and findings were made.

## DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The items 1,2,3,4, 5, and 6 in the Questionnaire justify the hypothesis above see (appendix 1) showed to the sample of the study (students), and their responses can be seen in this table (4.8) below.

**Table (4.1): The differences between Arabic and English structures create difficulty in translation.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly disagree	6	1.6	1.6	1.6
Disagree	16	4.3	4.3	5.9
not sure	96	25.6	25.6	31.5
Agree	113	30.1	30.1	61.6
strongly agree	144	38.4	38.4	100.0
Total	375	100.0	100.0	

The response of the sample to item 1 "The differences between Arabic and English structures create difficulty in translation". According to table (4.7) which shows that, rate of strongly agree and agree are 38.4% and 30.1% respectively. The total of agree and strongly agree is 68.5% besides 25.6% of participants aren't sure. However, disagree and strongly disagree rate is 5.9%. Whereas table (4.5), it is noticed that the mean is 2.99 with a standard deviation 0.967. While in table (4.6) "t" is equal to 10.279 with p-value or sig. level is equal to 0.000 which is less than 0.005 that refers, there are statistical significant differences between the obtained mean and the presumed mean.

### Summary of Students' Questionnaire

The hypothesis: "The difference between Arabic and English causes translation problems".

**Table (4.2): The common means for items from (1 to 6)**

Q. Number	Mean	Common Mean
1. The differences between Arabic and English structures create difficulty in translation.	2.99	$\frac{17.63}{6} = 2.94$
2. I cannot translate because I do not have much vocabulary	2.83	
3 The accurate equivalent for the words ba'ir, naga, gamal, and ga'ud in English is camel.	2.99	
4 I cannot translate without thinking in mother tongue.	2.98	
5 I stop to think for a long time to form my ideas.	2.99	
6 The accurate equivalent for library stationary store, bookstore, and bookshop is maktaba in Arabic.	2.85	
<b>Total</b>	<b>17.63</b>	

Source: researcher from questionnaire year 2012

**Table (4.3): The responses of subjects from items (1 to 6)**

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	59	2.58%
Disagree	149	6.50%
Neutral	527	23.00%
Agree	688	30.03%
Strongly agree	868	37.89%
Total	2291	100%

Source: researcher from questionnaire year 2012

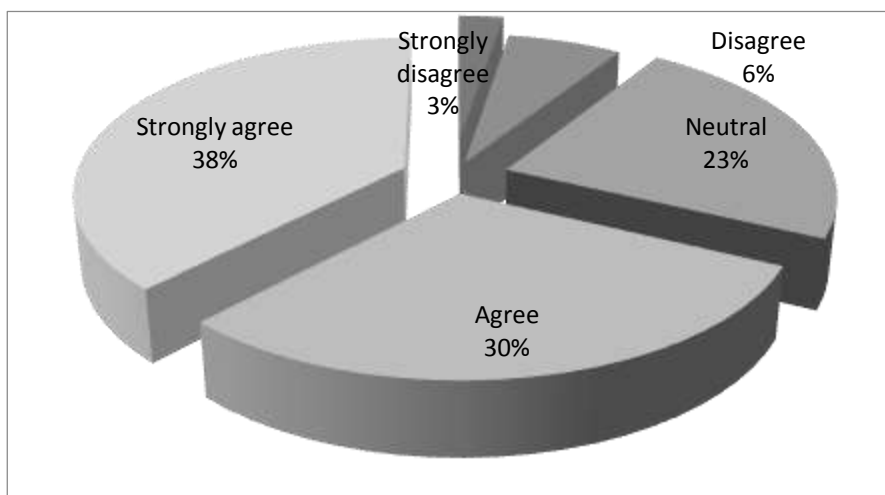


Figure (1) students, responses to 1<sup>st</sup> hypothesis

**Table (4.4) Chi-square**

Statement	Value
Chi-Square	1048.544
Sig.	0.000

Source: researcher from questionnaire year 2012

As shown in tables (4.2) and (4.3) which represent a total of questions 1 to 6 of the first hypothesis from. The common mean was 2.94 which indicates that the mean of respondents' responses are over agree supported by 30.03% agree in addition to 37.89% of the sample strongly agree, therefore the total is 91% agree that: "the differences between Arabic and English causes translation problem". Moreover, table (4.4) where it represents chi square for testing hypothesis which is:

H1 the differences between Arabic and English cause translation problem

H<sub>0</sub> the differences between Arabic and English don't cause translation problems"chi-square is 1048.544 and sig. value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 .Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and H1 "The differences between Arabic and English don't cause translation problems" is accepted.

The Hypothesis "There is a bias in translating cultural and political texts and students tend to translate words rather than the intention of idioms and proverbs"

### EFL Teachers' Questionnaire

**The analysis of the first hypothesis:** In a sample of 50 EFL teachers, 11 of them are teacher assistants, 31 lecturers, and 8 assistant professors. Most of them teach in Shaqra University in Shaqra, Sagir, and Dawadmi campuses, and the rest from other Saudi universities and schools. The following items of their responses 1, 2,3,4,5, and 6 to prove the hypothesis that says " The different language families that Arabic and English belong to creates a lot of problems concerning language structures .Furthermore, In addition to items 7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14, 15,16,17 and 18 prove the hypothesis that says "Misunderstanding of grammar leads to weak control of correct translation".

### Table (4.5) Experience Cross tabulation

Q1-The differences between Arabic and English structures create difficulty in translation

		q1		Total
		Agree	strongly agree	
Experience by years	(1 - 5)	2	14	16
	(6 - 10)	7	13	20
	11+	6	8	14
Total		15	35	50

Experience from (1-----5) represents group (1)

Experience from (6-----10) represents group (2)

Experience from (11+) represents group (3)



**Table (4.6) Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	Sig.
Pearson Chi-Square	3.673 <sup>a</sup>	.159
Likelihood Ratio	4.010	.135
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.300	.069
N of Valid Cases	50	

As it appears in table (4.6), 2 of the EFL teachers agree and 14 strongly agree in group (1) while 7 agree and 13 strongly agree in group (2) while 6 agree and 8 strongly agree in group (3). From table (4.38), it is noticed that, sig value is equal to 0.159 which is greater than 0.05 and this leads to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, it is possible to say that the experience is dependent on the responses of the statement (1) which says that "the differences between Arabic and English structures create difficulty in translation".

### Summary of EFL Teacher Questionnaire

The hypothesis: "The differences between Arabic and English causes the translation problem"

**Table (4.7) the common means for items from (1 to 6)**

Q. Number	Mean	Common Mean
1. The differences between Arabic and English structures create difficulty in translation	3.70	$\frac{18.92}{6} = 3.15$
2. I cannot translate because I don not have much vocabulary	3.58	
3 The accurate equivalent for the words ba'ir, naga, gamal, and ga'ud in English is camel.	2.60	
4 I cannot translate without thinking in mother tongue.	0.94	
5 I stop to think for a long time to form my ideas.	4.46	
6 The accurate equivalent for library stationary store, bookstore, and bookshop is maktaba in Arabic.	3.64	
Total	18.92	

Source: researcher from questionnaire year 2012

**Table (4.8) the responses of subjects from items (1 to 6)**

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	38	% 13.06
Disagree	41	14.09%
Neutral	25	8.59%
Agree	58	%19.93
Strongly agree	129	44.33%
Total	291	%100

Source: researcher from questionnaire year 2012

**Table (4.8) EFL teachers' responses to 1<sup>st</sup> hypothesis (Chi-square)**

Statement	Value
Chi-Square	1164.000
Sig.	0.000

Source: researcher from questionnaire year 2012

The differences between Arabic and English causes translation problem"

As shown in tables (4.8) and (4.9) which represent a total of questions 1 to 6 of the first hypothesis. The common mean were 3.15 which indicates that the mean of respondents' responses is above agree supported by 19.93% agree plus 44.33% of the subjects strongly agree, therefore the total is 72.9% agree that: "the differences between Arabic and English cause translation problem". Moreover, table (4.9) where it represents chi square for testing hypothesis which is:

H1 the differences between Arabic and English cause translation problems

H<sub>0</sub> the differences between Arabic and English do not cause translation problems"chi-square 1164.000 and sig. value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 .Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and H1 "The differences between Arabic and English don't cause translation problems" is accepted.

The Hypothesis "There is a bias in translating cultural and political texts and students tend to translate words rather than the intention of idioms and proverbs"

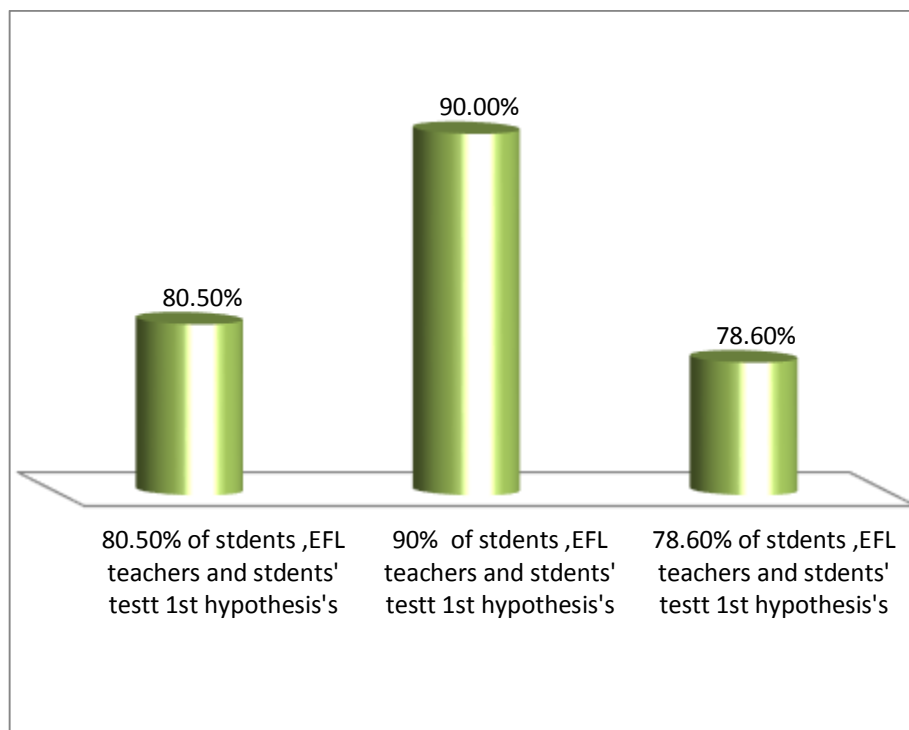
### The Analysis of the first hypothesis

In opened questions interview of a questions served to EFL experts concerning grammar. The different language families that Arabic and English belong to create a lot of problems concerning language structures. And their responses were as follows:

Q1-How far the differences in language structure of Arabic and English effect translation? All of them without any exception agreed that the differences between the two languages have great impact on translation output for imprecision according to them.

## SUMMARY

The results above show that research hypothesis is confirmed. The difference between the two languages account for difficulty 78.6% of students and EFL teachers agree. Also, students translate words rather than intentions and cultural and political background of translator affects the accuracy of translation with 90% of students and EFL teachers agreed. Moreover, 80.6 % of EFL teachers have the same opinion that grammar causes a problem. Furthermore, the responses to students' test show that 72% of student agreed on the study hypothesis.



## FINDINGS

The findings of this study that are:

- 1- The differences between the language families that Arabic and English belong to create many problems in translation.
- 2- Saudi EFL students can not translate properly because they do not have enough understanding of English grammar and structure.

## CONCLUSIONS

The current study concluded that, the poor knowledge about English structure beside the difference between the two language families that both languages belong to, cause problems. The Arabic –Semitic origins– and the English language which belong to Anglo-Saxons create problems of thinking in mother tongue consequently students apply the Arabic structure on English. In addition, Saudi EFL students' misunderstanding of grammar affects the quality of translation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. There must be special designed units in curriculum showing and comparing differences between the two languages (Contrastive analysis studies).
2. EFL Student translators should be motivated to have deep knowledge of grammar.
3. Linguists of English should adapt a single term instead of two, for words that only exist in Arabic culture and environment.

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