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A Pragmatic Approach to the Study of English / Arabic Translation Errors

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks first to explore the interface between pragmatics and translation with a specific reference to English - Arabic/ Arabic - English real translations, i.e., it foresees possible translation problems fourth year students in the department of translation, Constantine University 1, Algeria, are likely to make at the pragmatic level. Second, this work attempts to account for the pragmatic errors made by the translation students. Third, it tries to show how important pragmatic knowledge and pragmatic competence are in translation.

Key words: Translation, pragmatics, errors, English, Arabic

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation is not an easy task due to differences between languages and cultures. Therefore, different translators and linguists, suggest the applying of linguistic theory on the discipline of translation. This linguistic application on translation practice has been done under the form of different approaches. One of these approaches on translation is the pragmatic approach. Leech, (1983: 06) defines pragmatics as "the study of meaning in relation to speech situations". Furthermore, there are several pragmatic aspects which any translator should be aware of when translating. Those aspects are speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979), implicatures, presuppositions, the cooperative principle (Grice, 1975) and the Gricean four maxims (the maxim of quality, quantity, relation and manner maxim), which enable speakers and hearers in conversation to create and

decipher implicatures in utterances.

More importantly, Nida was among the first linguists who emphasize the importance of pragmatic knowledge in translation, yet he was not the only one who did so. There are other writings which have adequately pointed out that there are interactions between pragmatics and translation, such as Malmkjar (1998) and Ho (1971). They also raise some problems in translation which occur due to the pragmatic differences between the source language and the target language. Moreover, Hatim and Mason (1991), take a general pragmatic approach and suggest that for a better translation this last should maintain the same pragmatic effect of the source text on the target text. In addition, Gut (1991) follows Sperber and Wilson's (1986) theory of relevance, i.e., they see that translation is a communicative situation in which the

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translators interpret and present the communicative clues in texts.

From another perspective, research in the interaction between translation and pragmatics with reference to specific source/ target languages are of significance, justifying an empirical research in the interrelation between pragmatics and translation in cases of English- Arabic/ Arabic- English translation. Differences between English and Arabic at the pragmatic level can lead to different errors when translating. Translation students and translators in general make such pragmatic errors due to several reasons, such as the lack of pragmatic knowledge, and the unawareness of the importance of pragmatics in the translation task. This research paper focuses more on the pragmatic errors translation students are likely to make when translating English-Arabic/ Arabic- English texts, and on the main reasons behind such translation errors.

2. TRANSLATION AND TRANSLATION EQUIVALENCE

Translation is an activity that is growing phenomenally in today's globalized world (Hatim and Munday, 2004). Translation is not so new as a field since it has been widely practiced in the course of human history and human activities; the result of these human activities and history provides a great deal of information about different cultures (Aziz and Lataimish, 2000). Another definition of translation is the way Baker (1998) defines it. "the translator is the expert whose task is to produce message transmitters for use in trans-cultural message transfer. To do this, that translator, must at a particular place and at a particular time, produce a particular product for a particular purpose." (Baker, 1998: 04). That is to say that translation is the structural and meaning transfer

from the original to the target language. This process of transfer leads to a particular purpose namely to serve as a cross-cultural communication means among people; i.e.; translation can be regarded as a series of shifts at both the linguistic and the cultural level within which a given text is produced. A further definition of translation is as Nida and Taber (1982: 12) define it "translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style", i.e., translators do not focus only on the form or structure of the text, rather they focus on both meaning and form of the message in order to produce the same effect of the source text.

Thus, almost all scholars and translators agree that equivalence is the most important part of translation. According to this, translation has been divided by scholars into different divisions, such as formal vs. dynamic (Nida, 1964), semantic vs. communicative translation (Newmark, 1991). Semantic vs. functional equivalence (Bell, 1991), covert vs. overt translation (House, 2001), non-pragmatic vs. pragmatic translation (Wilss, 1982). This dichotomy deals with translation from the principle of equivalence between the source and target texts.

However, equivalence can differ from one translation to another, i.e., there are different degrees of equivalence. Baker (1992) proposes that translation equivalence is much more related either to the form/ the meaning of the text, and to cultural norms of both languages; or to the effects the source and the target texts may have on readers. To start with, Nida (1964) distinguished between two types of equivalence, formal and dynamic equivalence. Sometimes formal equivalence is referred to as literal translation. Hatim and Munday (2004),

argue that formal equivalence or formal correspondence is the relationship between the source and the target texts in which the replacement of words is purely formal. Yet, this type of equivalence does not always serve the message of the source text when translating it into the target language, i.e., translating the original linguistic unit, the grammatical structure, and punctuation and neglecting the meaning and the extra linguistic factors of the original text may lead to violation of some aspects while translating. Hence, formal equivalence cannot be always regarded as a good translation, as it is the case in Nida's (1964: 166) example from the Bible where the phrase "lamb of God" would be rendered into "seal of God" for the Eskimo because the lamb does not symbolize innocence in their culture. The second type of equivalence for Nida and Taber (1982) is dynamic equivalence. They define it as the translation principle in which a translator translates the source text meaning producing the same effect and impact on the target text audience as it is the effect upon the source text audience. In other words, applying dynamic equivalence the translator tries to read and understand the thoughts and ideas in the source text then translate them into the target language regardless the form. Thus, what matters here for a translator is the fact that s/he is not dealing only with different languages, rather s/he is dealing with different cultures too. Furthermore, Koller's names it differently as pragmatic equivalence or as others call it communicative or functional equivalence. It is oriented towards the receptor of the text, as s/he should receive the same effect that the original text produces on its readers (Koller, 1977).

From another perspective, Catford (1965) supposes that non-equivalence is due to

two factors which are linguistic factors and cultural/ pragmatic factors. Consequently, two types of equivalence can be emerged here, linguistic equivalence and cultural or pragmatic equivalence. The latter is concerned with the extra linguistic factors, while the former deals more with grammar, structure and vocabulary of language as well as dealing with the semantic field of the language. That is to say, unlike linguistic equivalence, the first concern of pragmatic equivalence is not how to connect sentences and paragraphs together with identifying textual features, rather it is how sentences are used in a communicative way and how they can be interpreted in context.

3. PRAGMATICS AND TRANSLATION

Levinson defines pragmatics as the relationship between structure and extra linguistic context. "It concentrates on how linguistic expressions are encoded by their context" (Levinson, 1983: 8). Yule, (1996), defines pragmatics as the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). It has, consequently more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterance than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. In other words, pragmatics is the study of language use and language users. It is the relationship that exists between the sentence or the utterance and the user of this utterance. It is concerned with bridging or lining between sentences meaning and speakers' intention.

More importantly, the real meaning of an utterance can be discovered by the analysis of contextual meaning through pragmatics. Here, one should bear in mind the fact that the function of a language is not only to report events in the world, language also is used to convey messages that are full of cultural

aspects which are very useful in the communication process. That is to say, texts do not have meanings; rather, in producing texts people intend meaning. So, the translator as a producer of texts, attempts to understand first the author's intended meaning in the source text, then he should create a target text which is equivalent to the source text and which has the same intended meaning and impact on the audience of the source text, which has a great deal here with pragmatics (Ballim and Wilks, 1991). There are several major areas of investigation that have been involved in pragmatic studies including speech acts and events, cooperative principle, implicature, presupposition and entailment, and deixis (Hatim and Mason, 1991).

To start with, Austin sees that speech act is an act that is performed by a speaker when producing an utterance in order to communicate with hearers. Communication is a series of communicative acts or speech acts. This later is the minimum functional unit in communication such as giving commands, asking questions, and making statements (Austin, 1962). Thus, when a translator comes to translate a given utterance s/he should take into account not only the grammar and meaning of the utterances, furthermore s/he should consider the actions the speaker implied in her/his utterances when uttering them. For instance, Austin (1961) gives the example of producing the utterance "I do" in a marriage ceremony to get married. He says that uttering 'I do' is doing an action since it is clear that the utterance 'I do' in this context is neither to describe nor to state something, rather it is to perform and do an action. Moreover, the utterance can be considered neither true nor false. In an attempt to translate Austin's example into Arabic literally, instead of saying "I do",

Arabic participants may say "افعل أن", which is here not equivalent to the English reply. A better translation can be "موافق أن", which means *I agree*. This means, to reach an authentic translation the translator should first produce a correct grammatical sentence. Second, s/he should maintain the same intended or implied meaning of the source utterance in the target text. Third, the translator has to produce in his/her translation the same effects the source utterance has on its audience. To achieve all this, the translator should pass through the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary phases when translating a certain text, in addition to coming across other different pragmatic aspects such as, cooperative principle, implicatures, presuppositions and entailments, etc. however, pragmatic aspects are not universal, especially in languages that have totally different cultures; in this case pragmatic problems can occur when translating. In other words, a translator should use his/her cross-cultural pragmatic knowledge in order to appropriately convey his/her message into the target language and without causing any offence. Pragmatic aspects, as many theories have claimed, differ cross-culturally, so that the translator first should work to achieve a cross-cultural pragmatic understanding. This can only be if the translator is familiar with pragmatic aspects that the source and the target texts include (Bariki, in press.). More importantly, it is worth remembering here that an informed translator has to recontextualize the situation in which the original text is embedded as an attempt to convey meaning and aid target reader in best understanding of the original meaning. Accordingly, the translator may achieve a corresponding effect on his new readership (Ehrman, 1993). This means that the translator should be familiar with

the surrounding extra-linguistic dimensions of the original text as a communicative event.

The major concern of this paper is to analyze how fourth year translation students translate communicative instances in which different levels of pragmatic principles and maxims interact. Co-operations, competitions, and violation of principles and maxims in the cooperative principle will be explored and evaluated. Furthermore, the investigation of how maxims of the cooperative principle are manifested and operated in English and Arabic is one of the primary objectives of this paper. This latter focuses on which points and rules translators should take under consideration when translating implied and intended meanings.

4. SAMPLES OF PRAGMATIC ERRORS IN STUDENTS' TRANSLATIONS

In order to find out pragmatic errors translation students are likely to make when translating English /Arabic/English texts, and what are the main reasons which may lead translation students to make such errors; translation students were given two texts, an English text to be translated into Arabic (a portion from Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*), and an Arabic text to be translated into English (a portion from Nagib Mahfouz' novel *الزعيم قتل يوم*). Students' translations were analyzed and examined from a pragmatic perspective; the following are some of the pragmatic errors found in the students' translations.

a. Arabic/ English Translation

The First Utterance

To start with, the first Arabic utterance to deal with is “بالدفع ثملة انتظار فترة” “الثقييل ال غطاء تحت”. The model answer of this utterance or the professional

English translation for this Arabic utterance is “*a moment of expectation full of warmth beneath the heavy cover*”. Attention should be put on two main meanings in the utterance. First, the term ‘ثمل’ can have many meanings in Arabic depending on the context of occurrence, therefore, this term can be translated into English using different translations depending on the context in which this term is used. Its denotative or literal meaning in English is ‘drunk’. It has other connotative meanings such as, screwed, intoxicated, boozy, full, etc. However, considering the context in which the term ‘ثمل’ is used in the Arabic text the most appropriate equivalent for it in English is ‘full’.

The second thing that can be noticed in this utterance and its translations is the term ‘انتظار’ and how students translated it into English. ‘Waiting’ is the denotative meaning of the term انتظار, yet according to the context in which this term is used it should be translated as “expectation”, i.e., the model translation “a moment of expectation” is considered more appropriate to attain the same implicit meaning to some extent. Details are shown in Table 1 below:

The source text utterance	Students' Translations	Frequency of the students' translation	Percentage
فترة انتظار ثملة بالدفء تحت الغطاء الثقيل	A moment of waiting full of warmth under the heavy cover.	10	20%
	A waiting period mixed with warmth.	07	14%
	A period of waiting intoxicated/ drunk in the warmth under the heavy cover	14	28%
	A long period of waiting under the heavy cover.	19	38%

Table 1

Statistically speaking, 38% of students (19 students out of 50 students) translated the Arabic utterance into English as '*a long period of waiting under the heavy cover*'. It can be clearly noticed here that the majority of students ignored translating the expression 'ثملة بالدفء' into English. On the one hand, may be this is because students were afraid to pragmatically mistaken in translating this expression into English, thus students preferred to use the avoidance strategy which they think cannot harm their translation as a whole. On the other hand, ignoring translating such pragmatic expression can be due to students'

weakness in pragmatic knowledge, and because of their incompetency to relate the text to its context when translating. 28% of students translated this utterance into English literally as '*a period of wait intoxicated/drunk in the warmth under the heavy cover*'. This indicates that translation students do not give any importance to pragmatic aspects when translating. 14% of students translated the same utterance into English as '*a waiting period mixed with warmth under the heavy cover*'. While the rest of students, which represent 20% of them, succeeded to find acceptable translations such as '*a moment of waiting full of*

warmth under the heavy cover'. However, concerning the expression no one of students *فترة انتظار* succeeded to find the appropriate translation for it. All of them translated it literally as "wait/waiting".

The Second Utterance

As stated earlier, pragmatic equivalence occurs when the translator produces a target text which has the same effects the source text has upon its audience. To achieve this the translator should try to meet the target reader's comprehension needs. In this case the translator should take into consideration all the pragmatic factors in both languages (the source and the target languages), in addition to be aware of the context in which the source utterance occurs, as well as being aware of the pragmatic and cultural differences between the source and the target languages/texts. For instance, religious texts are one of the most common types of texts in which any translator may face difficulties when translating such text due to pragmatic and cultural differences between the source and the target texts/languages. Nida (1964) was among the first linguists who suggested the integrate of pragmatic knowledge in translation. In his Biblical translation, he claims that the religious message often failed to be communicated because of different cultural contexts, thus he proposes a translation theory of functional equivalence. "Nida's theory emphasizes not formal correspondence, but functional correspondence; not literal meaning, but dynamic equivalence; not *what* language communicates, but *how* it communicates." (Gentzler, 2001: 53).

Utterance two is an example of what is just explained above; it is as follows *"اللهم إني أنام بأمرك و أصحوا بأمرك و انك مالك كل شيء"*. This utterance which is of a pragmatic nature is translated into English by the professional translator

Hashem Malak as "*O Lord, I sleep at Thy command and awaken at Thy command! Thou art Lord of things*". Reading the Arabic original utterance gives one the impression that the utterance is a prayer to Lord. Thus, when translating this utterance into English the English reader should have the same impression the Arabic reader has when reading this utterance, i.e., the English reader or the target reader should feel that the translated utterance s/he is reading is a prayer. That's why the professional above English translation is considered the most appropriate English equivalent to this utterance.

Translation students were supposed to go beyond the linguistic structure and respect differences in pragmatics and culture of the source and the target languages. Yet, most translation students did not give any importance to pragmatic and cultural differences between the source and the target languages when translating utterance two into English. The overwhelming majority of students' answers (74%, 37 translations out of 50) were not acceptable since that those students did not realize in their translations the same effects the source text has on its audience. 74% of translations were as follows "*Allah, I sleep and wake up in your order, you are the sieving of all things*". Students here just transferred the meaning of the utterance from their mother tongue to the target language regardless cultural and pragmatic differences. For example, the word '*Allah*' is never used in an English society, yet students used it in their English translations. This means 74% of students translated utterance two literally. 10 students out of 50 (20%) avoided at all translating utterance number two into English, and only three students out of fifty (6%) succeeded to translate the Arabic utterance appropriately. Students' failure can be accounted for by the

participants' neglect of the pragmatic, cultural, and more specifically the religious dimension of such utterance. In other words, it is clear here that translation students treat translation as a micro-linguistic not a macro-linguistic

enterprise. For more details see Table 2 below:

The source text utterance	Students' Translations	Frequency of the students' translation	percentage
اللهم إني أنام بأمرك و اصبحوا بأمرك و انك مالك كل شيء	Allah, I sleep and I wake up in your order, you are the serving of all things. Allah, I have reached the evening and I have reached the morning into you, you are the owner of everything.	37	74%
	Oh God, I sleep at your command, and awaken at your command! Thou art God of things.	03	06%
	Ignored translating this utterance.	10	20%

Table 2

b. English /Arabic Translation

The Third Utterance

As can be seen in table 3 below, students had different understandings for utterance three. This last is as follows '*the question being whether you are to be let to live*'. The utterance looks ambiguous, i.e., according to the context

in which this utterance is used it can have two different meanings. First, the speaker meant to threaten the young boy by implying in his utterance that the boy may be let to live as he can be killed. Second, the speaker tried to say that he will ask a question and after getting the answer he will decide whether to kill the

boy or not; that is to say the man's decision depends on the answer the boy will provide. In the Arabic version of Great Expectations, the professional translators avoided translating utterance three, 40% of students did the same. On the one hand, 38% of students understood the utterance as a threat to the boy that he may be let to live as he may be killed, then translating it as 'القضية هي إن كنت' 'سأدعك تعيش/ إذا افترضنا أني سمحت لك

On the other hand, 24% of students understood the utterance as that the speaker wanted to say that he will ask the boy a question and depending on the boy's answer the man will decide whether to kill the boy or not. Their translation for this utterance was as follows 'ما إن السؤال الذي سيقرر' 'Table 3 gives more details:

The source text utterance	Students' translations	Frequency of the students' translations	Percentage
The question being whether you are to be let to live.	إن حياتك على المحك/ إن الأمر يهم حياتك.	08	16%
	إذا افترضنا أني سمحت القضية هي إن لك بان تعيش كنت سأدعك تعيش/	10	20%
	السؤال الذي سيقرر ما إن كنت سأتركك لتعيش	12	24%
	Students avoided translating the utterance.	20	40%

Table 3

The Fourth Utterance

Say Lord strike you dead if you don't.

This is an expression which is used by British people to threaten someone, i.e., when someone asks somebody to do something and wants to threaten him/her, the best way to scare him/her is to threaten him/her by being killed. In

translating this utterance, which can be considered a culturally loaded expression, fourth year translation students did not succeed in finding the most appropriate Arabic equivalent for this utterance. As table 4 shows below, most of students avoided translating this utterance (44% of them), the main reason behind this is that students did not

understand what is meant by this utterance, and that they could not make a pragmatic link between the utterance and the context in which the utterance occurred. Furthermore, 12% of students gave nonsense translations, such as *يقول لك سيدي انك ستموت إن لم تفعل ذلك*, *اطلب من الرب الإضراب إن لم تتمكن*. Which are purely word-for-word translations that cannot be acceptable translations. Some students were near to the right translation in their attempts; 28% of them translated the nineteenth

utterance into Arabic as *الرب يقتلك إن لم تفعل*, *إن لم تفعل فاسأل الرب إن يدعك من الموتى*.

While 8% or 4 students translated utterance four as *‘ستموت إن لم تفعل’* (with omitting the word ‘lord’ in the utterance). Other 8% of students translated it as *‘تذكر أن الموت بانظارك’*. The last four *‘إن لم تنفذ ما أمرتك به’*. These translations can be considered as acceptable ones (Tab 4):

The source text utterance	Students' translations	Frequency of the students' translations	Percentage
Say Lord strike you dead if you don't.	<i>تذكر أن الموت بانظارك إن لم تنفذ ما أمرتك به</i>	04	08%
	<i>‘ستموت إن لم تفعل’</i>	04	08%
	<i>إن لم / الرب يقتلك إن لم تفعل تفعل فاسأل الرب إن يدعك من الموتى</i>	14	28%
	Nonsense translations	06	12%
	Students avoided translating the utterance.	22	44%

Table 4

c. Further Comments about Students' Translations

The data analysis showed that students in the department of translation are noticeably weak at the pragmatic level when translating. More importantly, results above show that fourth year

translation students when translating never took into account the pragmatic factors of the text. In some cases, students got the correct translation of an utterance either by chance or when they are familiar with the source language utterance. On the one hand, sometimes

students translated the original utterances properly by chance when they translated it literally and here the literal translation is considered as the most appropriate equivalent for students. On the other hand, in other cases students got correct translations because they are familiar with the expressions and their equivalents in Arabic.

Furthermore, tables and explanations above have shown that most of the time students either translate the original utterances literally, or they avoid totally translating them when they fail to find an equivalent in the target language or when they do not understand the source utterance. In cases where students avoided or ignored translating the original utterances, this can be seen either as a strategy adopted by the participants or as a case of weakness in translating or lack of knowledge at the pragmatic level. Another worth mentioning problem observed in the students' translations is that students' mistakes do not only occur at the pragmatic level. This means, as tables 04 shows, in some cases students came to a nonsense translation; this was mainly either due to the students pure literal translations when they do not understand an utterance or could not make a link between the utterance and its context; or due to the bad level of translation students at the semantic and grammatical levels. However, the students' failure occurred most of the time at the pragmatic level. Phrased differently, students' violation of the pragmatic aspects when translating English/ Arabic texts, can be accounted for first by the lack of knowledge and lack of practice at the pragmatic level; second by students' unawareness of the importance of pragmatics in translation; and third by the traditional teaching methodologies translation teachers use in the department of translation in Constantine University 1. Consequently,

statistically speaking, about 30% students from the sample population avoided translating utterances which are of a pragmatic nature, while about 45% of them translated pragmatic and cultural utterances word-for-word translation.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, results indicate that translation students, most of the time, do not give any importance to the pragmatic aspects in a certain text when translating it from English into Arabic or vice versa. In other words, fourth year translation students are not aware of the importance of pragmatics in translation. Most of the time, they translated the original utterances literally regardless the context in which utterances occurred. Therefore, it should be quite stressed on the importance of teaching pragmatics to students in the department of translation in Constantine University 1. Since that the lack of pragmatic knowledge among translation students was the main reason for the mistranslations of students. Moreover, the teaching of English in the department of translation in CU1 has focused too much on linguistics and grammar and too little, if not never, on pragmatics. Yet, students in the department of translation should know about pragmatics and pragmatics in translation in order to be more competent to make a clear link between the text in hand and its pragmatic features before starting translating it.

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