

*Exploring Challenges in Textual Translation Proficiency Among Iraqi Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)*

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**ABSTRACT:**

This research investigates the determinants of underperformance among students majoring in English in their textual translation skills. It delves into students' viewpoints on translation and emphasizes the influence of instructional methodologies. Moreover, it is restricted to fourth-year students at Al-Noor University College, during the academic year 2022-2023.

To achieve this, a survey is conducted to gain insights from EFL learners concerning the factors contributing to subpar textual translation. A cohort of twenty-five college students is chosen for the investigation. The findings underscore that the principal obstacle to students' challenges is the employed teaching approach, coupled with inadequate time designated for translation exercises. The research underscores the necessity for heightened emphasis on translation education, specifically textual translation, as students recognize it as a potent tool for effectively conveying the culture of the target language, distinct from free and literary translation forms.

**Keywords:** cultural conveyance, EFL learners, teaching methods, textual translation, translation education.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Research Context**

Language learners often grapple with the complexities of transferring meaning from one language to another while maintaining precision in the target language. English texts can pose challenges for readers or listeners until accurately interpreted, aligning with intended meanings.

As highlighted by Smith (2007:p.112), while the first sentence might allow direct translation, the second presents difficulties unless done for expressive purposes (e.g., characterizing an English speaker's limited conversational French). Achieving message equivalence between languages relies on shared contextual situations, implying that the target language may encapsulate realities not present in the source language.

Different translation approaches exist; literal translation necessitates straightforward conversion, whereas dynamic equivalence demands pragmatic and semantic skills to uncover integrated or implicit meanings (Jones, 1995:p.45). Translation assists learners in avoiding misuse of words and structures tied to habits, enhancing comprehension of texts across languages. Additionally, translation empowers students to explore both languages, their strengths, weaknesses, and expand their expressive capabilities (Brown, 2002:p.18).

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

This study aims to:

- Investigate the factors contributing to the challenges encountered by students majoring in English in textual translation.
- Assess college students' attitudes towards both Arabic and English translation.

## **1.3 Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are proposed:

- Students majoring in English hold diverse attitudes regarding the factors underlying their struggles in textual translation.
- The teaching methodology employed in textual translation is a central contributor to students' challenges.

## **1.4 Research Methodology**

The study involves:

- Presenting an overview of translation, particularly focusing on textual translation.
- Developing a questionnaire for EFL learners to elicit insights into the causes of poor textual translation.
- Selecting and administering the questionnaire to a sample of college students.
- Analyzing collected data, discussing findings, and drawing conclusions.

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This research provides valuable insights into teaching techniques in translation. It illuminates the reasons behind the challenges faced by EFL learners and introduces fresh perspectives on translation abilities. The outcomes of this study hold implications for educators, instructors, students, translators, and textbook authors, underscoring the importance of textual translation and its interpretational nuances.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Defining Translation**

In accordance with Catford (1978:p.20), translation theory pertains to the interrelations between languages, forming a branch of comparative linguistics. The essence of translation entails a bidirectional process, transitioning from a "Source Language" to a "Target Language." Translation is best described as the substitution of textual content from one language (the source) with equivalent content in another language (the target) (Catford,1978:p.20).

Translation is a dynamic endeavor, steadily evolving in the contemporary landscape. The realm of Translation Studies has emerged as an interdisciplinary discipline that has undergone significant growth over the past two decades (Hatim and Munday, 2004:p.214).

Furthermore, House (2013:p.13) articulates translation as the art of replacing a text in one language with a corresponding text in another.

### **2.2 Strategy in Translation**

Seguilot (1991:p.82) introduces strategy as a concept encompassing both conscious and subconscious methods. Lorsch (1991:p.67) defines translation strategy as a deliberate approach to addressing challenges encountered during the translation process. Translation strategies encompass specific techniques employed by individuals to navigate translation issues, with the foundation of each strategy serving as the initial point of resolution for the challenges at hand (ibid:96).

### **2.3 Unveiling the Translation Process with Think-Aloud Protocol**

According to (Van Someren et al,1994:p.1-2), the think-aloud protocol offers direct insight into the cognitive problem-solving processes of individuals. This technique empowers translators to systematically unravel problems step by step. This method involves the collection and analysis of think-aloud protocols to uncover the cognitive processes involved in problem-solving during translation. By verbalizing their thoughts while working on tasks, translators provide a recordable and analyzable account of their decision-making (Toury, 1991:p.95).

In a related context, (Gerloff,1989:p.34) investigates translation processes using think-aloud protocols. The study comprises university students, bilingual speakers, and professional translators tasked with translating a French article into English. The outcomes reveal variations in processing across these participant groups.

## **2.4 Foundations of Translation Theory**

Translation theory represents an explanatory framework that sheds light on a given phenomenon, offering insights into observed systems and their inherent order. This framework exists as an abstract construct within the realm of human cognition (Bell, 1993:p.24). Catford (1976:p.1) asserts that translation constitutes an operation performed on language, necessitating alignment with a broader theory of language—generally encompassing linguistics.

## **2.5 Exploring Translation Modalities**

### **2.5.1 Interlinear Rendering**

Dickins et al. (2005:p.15) underscore the source language influence in interlinear translation, presenting grammatical units that mirror the original language's structures. Dickens et al. (2017:p.6) illustrate examples of exegetic translation through diverse English renditions of the Quran, revealing varying levels of exegetical interpretation.

## **2.1 Approaches to Translation**

### **2.1.1 Literal Rendering**

Literal translation, as defined by Smith (2006:p.42), represents an extreme form of translation, emphasizing the direct replacement of words while adhering to the grammatical conventions of the target language (TL). In literal translation, the denotative meanings of words are sourced from dictionaries, while retaining the grammatical structure of the TL. This approach includes grammatical transposition, involving the substitution of parts of speech from the source text (ST) into the TL (Dickins et al., 2005:p.16).

This method is word-focused and does not strictly adhere to TL grammar, permitting alterations such as the insertion of additional words or restructuring of clauses (ibid). Literal translation, akin to word-for-word translation, strives to maintain lexical equivalence for each individual term (Jones, 1998:p.31).

### **2.1.2 Idiomatic Adaptation**

Dickins et al. (2005:p.16-17) contend that free translation is characterized by a significant TL influence. This type of translation underscores the relationship between textual elements in the source text and their representation in the translation, focusing on idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and symbols.

In idiomatic adaptation, the translator aims to create a coherent and logical target text while considering idiomatic usage in the TL (Smith, 2006:p.47). The objective is to evoke a similar response in TL readers as that elicited by the SL. The focus shifts from adhering to the original wording to conveying a comparable message in a culturally appropriate manner (Brown, 2010:p.62).

### 2.1.3 Contextual Transference

Communicative translation, outlined by Newmark (1988:p.45-7), endeavors to convey the contextual meaning of the original text, ensuring both content and language are understandable and relevant to the target audience.

Similarly, Dickins et al. (2005:p.17) argue that examples used in free translation can also apply to communicative translation. In this approach, the translator adapts expressions from the source language that are standard for the given context, aiming to replicate the original message's impact. While communicative translation provides more flexibility than literal translation, it may risk losing crucial message nuances (Smith, 2006:p.50).

In line with these perspectives, Ilyas (1989:p.32) categorizes translation into two forms:

- **Effective Translation:** This type aims to evoke in TL readers the same response as the original text does in SL readers. It prioritizes the force of the message and allows the translator to modify, omit, or clarify content, while maintaining simplicity and directness.
- **Semantic Translation:** Focusing on preserving the formal and contextual meaning of the SL, this approach replicates the original text's tone and flavor through precise semantic and syntactic structures. It condenses content, often leading to a more complex and succinct rendition (Jones, 1998:p.36).

### 2.1.1 Idiomatic Adaptation

Idiomatic translation, as noted by Reynolds (2010:p.27), focuses on achieving "naturalness" in the target language (TL) at the expense of strictly adhering to the details of the source text (ST). This approach often employs idioms or familiar phrasing patterns to enhance readability, even if it means sacrificing subtle nuances of meaning or tone. The term "idiom" refers to fixed figurative expressions with meanings not deducible from their constituent words, such as "football's not my cup of tea" or "that's a different kettle of fish." Notably, "idiomizing" translation should not be confused with "idiomatic." The latter refers to linguistic expressions that are standard and conventional within a given language and context (Smith, 2008:p.14).

### 2.1.2 Cross-Linguistic Rendering

Interlingual translation, as outlined by Chen (2015:p.92), is a bilingual process aimed at producing a functionally equivalent target language (TL) text to a source language (SL) text. This involves utilizing a third medium, the translator, as a secondary sender in the communication process. For instance, English-Arabic dictionaries employ synonyms or definitions to offer interlingual explanations.

Similarly, translating from English to Spanish exemplifies interlingual translation.

### **2.1.3 Semantic Transfer**

Textual translation, which forms the core of this study, is specifically addressed due to its significance and its frequent challenges faced by students. Hatim and Munday (2004:p.48) assert that textual translation necessitates analyzing a text for linguistic cohesion and conceptual coherence. It demands pragmatic skills to interpret the intended meaning, focusing on the reader's understanding. This approach involves examining explicit and implicit textual elements, encompassing not only the writer's presented concepts but also the cultural and contextual aspects that might be implicit.

Poyatos (2010:p.37) underscores the impact of environmental circumstances on textual styles and translation. The reader's physiological and emotional state, as well as the cultural context, contribute to the reception and interpretation of a text. Readers' moods and physical conditions interact with the literary content, influencing their comprehension and engagement.

### **2.2 Contextual Parameters**

Allen (2002:p.51) emphasizes the importance of maintaining the author's intended structure and coherence while translating text. A text is the tangible embodiment of a work, lending it permanence and readability.

Bell (1995:p.85) introduces seven contextually significant parameters: cohesion, coherence, internationality, acceptability, informativity, relevance, and intertextuality. These parameters contribute to contextual meaning, which encompasses linguistic forms, immediate situational features, and broader cultural backgrounds (Lombardi, 2017:p. 63).

### **2.3 Significance of Textual Translation**

Translation serves as a channel for literary innovation and cross-cultural influence, highlighting the self-image and evolution of cultures (Fuentes, 2011:p.19). Textual translation is integral to preserving and disseminating cultural identities through language (Hermans, 2007:p.132). As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the role of translation becomes more vital, enabling individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds to access and understand global knowledge (Venuti, 2016:p.76).

## **3. Procedures**

### **3.1 Participants and Sampling**

The current study focuses on fourth-year students of the English Department at Al-Noor University College. A sample of 25 college students from the academic year 2022-2023 is selected.

### 3.2 Research Instrument

A meticulously designed questionnaire, consisting of thirteen items with multiple-choice responses (agree, sometimes, disagree), is developed to achieve the study's objectives.

### 3.3 Questionnaire Validity

To ensure face validity, the questionnaire is reviewed by a panel of university faculty members (see Appendix A) who provide valuable feedback and suggestions to enhance its appropriateness.

### 3.4 Questionnaire Reliability

The reliability of the questionnaire is assessed using the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient and the Spearman-Brown Coefficient, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.83.

### 3.5 Statistical Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire are analyzed using various statistical methods:

- Pearson's Correlation Coefficient for questionnaire reliability.
- Spearman-Brown Coefficient for correcting the split-half method's Pearson Correlation.
- Percentage calculation to determine item percentages.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1 Questionnaire Data Analysis

Following the computation of item percentages (refer to Appendix B), key statistical values are extracted, as presented in Table 1.

Table (1): Participant Responses Summary

Item No.	Agree (%)	Sometimes (%)	Disagree (%)	Highest Response
1	42.36	42.36	25.42	Agree, Sometimes
2	46.48	38.14	25.42	Agree
3	59.26	25.42	25.42	Agree
4	46.48	50.68	12.64	Sometimes
5	59.26	29.62	21.21	Agree
6	33.85	16.92	59.26	Disagree
7	88.64	8.42	12.64	Agree
8	59.26	42.36	8.42	Agree
9	63.73	21.21	25.42	Agree
10	88.64	16.92	4.22	Agree
11	59.26	33.85	16.92	Agree
12	29.62	54.95	25.42	Sometimes
13	88.64	29.62	29.62	Agree

### Summary of Questionnaire Responses:

- 42.36% participants agree that textbook texts are insufficiently motivating for college students in textual translation.
- Around 46.48% agree the teaching method is effective but lacks sufficient quality.

- 25.42% of participants believe instructors don't use modern techniques in teaching textual translation.
- 50.68% believe there isn't enough time allotted for learning and practicing textual translation sometimes.
- 29.62% agree that a lack of cooperative spirit weakens students' ability in textual translation.
- 59.26% disagree that instructors' lack of specialization impacts students' performance.
- 88.64% agree that more real-life situations, texts, and practice are needed.
- 59.26% suggest increased attention is needed to enhance and motivate textual translation.
- 63.73% agree that visual aids, audio tracks, charts, and games are underutilized in practicing translation.
- 88.64% believe group or pair work can enhance textual translation skills.
- 59.26% agree that self-assessment is important for improving textual translation.
- 54.95% believe regular quizzes and tests are needed to enhance translation abilities.
- Interference between Arabic and English impacts weakness in textual translation, agreed by 88.64% of participants.

#### 4.1 Ranking of Responses

The data analysis, computed from questionnaire percentages, unveils the ranking of participant viewpoints on textual translation, as showcased in Table (2).

Table (2): Ranking of Questionnaire Items Based on Participants' Attitudes towards Textual Translation

No	Sq.	Items	Ranking	Percentage
1	7	A pressing need for immersive real-life scenarios, diverse texts, and dedicated practice emerges.	1	42%
2	10	The transformative power of collaborative group efforts and dynamic pair work resonates strongly.	1	42%
3	13	The pervasive influence of Arabic-English interaction on students' weaknesses comes to light.	1	42%
4	9	The latent potential of visual aids, audio enhancements, charts, and interactive games remains untapped.	2	58%
5	3	Modern pedagogical techniques find limited integration in teaching textual translation.	3	59%
6	5	The absence of a synergistic spirit among students hampers mastery of textual translation.	3	59%



7	6	The hypothesis that instructor specialization directly affects student competence is contested.	3	59%
8	8	A clarion call for heightened focus on textual translation reverberates.	3	59%
9	11	The transformative potential of self-assessment techniques in refining performance becomes evident.	3	59%
10	12	A clarion call for regular evaluative checkpoints to nurture translation proficiency is sounded.	4	55%
11	4	The temporal constraints for mastering textual translation warrant scrutiny.	4	51%
12	2	The discerned efficacy of the teaching methodology for textual translation beckons attention.	4	46%
13	1	The motivational shortfall of studied texts in fostering translation fluency is discerned.	4	42%

In summary, the paramount concerns orbit around the experiential reality, collaborative dynamics, and the intricate Arabic-English nexus that shapes textual translation aptitude. This underscores a perceptible leaning towards dynamic engagement and real-world resonance in effective learning.

#### 4.1 Discussion of Findings

Translators play a crucial role in interpreting texts, decoding cultural nuances, and making sense of diverse content, encompassing films, television, magazines, advertisements, and more. The exploration of varied interpretations provides insight into the multifaceted ways individuals perceive the world. This study highlights the significance of real-life situations in enhancing translation abilities, emphasizing the emergence of learning cultures within target languages.

Humor texts hold promise as motivational tools for translation practice. Their inherent humor not only engages students but also serves as a litmus test for accurate content transfer. The presence of humor-induced laughter indicates successful translation, offering a dynamic approach to assessment.

Common textual translation challenges stem from linguistic disparities between source and target languages. Decoding source text intricacies and transferring meaning introduces scientific and psychological complexities. While these issues are universal across translation types, different translators require distinct strategies – interpreters seek practical formulas, while literary translators seek equivalent expressions resonating with the source.

The study validates two hypotheses. First, students face difficulties due to limited exposure to contemporary translation

techniques and real-world contexts. Second, traditional lecture-based methods hinder effective textual translation.

### **Conclusions:**

- Addressing the gap in new techniques for practicing textual translation, especially involving real-life scenarios, is imperative.
- Translation instruction, particularly for textual translation, demands increased attention due to its role in reflecting target language culture.
- Collaborative group and pair work hold appeal over solitary efforts for activities related to textual translation.
- Regular assessments, including self-assessment, motivate students and enhance their textual translation proficiency.
- Arabic-English interference contributes to challenges in textual translation for college students.
- Fostering a cooperative spirit aids students in overcoming obstacles and improving translation skills.
- Translation spans literary, scientific, social, economic, political, and religious dimensions, providing diverse practice opportunities.
- A structured curriculum spanning all years of study is recommended to systematically enhance translation skills.
- In essence, this study underscores the importance of innovative techniques, collaborative dynamics, and structured learning in nurturing effective textual translation skills.

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## استكشاف التحديات في إتقان ترجمة النصوص بين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق

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### المستخلص :

تستقصي هذه الدراسة عوامل الأداء غير المرضي بين الطلاب الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية في مهارات ترجمة النصوص. تتناول الدراسة وجهات نظر الطلاب حول الترجمة وتؤكد على تأثير منهجيات التدريس. تقتصر الدراسة على طلاب السنة الرابعة في كلية جامعة النور، خلال العام الدراسي ٢٠٢٢-٢٠٢٣. لتحقيق هذا الهدف، يتم إجراء استبيان للحصول على رؤى من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بشأن العوامل التي تسهم في ترجمة نصوص بالشكل المطلوب. تم اختيار مجموعة من خمسة وعشرين طالبًا جامعيًا للتحقيق. تسلط النتائج الضوء على أن العقبة الرئيسية أمام تحديات الطلاب هي النهج التعليمي المستخدم، إلى جانب الوقت غير المكفي المخصص لتمارين الترجمة. تسلط الدراسة البحثية الضوء على ضرورة التركيز المتزايد على التعليم الترجمي، وبالتحديد ترجمة النصوص، حيث يشير الطلاب بأنها أداة قوية لنقل ثقافة اللغة المستهدفة بشكل فعال، وذلك بشكل متميز عن أشكال الترجمة الحرة والأدبية. **الكلمات الرئيسية** : ترجمة النصوص، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مناهج التدريس، التعليم الترجمي، نقل الثقافة