

Stylistic Errors in English-Arabic Translation

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Abstract:

Different definitions of translation agree upon the fact that this process means conveying some sort of information from one language into another. Translation, which procures increasing significance at present, has attracted the attention of many scholars. It has contributed a great deal in connecting various cultures of the world, leading to the enrichment of human knowledge at large. In English-into-Arabic translation, the translator encounters various problems in rendering style. His/her errors in translating style stem largely from the fact that s/he focuses on words as isolated items. Therefore, this article comes to deal with a number of stylistic errors in English-Arabic translation. The main stylistic errors in most translated texts could be handled with reference to certain causes like literal translation, inexact rendering and L1interference. In short, errors diagnosed in translation fairly indicate that the task of the translator is rather multiple, for s/he ought to be aware of the linguistic, cultural, as well as idiosyncratic features of the language involved in the translation process.

Introduction

Translation, which has an increasing significance at present, has attracted the attention of many scholars. It has contributed a great deal in connecting various cultures of the world. This interplay has naturally led to the enrichment of human knowledge at large (Pinchuck, 1977: 16).

1. Translation: Defining the Concept

Different definitions of translation seem to agree upon the fact that this activity means conveying some sort of information from one language into another. For instance, Catford (1965: 20) defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)". Translation is also defined

as a "type of information transfer, the transfer of information expressed in one language into the terms of a second language" (Pinchuck, 1977: 9). Furthermore, Nida and Taber (1974: 12) state that translation "consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, firstly in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style".

Translation that might appear simple at face value is, in fact, painstaking if not arduous in some of its aspects, for it comprises transferring not only meanings of individual words or structures into the receptor language, but also stylistic features and implicational meanings. This process, therefore, is a reproduction in the translated version of the thoughts and the meanings implied in the original text (Khulusi, 1958). Not only this, but "to produce the message one must make [...] many grammatical and lexical adjustments [...]. Many translations attempt to reproduce the significance of the source language expressions, [...]" (Nida and Taber, 1974: 12).

2. What is Style?

The term "style" has been looked at in different ways. It would be out of the focus of this paper to circumscribe this term fully. For the main purpose of the present article, then, style is intended to mean a mode of expression that differentiates one person from another (Chapman, 1973). Our concern would be, however, confined to the stylistic errors and pitfalls diagnosed in the renditions of translation. Moreover, translators are expected to be aware "of most of the vocabulary included in the text" to be translated (Barcho and Gorgis, 1986: 102-3).

Crystal's and Davy's distinction of this term may well serve the purpose here. In their book, *Investigating English Style* (1969), they indicate "four commonly occurring senses" of style. First, it may refer to the distinctive language habits of

a particular person. Second, it may point to the language habits of a "group of people at one time," such as the style of the Romantic poets. Third, style takes a more "restricted meaning" when it points to "the effectiveness of a mode of expression," i.e., when it is used in an "evaluative sense," e.g. when we deal with a "clear" or "refined style". Also, it is lastly associated with literature when we deal with "good", "effective" or "beautiful writing" (Crystal and Davy, 1969: 9-10).

3. Stylistic Errors

English-Arabic translations project a number of pitfalls attributed to a variety of reasons. The main stylistic errors in most translated texts would be handled with reference to the following causes:

3. 1 Literal Translation vs. Free Translation

There have always been some controversies on the kind of translation to follow: either literal or recreation of the original text, i.e. free translation. Relying on literality, i.e. "faithfulness" to the English language, the word 'light' can be translated into Arabic as 'خفيف' (the opposite of the adjective 'heavy'), as 'نور' (the opposite of the noun 'darkness') and as 'أشعل' (a verb). Some translators achieve literal translation in their attempts to come very close to the style adopted in the original text, viz. in their views, translation should not fall short of the original. Thus, their renderings miss reproducing the effect of the original. Also, they sometimes fail to convey the connotative meaning aimed at in the original text. On the other hand, free translation appears both awkward and aloof from the original text.

A more reliable translation, then, necessitates little alterations on the original text to bring out the effect required. Such translation should appear as if it were really the original text reflecting its freshness and spirit (Savory, 1968). Catford

(1965: 21) refers to this as "partial translation", where some parts of the original text are left untranslated: they are simply transferred to and incorporated in the translated text.

3. 2 Mistranslation

Mistranslation or translating incorrectly is common among translators. One main cause for this is the fact that Arabic and English belong to different linguistic and semantic domains. Another reason may be the limited translation experience in some cases.

It is worthwhile mentioning here that a good translation should preserve the idea (s) of the original. The content of the message should then be the first concern in the translation process. Nida and Taber (1974: 106) sums up this as follows: "obviously in any translation there will be a type of "loss" of semantic content, but the process should be designed as to keep this to a minimum". Only the form of the message then can be changed. The statement "I like reading historical novels" is deduced here for illustration. For this English statement, two different versions of Arabic translation are selected:

- "أحب قراءة الكتب التاريخية."
- "أحب قراءة القصص التاريخية."

In the example above, the translated statements failed to convey the required meaning for the two adhered mostly to literality. These renditions and many others are "so badly done that the original is [...] deformed and mutilated" (Aziz, 1971: 20). Further, they make it rather hard to understand the message of the original statement. Hence, the sentence can better be translated as follows:

- "أحب قراءة الروايات التاريخية"

3. 3 Inadequate Translation

In mistranslation, the denotative meaning of the text loses much of its efficiency. However, in inadequate translation, the connotative meaning is missed. To illustrate this point, an example might be cited here. The English proverb 'Time is money' can be translated in different ways. Some renderings of this statement are as follows:

- "الوقت ثمين"

- "إن للوقت قيمة كبيرة"

It is evident that the above renderings are all inadequate since they fail to represent the deeper meaning of the phrase, i.e. the connotative meaning.

3. 4 Inexact Rendering

Good translation, no doubt, requires fidelity, on the part of the translator, to the text s/he is going to render into the other language. Due to the intricate process of translation, translators are sometimes accused of being "traitors". Translation, thus, occurs when "the translator does not tell the whole truth; he either omits from, or adds to, the original sense" (Aziz, 1971: 22). The first aspect above (i.e. omission) is labelled as "under-translation" for important features of meaning are left out (Shamaa, 1978: 68). The second aspect is referred to as "over-translation" where the translator adds more items to the text, thus providing extra meaning.

Nida and Taber confirm that the ideal translation should keep away from "translationese", i.e. "formal fidelity" with no constant attention to the "content" and the effect of the message. The proverb 'Time is money' can be translated into Arabic as:

- "الوقت كالنقود"

- "الوقت كالسيف إن لم تقطعه قطعك"

Or as,

- "الوقت من ذهب"

The translation should reflect accurately the meaning of the original text. Ask yourself:

- Is the meaning of the original text clear? If not, where does the uncertainty lie?
- Are any words 'loaded', that is, are there any underlying implications?

Is the dictionary meaning of a particular word the most suitable one?

The ordering of words and ideas in the translation should match the original as closely as possible (This is particularly important in translating legal documents, guarantees and contracts. etc.). But, differences in language structure often require changes in the form and order of words.

Translation is to render into another language to make the content of the first understood. In short, it is the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language.

3. 5 L1 Interference

It is a common fact now that the translated text should appear as an original one and not as a duplicate of the original. Interference from the mother tongue plays a vital role in distorting the translated text, although in very limited cases it helps in "introducing a local color into the TL text" (Catford, 1965: 21).

Influenced by their mother tongue, translators sometimes produce alien linguistic forms. They even go so far that they neglect the syntactic form of the translated sentences.

Conclusion:

In English-into-Arabic translation, translators encounter thorny problems in rendering style. Their errors in translating style stem largely from the fact that they focus on words as isolated items whereas their main task ought to be directed to "perform a given function in the best possible way, and the details concerning the translation of individual words ought to be subordinated to this task"(Hartmann, 1979: 67). Translators' attention, thus, need to be aimed at "complete discourse, which in turn is incorporated into a particular context of situation" (ibid.).

It is worthwhile mentioning here that good translation should preserve the idea of the original. The content of the message should then receive a prior concern in the translation process. Only the form of the message then is liable to be changed.

The errors diagnosed in translation fairly indicate that the task of the translator is rather multiple, for s/he ought to be aware of the linguistic, cultural, as well as idiosyncratic features of the language involved in the translation process. Savory (1968: 36) both succinctly and eloquently summarizes this as follows: "[...] to linguistic knowledge and literary capacity, a translator must add sympathy, insight, diligence, and consciousness".

A good translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work; the style and manner of the writing should be of the same as that of the original. A translation should have all the ease of the original composition.

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