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Editor-in-chief

CONTENTS FOREIGN RESEARCHES

Title	Page
Students' Possible self as a Motivator in Learning Translation Osama Hameed Ibrahim & Mohammed Basil AlAzzawi	20 - 1
The Translation of the verb of appropinquation (Kada / בונ) in the Glorious Quran into English Anwar Ali Mohammed& Abdulrahman Ahmed Abdulrahman	39 - 21
The Challenges of Translating English Alternative Questions into Arabic Marwa Mwafeq Basheer& Halla Khaled Najim	49 - 40
Personal Pronouns and Their Relation to Number System in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Study Noor Duraid Alazzawi & Halla Khaled Najem	63 - 50
Problems of Translating Iraqi Marriage Contract into English Ali Mohamed Al-Jawali & Luqman Abdulkareem Nsser	77 - 64
Linguistic features of scientific texts in translation Ayman Nehad Abdulmajeed & Layth Nawfel Mohammed	92 - 78
Orientalist Eyes in Gertrude Bell's Persian Pictures Hasan Moayad Hamid	107- 93
Application of Reiss's Model to the Translation of Arabic Modern Novels into English Abeer Abdullah Khodher & Salim Fatehe Yahya	143-107
A Quantitative Analysis of In-Group Responses on Converging and Diverging on Facebook Hadeel Thaer Ibrahim Aldabagh& Ashraf Reyadh Alallaf	159-144
Loanwords in Mosuli Arabic with Reference to Car Mechanics Jargon Haneen Majeed Almetwaly & Ashraf Reyadh Alallaf	178-160
A Pragmatic Study of the Speech Act of Criticizing in Mosuli Arabic with Reference to English Mohammed Abdulatif Jasim& Ebaa Mudhafer Alrasam	201-179
A Pragmatic Study of Irony in Iraqi Arabic Ali Hussein Baba& Ebaa Mudhafer Alrasam	222-202
Structural Ambiguity in Selected Arabic Literary Texts	241-223

Nadya Shaker Jumaa & Marwan Najeeb Tawfeq	
Relevance – Comprehension Heuristics of Translation Process: A	259-242
Case Study on Literary Translation Mohamed Nihad Ahmed	-55 -4-
Identity, Migration, and Assimilation in Nadine Gordimer's The	280-261
Pickup Haider Najee Shanboj Alaliwi	
La condition de la femme camerounaise dans Les Impatientes de	304-281
Djaïli Amadou Amal Hanan Hashim Mohammed Saed	J04 201



The Challenges of Translating English Alternative Questions into Arabic

Marwa Mwafeq Basheer* Halla Khaled Najim**

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Abstract

The present study investigates the problems and difficulties that students face when they translate English alternative questions into Arabic. Therefore, a sample of three sentences was taken from well-known English grammar books and distributed to fifteen M.A. students in the English translation department to be translated using Newmark's method of semantic and communicative translation.

The study hypothesizes that the student is not fully aware of how the alternative questions are formed and translated into Arabic. Therefore, this study aims at examining the students'awareness of those questions through translation and focusing on the problems that obstruct the process of translation. The study also concludes that the majority of those problems result from the lack of knowledge of the alternative questions in Arabic which is caused by not enough attention paid to this subject in both languages.

Keywords: alternative questions, difficulties, translation

1. Introduction:

English questions are classified into three major classes based on the type of answer they expect. Thus, if they expect an affirmation or

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disaffirmation reply they are called yes-no questions such as, Do you like tea? And if they expect information as a reply, they are called *wh*-questions such as, What is your favorite drink? Whereas, if they expect one answer out of two or more replies or alternatives presented in the same question, then they are called alternative questions such as, Do you like coffee or tea? (Quirk et.al, 1985:806).

Among all three types, this study tackles the third type of question which is the alternative question. In which, the speaker presents two (or more) options in his question and asks the addressee to choose his answer from (ibid). It also deals with the challenges and difficulties that occur when translating such types of questions from English into Arabic.

1.2 The Aims of the Study:

This study aims at the following:

- 1- Explaining what is meant by alternative questions and how they are formed in both English and Arabic.
- 3- Assessing the translation of M.A. students of the alternative questions.
- 2- Investigating the challenges that obstruct the process of translating alternative questions.

1.3 Hypotheses:

- 1. Alternative questions can be found in both English and Arabic.
- 2. English alternative questions are structurally different from the Arabic ones.
- 3. Translators face difficulties in translating English alternative questions into Arabic.

1.4 The Problem of the Study

The students face difficulties in understanding and translating alternative questions from English into Arabic.

1.5 The Model of the study

This study adopts Quirk et.al (1985) and Atyaa (2007) as a grammatical model. It also adopts Newmark's semantic and communicative method as a translation model.

1.6 Procedures and Data Collection:

The procedure that is adopted in this study is handing the M.A. students three sentences taken from different English grammar books such as those of Aziz, Eastwood, and Quirk et.al. The sentences depict alternative questions. Accordingly, the students were asked to translate those alternative questions from English into Arabic by following Newmark's semantic and communicative method of translation also taking into consideration the grammatical rules of the target language.

1.7 The Value of the Study:

This study holds benefits to the students of translation. It focuses on the problems and difficulties in translation, especiallty, those related to understanding and translating English alternative questions which is not a word-for-word translation into Arabic. Therefore, this study is important as it finds a way to overcome such problems and improves the quality of translation.

2. Alternative Questions in English

As mentioned before, alternative questions are considered as one of the three major types of English interrogatives or questions. It is the third type which is used in order to ask the listener to specify his answer out of two (or more) alternative answers given in the question. It presupposes the truth of only one of the two propositions. Thus, such types of questions cannot be answered by using the words 'yes' or 'no' (Quirk et. al, 1985:823). For example,

1. A: Do you travel by bus or train?

B: Bus

Structurally speaking, alternative questions are similar to yes-no questions; they both begin with an operator followed by a subject. However, alternative questions use the coordinator particle 'or' to connect the alternatives.

In addition to the main difference between yes-no questions and alternative questions which is using the word 'or', another important difference is using intonation. Yes-no questions use a final rising intonation, whereas alternative questions use a separate falling intonation for each alternative (ibid). For example,

- 2. A: Shall we go by BUS or TAXI? (alternative question) B: By BUS.
- 3. A: Shall we go by bus or TAXI? (Yes/no question)

B: Let's take a TAXI.

Furthermore, alternative questions are subdivided into two types. The first type is the one that is similar to yes-no questions (i.e. has a subject-verb inversion) and the second type is similar to *wh*-questions (i.e. uses *wh*-word) (Quirk et. al, 1985:824). Consider the two following examples,

4. Are you reading or writing now?

5. What do you like best Summer or Winter?

Not to forget that some scholars consider alternative questions as a subtype of yes-no questions, not a main type. For example, Jespersen (1954:480) states that English questions are divided into two types: nexus (yes/no questions) and x-questions (*wh*-questions). In which, nexus questions are subdivided into disjunctive (**alternative**) questions and **tag questions**. The former gives the listener alternatives to choose from and ends with a falling intonation on the final alternative, while the latter asks for confirmation. (ibid)

3. Alternative Questions in Arabic

Arabic questions are divided into two main types; the first type is verification (or yes/no) questions whereas, the second type is information (or wh-questions). Therefore, alternative questions are not considered as a main independent type by themselves but as a subtype of verification questions or information questions. The function of alternative questions is to ask the listener to choose his answer out of two (or more) alternative answers presented in the question. Therefore, they are not answered by 'na'am or 'la' (Atyaa, 2007:21).

Alternative questions are formed by using the only question particle 'hamza' and the coordinator connected particle 'am/ə\' which combines the two alternatives. Thus, it is incorrect to use other question particles such as 'hal' to ask such questions as in,

- 6. (Do you study grammar or literature?) أتدرس نحوا أم أدبا ؟
- 7. *هل تدرس نحوا أم أدبا؛ (Do you study grammar or literature?)

It is important to mention that the particle 'am' in the alternative questions is considered to be a coordinator and a connecter for it coordinates two ideas and connects two similar alternatives. What is meant by similar is semantically and grammatically similar as,

8. أتدرس نحواً أم أدبًا (Do you study grammar or literature?)

Both are semantically related (i.e. both are subjects) and also grammatically related (i.e. both are nouns, singular, and in a accusative case) (ibid:21-22).

Nevertheless, there are some questions in which 'hal' and 'am' are used together. However, these questions are not considered alternative questions because they are not asked to be answered. In addition, the role of the particle 'am' there is not to connect similar alternatives because those alternatives are not similar and they represent a full sentence (Aziz, 1989: 259). For example a verse from the Glorious Quran,

9. (قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتُوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ أَمْ هَلْ تَسْتُوِي الظَّلُمَاتُ وَالنَّورُ ۗ). Al- Raad:16 say: Are the blind equal with those who see? Or the depths of darkness equal with light? (Ali,2001:591)

Here, the particle 'am' does not connect two alternatives, thus it is not considered as a connected nor coordinator, but rather as a disconnected in a question that is not alternative (ibid).

4. Data Analysis:

Concerning the grammatical model, this study adopts Quirk's (1985) as an English model and Atyaa (2007) as an Arabic model. As for the translation model, the study adopts Newmark's (1982/1988) method of translation, specifically semantic and communicative translation. The reason these two methods meet the need of translating the alternative questions regarding the meaning and form and suit the process of analyses. However, the main concern of this study is making sure that the students are following the grammatical rules of the target language when they translate the English alternative questions whether they are using the semantic or the communicative method.

SL. Text (1)

"Are you sending a card or a letter?" (Eastwood, 1994:26)

TL. Texts

هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة؟
 هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة؟
 هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة؟

4. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?
5. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?
6. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?
7. أترسل رسالة أم بطاقة?
8. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?
9. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?
10. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?
11. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?
12. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?
13. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?
14. هل ترسل بطاقة أم رسالة?

Discussion:

Text (1) "Are you sending a card or a letter?" is an alternative question that starts with the auxiliary 'are' and contains the word 'or' that combines two alternatives or choices. The question also ends with a question mark.

Concerning assessing the translation of this question, it is noticed that the translation of subjects (1-6, 8-15) is incorrect for using the question particle 'hal' to form an alternative question that is grammatically wrong. According to the Arabic grammar rules, the particle 'hal' is not used in the alternative questions but only in the verification questions.

However, the translation may be considered as a semantic translation when it comes to following the meaning of the source text which is asking someone to select one thing out of two. Also, the form of the source is presented by a question.

Nevertheless, the translation of subjects (7) is correct for following the TL. grammar rules and using the question particle 'hamza' to ask an alternative question. Also, the rendition can be considered as an example of a semantic translation for following the source text meaning and form.

SL. Text (2) "Shall we go by bus or train?"

(Quirk et.al, 1985:82)

```
1. هل سنذهب بالباص أم بالقطار ؟
           2. هل سنغادر بالباص أم بالقطار؟
               3. أنذهب بالحافلة أم بالقطار؟
            4. هل نذهب بالحافلة أو بالقطار؟
5. هل بنبغي علبنا الذهاب بالحافلة ام بالقطار؟
          6. هل سنذهب بالباص أم بالقطار؟
                7. أنذهب بالحافلة ام بالقطار
```

TL, Texts

8. هل نذهب بالباص أم بالقطار؟

9. هل سنذهب بو اسطة الباص ام القطار ؟

10. هل نذهب بالحافلة ام بالقطار؟

11. هل نستقل الحافلة ام القطار؟

12. هل نذهب بالحافلة أو بالقطار؟

13. هل نذهب بالحافلة أو بالقطار؟

14. هل سنذهب بالباص أم بالقطار؟

15. هل سنذهب بالباص أم بالقطار؟

Discussion:

Text (2) represented by "Shall we go by bus or train?" is an alternative question that starts with the auxiliary 'shall' and contains the word 'or' that combines two alternatives.

In assessing the translation of the questions, it is noticed that although the translation of subjects (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8-15) may sound as a semantic translation for following the source text meaning, it is an incorrect translation for not following the target language grammar rules that do not allow using the particle 'hal' in asking alternative questions.

Nevertheless, the translation of subjects (3 and 7) is correct for following the TL. grammar rules by using the question particle 'hamza' in order to ask an alternative question. Also, the question can be considered as a semantic translation for following the source textual meaning and form. As for the communicative translation, none of the questions were translated communicatively.

SL. Text (3)

Have they gone to the show or to the library? (Aziz,1989:252)

TL. Texts

هل ذهبوا الى المعرض أم الى المكتبة؟
 هل ذهبوا الى المعرض أم الى المكتبة؟
 هل ذهبوا الى المعرض أم الى المكتبة؟
 هل ذهبوا الى العرض أو الى المكتبة؟
 هل ذهبوا الى المعرض أم المكتبة؟
 هل ذهبوا الى المعرض أم الى المكتبة؟
 أذهبوا الى المعرض أم الى المكتبة؟
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 المكتبة؟
 المال ذهبوا الى المعرض أم الى المكتبة؟

Discussion:

Text (3) represented by "Have they gone to the show or to the library?" is an alternative question that starts with the auxiliary 'Have' and contains the word 'or' that combines the two alternatives (i.e. show and library)

In assessing the translation of the questions, it is noticed that although the translation of subjects (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15) may seem like a semantic translation for following the source text meaning, yet it is an incorrect translation for not following the target language grammar rules that do not allow using the particle 'hal' in asking alternative questions.

Nevertheless, the translation of subjects (7 and 13) is correct for following the TL. grammar rules by using the question particle 'hamza' in order to ask an alternative question. Also, the question can be considered as a semantic translation for following the source textual meaning and form. As for the communicative translation, none of the questions were translated communicatively.

5. Conclusion:

This study concludes that translating alternative questions from English into Arabic is challenging for the student of translation. Those challenges are represented by the lack of knowledge of the Arabic alternative questions specifically the tools that are used to form such questions, the majority of the students used the question particle (hal) and the particle (am/أم) to express an alternative question which is not correct according to the Arabic grammar rules. First, the particle (hal) is not used in the alternative questions instead, the question particle (hamaz) is used in such questions. Second, combining (hal) with (am) in a question means this question is not an alternative question since (am) here does not coordinate two similar alternatives but separates them thus, it is called disconnected (am). As a result, the whole meaning of the question was changed from being an alternative that gives the addressee choices to choose from into something else. However, a few students succeeded by using hamza to ask an alternative question. The reason for those challenges is the lack of knowledge of the Arabic alternative questions and the exact way of using the Arabic particles.

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تحديات ترجمة الاسئلة البديلة من الانجليزية الى العربية

مروة موفق بشير * هالة خالا نجم **

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة المشكلات والصعوبات التي تعترض الطلاب عند ترجمة الاستفهام التصوري والذي يؤدي وظيفة الأسئلة البديلة باستعمال الهمزة و (أم) المتصلة من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية. وقد وزعت ثلاثة نماذج من جمل وهي عبارة عن اسئلة بديلة مأخوذة من كتب معروفة لقواعد النحو الانجليزي وتم توزيعها على خمسة عشر طالباً من طلاب الماجستير في قسم الترجمة لغرض ترجمتها الى العربية اعتماداً على طريقة نيومارك (1982&1982) في الترجمة الدلالية والتواصلية.

تفترض هذه الدراسة أن الطالب ليس على دراية كافية بالأسئلة البديلة وكيفية ترجمتها إلى اللغة العربية. لذلك فهي تهدف الى اختبار معرفة الطلاب بهذا النوع من الأسئلة والتركيز على المشكلات التي تعترض عملية الترجمة. وأخيرا تستنتج هذه الدراسة أن غالبية هذه المشكلات سببها عدم معرفة الطلاب الكافية بهذا الموضوع كنتيجة للاهتمام الضعيف الذي توليسه كتسب النحسو لموضوع الاسئلة البديلسة فسي كاتسا اللغتسين. الكلمات المفتاحية: الأسئلة البديلة، صعوبات، ترجمة

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