English Realization of Syntactic Problems in an Arabic Text
(A contrastive study)

By
Lecturer: Hashim Sa'doon Saleem
Tikrit University – College of Education

Abstract
The current Study is an effort to investigate the syntactic problems that may be encountered by translators who convey meaning from Arabic into English. The researcher, within the available linguistic devices, attempts to overcome the syntactic barriers behind such Arabic-English contrastive analyses; furthermore adopts a systematic approach, which relies on certain modern linguistic concepts to explain the grammatical variations selected when translating from Arabic into English. The approach to achieve this purpose is by choosing ample sentences and phrases extracted from the Arabic political text heading:

(الاستراتيجية الأمريكية تجاه الخليج العربي : مصالح ثابتة وسياسات متغيرة)
(The American Strategy towards the Arab Gulf: fixed interests and changeable policies). This text is written by Usama Al-Ghazali Harb (Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, year 4, no. 38, April, 1982, pp. 33-45). The researcher hopes that this contrastively handled analysis will cover all the aspects in question.

1. Introductory Notes
It is assumed that, in dealing with a research of a political nature, many hard areas are to exist in the way which can be highlighted. The translators can benefit from the syntactic problems posed here in translating as many Arabic sentences as possible, although in particular different sentences entail suitably different syntactic uses and means. For this purpose different sentences require different syntax and right semantically oriented content. Among the syntactic problems often encountered in transaction are tense, word order, and syntactic ambiguity.

The syntactic gap between English and Arabic remains wide due to the remote relationship and different linguistic origin of both languages. Arabic and English belong to different families because they are not
closely related, unlike English and German which are highly connected belonging to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family. For this reason, any contrastive analysis between Arabic and English is expected to demonstrate largely different syntactic uses which may add more difficulties to the researcher and make the task full of complexities.

The Arabic sentences and extracts and their English counterparts are studied and analyzed adequately to detect the similarities and mainly the dissimilarities in both languages. In so doing, the researcher's duty seems to be a challenging one and beyond any simplicity since the two languages under Study belong to different linguistic systems.

2. **Syntactics**

This section will analyze problems related to syntax. For the purpose of this work, syntax is defined as "the study of the interrelationships between elements of sentence structure and of the rules governing the arrangement of sentences in sequences." (Crystal, 1980: 346). In adopting this definition, an attempt is made to avoid morphological problems.

In the process of translating, syntactic problems are a basic difficulty because of the huge differences between the two languages which belong to different language systems. Encoding the semantic message into the target language syntax requires knowledge of the system of the target language.

Under syntax, the following categories will be discussed:

2.1 **Tense**
2.2 **Voice**
2.3 **Number**
2.4 **The comparative**
2.5 **Negation**
2.6 **Articles**

2.1 **Tense**

Tense is "a category used in the grammatical description of verbs (along with aspect and mood), referring primarily to the way of the grammar marks the time at which the action denoted by the verb takes place. Traditionally, a distinction is made between past, present, and future tense forms...In linguistics, the relationship between tense and time has been the subject of many studies, and it is now clear that there is
no stable relationship between the two. Tense forms can be used to signal meanings other than temporal ones," (Crystal, p.352).

"The temporal forms of the Arabic verb are but two in number, the one expressing a finished action, one that is done and completed in relation to other acts (the perfect); the other unfinished act, one that is just starting or in progress (the imperfect)." (Wright, 1967:51).

For the purpose of this work, the tense problems encountered in translating the source text are to be subcategorized into:

a. The notion of the past tense in Arabic is rendered by the notion of the present or present perfect tenses in English.
b. The notion of the present tense in Arabic is rendered by the notion of the past tense in English.
a. The notion of the past tense in Arabic is rendered by the notion of the present or present perfect tenses in English.

Example 1
Source Language
احتل نفط الخليج مكانا رئيسيا ومتصاعدا داخل الواردات النفطية الأمريكية

Target Language  Gulf oil has become of great and increasing importance in American oil imports.

Example 2
SL
وان اكتسبت (المصالح والالهاف)– بحكم عوامل كثيرة - مزيدا من الحيوية والاهمية بالنسبة للولايات المتحدة والمعسكر الغربي باسره.

TL  For many reasons, there has been a continuation of those interests and objectives whose vital importance has increased for the U.S. and the whole western camp.

Example 3
SL
وفي بدء عام 1976 ارتفعت نسبة الوردات النفطية التي تساهم في سد حاجة الاستهلاك المحلي الى 33 بالمئة.

TL  At the beginning of 1976, oil imports to cover domestic consumption had risen to 33 %.
The Arabic past tense causes problems in translating into English. The translator may get confused whether to use the past simple, the present perfect or the past perfect any of which can replace the past in Arabic.

It is worth mentioning that the English simple past is used to refer to actions or situations which are finished or no more in action and the effect of which is finished as well. The present perfect is used "when we talk about actions or situations which started in the past and have continued up to the present time; we often use the present perfect to show the connection between past and present (Swan, 1981:494)". If we are already talking about the past, we use the past perfect to go back to an earlier past time, to talk about things that had already happened at the time we are talking about (ibid:467).

In example 1 and 2, oil and American interests in the Arab Gulf seem to have started at the same time in the past and have continued up to the present. These two examples are rendered in English in the present perfect tense. Example 3, dates back to an earlier past time to talk about oil imports to cover American domestic consumption which had already risen at the time in question.

In translating into Arabic, the present perfect in English can also be translated by the past.

Example 1

SL

شهدت منطقة الخليج ولاتزال تشهد موجة عاتية من الاهتمام السياسي والتركيز الاعلامي.

TL The Gulf region has witnessed overwhelming wave of political and media concern.

The combination of past and present is equivalent in function to present perfect in English.

a. The notion of the present tense in Arabic is rendered by the notion of the past tense in English.
Example 1

SL

على أن فكرة "التدخل العسكري المباشر" في الخليج اخذت تكتسب ابعادا مهمة جديدة في إطار معرف باسم "مبدأ كارتر" الذي يركز على العودة الى استعمال القوة العسكرية الأمريكية.

TL

The idea of "direct military intervention" in the Gulf took on new and important dimensions in the framework of the so-called "Carter doctrine" which emphasized a return to the use of American military force.

In the Arabic example, the Carter Doctrine is treated as a continuing fact whereas in English, because Carter is no longer president, it is considered as belonging to the past.

2.2 Voice

Voice is "a category used in the grammatical description of sentence or clause Structure, primarily with reference to verbs, to express the way sentences may alter the relationship between the subject and object of a verb without changing the sentence. The main distinction is between active and passive, as illustrated by 'The cat bit the dog' and 'The dog was bitten by the cat' (Crystal, p. 378).

Voice is not a problem for a translator when the same structure exists in both languages. In this Arabic text, the passive was used occasionally in a way typical of modern Arabic journalism. It was not a difficult task to translate these examples because English uses the passive a great deal. The English passive sentence of the Arabic extracted sentence:

في هذا الاطار، نظر الى كل من السعودية وايران في ظل حكم الشاه على انهما تمثلان نقاط الطاقة الارتكاز في المنطقة

was treated as passive because it makes an expressive way of translation (in this framework, Saudi Arabia and Iran under the reign of Shah were viewed as the axis of the U. S. policy in the region.)

linguistic barriers arise when there is no option but to use a different voice.

The following are the voice problems faced in the translation of the Arabic text:
(A) Nominal sentence in Arabic rendered by passive verbal clause in English.

(B) Active clause in Arabic rendered by passive clause in English.

(A) Nominal clause in Arabic rendered by passive verbal clause in English.

Example no. 1
SL
تم تطوير امكانيات التدخل العسكري المباشر في الخليج

TL The possibilities of a direct military intervention in the Gulf were then developed.

Example no. 2
SL
امكانية تعرض الولايات المتحدة لانقطاعات في تدفق النفط

TL The flow of oil to the U.S. might be interrupted.

Sentences of this kind can cause major problem to the translator. The Arabic sentence starts with a nominal phrase, which cannot be placed at the beginning of the English sentence. The first examples can be literally translated as 'then developing the possibility of direct military intervention'. The second example translates as 'the possibility of the U.S. being subject to an interruption in the flow of oil'. These are literally worded translations so the passive is used instead.

B. Active clause in Arabic rendered by passive clause in English

Example no. 1
SL
سيطرة على السياسة الامريكية في الخليج فكرة التحالف أو الأمن الاقليمي

TL The American policy towards the Gulf has been dominated by the idea of alliance or regional security.
Example no. 2

SL

وفرض واقع منطقة الخليج "خصوصية" على تطبيق هذا المبدأ

TL The application of this doctrine was modified to fit the special features of the Gulf.

Arabic often uses the active voice where English uses the passive. The passive, in fact, is sparingly used in good Arabic.

NUMBER 3.3

"Number refers to a grammatical category used for the analysis of word classes displaying such contrasts as singular, plural, dual, etc., as in English, boy vs. boys, 'he walks' vs. 'they walk', (Crystal, p245).

In Arabic, adjectives and verbs agree with nouns in terms of singular and plural while there is also the notion of duality. In translating from Arabic into English, many problems concerning number emerge. Problems of number encountered in the translation are subcategorized as follows:

(A) Singular in Arabic = plural in English.

(B) The construct plural in Arabic = singular in English.

(C) Dual in Arabic = plural in English.

(A) Singular in Arabic = plural in English.

Example 1

SL

ان المخزون العالمي من النفط اقل مما كان مقدرا.

TL World oil reserves are less than the quantity estimated...

Example no. 2

SL

توفير احتياطي استراتيجي مخزون في ارض الولايات المتحدة يكفي لسد حاجتها طوال ..

TL The provision of strategic reserves stockpiled in the U.S. to cover its needs for ...

321
Example 3
SL
ان على الولايات المتحدة ان تتعلم كيف تتعايش مع الاستيراد النفطي
TL the U.S. has to learn how to accommodate with oil imports…

Example 4
SL
تعكس ظهور الولايات المتحدة كقوة مؤثرة في السياسة الدولية
TL With the emergence of the U.S. as an influential power in international politics…

Example 5
SL
ما دام الاتحاد السوفيتي يسعى الى تحطيم الرأسمالية لصالح الشيوعية
TL Since the Soviet Union is endeavouring to destroy capitalism in behalf of communism…

The underlined nouns in all of the examples are singular in Arabic but plural in English.

(B) The construct plural in Arabic = singular in English

Example 1
SL
لم تقلل دراسة "سيبو" من شأن الضغوط التي سيفرضها عدم التوازن هذا على اسعار النفط العالمية ، ومن الشن الذي سيتم تقاضيه من الاقتصاد والدولار美国人ين.
TL The aforementioned study … did not underrate the pressure which this imbalance would impose on the world oil price and the price which the American economy and the dollar would pay.

Example 2
SL
ولكن اشد الخاطر التي تتطوي عليها الواردات النفطية هي …
TL The most serious risk with oil imports … is…

In example no. 1, the literal translation of the phrase اسعار النفط is 'the prices of oil'. In English, however, this is always contracted into 'oil price.'
(C) Dual in Arabic = plural in English

Example 1
SL

وبدأت تظهر — في خضم المواجهة بين المعسكرين — المخاوف

TL Because of the confrontation between the two camps...

Example 2
SL

الاتحاد السوفيتي قد يلجأ إلى استغلال الاعتماد الأمريكي على نفط الشرق الأوسط بواحدة

TL The soviet Union "might try to take advantage of American dependence on Middle East oil in one of two ways:-

3-4 THE COMPARATIVE

"A term used in the three-way grammatical description of Adjectives and Adverbs into degrees, specifying the extent of their application. The comparative form is used for a comparison between two entities, and contrasts with superlative, for more than two, and positive, where no comparison is implied. In English, there is both an inflection (-er) and a periphrastic construction (more) to express this notion"(Crystal, pp.72-3 ). Similarly, Arabic possesses a comparative form of the adjectives. For the purpose of this work problems concerning the comparative in the translation of the Arabic text will be subcategorized into:

(A) Explicit comparative in Arabic = explicit comparative in English
(B) Explicit superlative in Arabic = explicit superlative in English
(C) Implicit comparative in Arabic = explicit comparative in English

(A) Explicit comparative in Arabic = explicit comparative in English

Example 1
SL

ان المخزون العالمي من النفط أقل مما كان مقدرا

TL World oil reserves are less than the quantity estimated.
Example 2

SL

TL In 1973, the need to import increased even more than in 1972.

Example 3

SL
اذا امكن الوصول بهذه السياسة الى درجة أعلى من الفعالية ، فربما يصبح تحمل مستوى أعلى من الواردات، ودفع علاوة أقل لبدائل لها أمرا مرغوبا فيه.

TL If we can bring this policy to a higher degree of effectiveness, it will be desirable to sustain a higher level of imports and to pay less for alternatives.

The words، أعلى，أكبر، أقل in the above examples are clear-cut examples of the usage of the comparative in Arabic. They were translated into English by direct equivalents less, more, higher.

(B) Explicit superlative in Arabic = explicit superlative in English

Example 1

SL
ولكن اشد المخاطر التي تنطوي عليها الواردات النفطية هي ...

TL The most serious risk with oil imports...

اشد is a superlative translated into English by an equivalent superlative the most.

(C) Implicit comparative in Arabic = explicit comparative in English

Example 1

SL
كان في مقدمة الاهداف التي حددها الرئيس الامريكي السابق كارتر في برنامجه لتوفير استهلاك النفط توفير...

TL foremost among the aims of former president Carter's programme to provide oil supplies was...

This sentence translates literally as 'the first of the aims which Ex-President Carter defined in his programme to provide'... Semantically ﴾
Mounded implies the superlative: it refers to the most important aim as opposed to lesser aims mentioned by Carter. This had to be clarified in English by foremost among, an explicit superlative.

3-5 NEGATION

"A process of construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of some or all the meaning of a sentence. In English grammar, it is expressed by the insertion of the 'negative particle' not or n't (the contracted negative): in lexis, there are several possible means, e.g. prefixes such as un-, non-, or words such as deny". (Crystal, 1980:239).

In Arabic "The negative particles may deny any part of the sentence, - the predicate, the subject (e.g. لَا تَقْفُ لِلْجِنْس), the object, the hāl or circumstantial expression, etc.

Among the many negative particles are... ليس ، إن ، لَن ، ما ، لا... etc".

(Wright, 1967:299)

Problems of negation found in this work are subcategorized into:

(A) Explicitly emphatic negative in Arabic = implicitly emphatic negative in English

(B) Explicitly emphatic negative in Arabic = implicitly emphatic negative in English with a cliché

(C) Implicitly negative in Arabic = implicitly emphatic negative in English

(D) Explicitly emphatic negative in Arabic = explicitly emphatic negative in English

(A) Explicitly emphatic negative in Arabic = implicitly emphatic negative in English

Example no 1

SL

ولن يكفي مس حاجة العالم بمعدلاته الاستهلاكية الحالية الا فترة تمتد من 20-25 سنة فقط.

TL ... and will only cover world demand at present rates of consumption on for 20-25 years.
Example 2

SL

و لكن م عارضة فكرة الغزو لم تتبين من هذا التقرير لموقف الاتحاد السوفيتي فقط، وإنما تعدته إلى مجموعة أخرى من الأسباب.

TL The opposition to the idea of invasion, however, originated not only from this report on the attitude of the Soviet Union, but also for many other reasons.

The particle ' لن ' the first example serves as an emphatic negative in the future. This is rendered in English by an implicit emphatic negative preceded by a future.

In the second example "لم ... فقط...انما" is paralleled by the English negative 'not only … but also. "

(b) Explicitly emphatic negative in Arabic = implicitly emphatic negative in English (with a cliché).

Example 1

SL

ليست أهمية نفط الخليج العربي للولايات المتحدة، وللعالم العربي ككل، في حاجة الى المزيد من التأكيد.

TL The importance of Arab Gulf oil for the U.S. and the whole western world is beyond any doubt.

Besides the other particles of negation, the word ليس in the above example negates the entire sentence. This is rendered in English by a negative collocation with affirmative force.

(c) Implicitly negative in Arabic = implicitly emphatic negative in English

Example no. 1

SL

و اذا فصلنا في تلك الأهداف الأمريكية بين...نتبين لنا ان المصالح الأمريكية في الخليج تتلخص في مصلحتين اساسيتين.

TL If we distinguish American 'Interests'..., we see that there are only two main American interests in the Gulf...
This sentence translates literally as "if we distinguish American 'interests' we see that these American interests in the Gulf are summarized in two basic interests". This restriction in number of interests indicates the idea of not more than two interests. Therefore, the rendition in English was by a negative.

(D) Explicitly emphatic negative in Arabic = Explicitly emphatic negative in English

Example no. 1

SL

فان تزايد القوة السعودية لم يكن امرا سارا للحكم الايراني

TL The increase of Saudi Arabia's power,… did not please the Iranian government.

The underlined explicit Arabic particle negating the sentence is converted into a similar explicit emphatic negative.

3-6 THE ARTICLES

Article is "a term used in the grammatical classification of words, referring to a sub-crass of determiners which display a primary role in differentiating the uses of nouns, e. g. the/a in English". (Crystal, p. 32). There are two kinds of articles, definite and indefinite distinguished partly on semantic and partly on grammatical grounds.

In Arabic, the definite article characterizes both nouns and adjectives and is considered part of the word. There is no indefinite article: if the definite article is removed, the word becomes indefinite.

Articles constitute a major problem to the translator because of the difference in the article systems of the two languages. Problems encountered in the process of translation are subcategorized into:

(A) Explicit indefinite particle in Arabic = explicit indefinite article in English

(B) Zero article in Arabic = explicit indefinite article in English

(C) The construct in Arabic = English Genitive

(D) Definite abstract noun = zero (indefinite) article

(A) Explicit indefinite particle in Arabic = explicit indefinite article in English
Example 1
SL
وكانت قضية الخليج احدى القضايا الرئيسية التي ...  
TL  The Gulf was a major issue...  
This meaning is often translated by an indefinite article in English.
(B) Zero article in Arabic = explicit indefinite article in English

Example 1
SL
ليس أقلها وجود سلاح حربي حديث وكثيف في يد بلد عربي مجاور...  
TL  Not least of which was the possession of modern, heavy, military  
weapons by a neighboring Arab country.

Example 2
SL
ثم اكتسب الوجود العسكري الامريكي في الخليج بعدا اخر في بدا عام 1975  
TL  This presence took on a further dimension.  
The 'Tanwin' in Arabic is equivalent to the indefinite article and may be so rendered in English.
(C) The construct in Arabic = English Genitive

Example no. 1
SL
مبدأ نيكسون  
TL  The Nixon Doctrine  
This sentence is translated literally as 'Nixon's Doctrine'. But conventionally it is not used. The construct in Arabic is when we have two nouns the first relating to the other, which starts with a definite article, unless the second element is a proper noun. It corresponds to the genitive in English represented in 'The' and 'of.'
(D) Definite abstract noun = Zero (indefinite) article
Example 1
SL

The above example is translated literally as, 'the Gulf region has witnessed an overwhelming wave of the political and the media concern', but this is impossible in English.

In Arabic, abstract nouns take a definite article but this is not the case in English.

Conclusion

The body of the research manifests big distinctions between Arabic and English relative to the syntactic categories selected for the current contrastive study. These differences are ascribed to different linguistic systems of the two languages. Arabic belongs to Semitic linguistic family whereas English is related to the Indo-European linguistic system. Tense, for example, the first category of syntax, differs in Arabic from English. Arabic includes only two tenses: perfect and imperfect while English's got many tenses to express the time-relations in the language. The same idea of the difference in tense between Arabic and English can be found on the other syntactic levels, viz, voice, number, comparative, negation and articles. Each grammatical term previously listed includes a number of differences between Arabic and English, which increase the difficulties in any contrastive analysis depending on translation.

Translating sentences and extracts in the political field is not void of hard difficulties and complications. In reality, translating from Arabic into English is very much harder than the reverse because it requires a translator highly equipped with all language arts and broad linguistic techniques in the target language since it is not his native language. Controlling English needs a lot of time and big efforts in getting the proper learning and knowledge, definitely, for long years. Thus, a translator must be able to use English automatically and successfully.

The body of the research reveals that compound and complex sentences are more difficult to translate than simple sentences as a simple sentence carries a single simple idea whereas a compound or a complex
sentence has multi ideas which needs to be distinguished and rendered in a detailed way correctly.

It is important to emphasize the role played by translators in conveying the English cultural values, which make the translation not only a matter of word substitution. The science of translation has turned from traditional process to new approaches which describe meanings scientifically and put in mind together the different linguistic systems of Arabic and English to obtain right translation. The results of this study reveal that the syntactic problems are higher than to be imagined.

As is seen in the previous pages of the research that Arabic and English (SL and TL) belong to different language families; more syntactic problems, however, are likely to be met. And having the words correctly translated is not enough but they should be arranged in a way corresponding to the syntactic and idiomatic usage of the target language. In that way, we can get effective translation into English.
الملخص:

تحديد مشكلات نحوية انكليزية في نص عربي

تهدف الدراسة الحالية بطريقة التحليل المقارن الى محاولة حل المشكلات النحوية التي تواجه المترجمين من العربية الى الانكليزية. يحاول الباحث وضمن حدود الوسائل اللغوية المتيسرّة التغلب على العقبات النحوية في تحليّلات مقارنة من العربية الى الانكليزية. فهو يتبنى بالإضافة الى ذلك طريقة نحوية تعتمد على مفاهيم نحوية حديثة لوضيح النماذج النحوية المنتخبة عند الترجمة من العربية الى الانكليزية. وسيلة الوصول لهذا الغرض تتحقق من خلال اختيار جمل وعبارات مقتطعة من النص السياسي العربي تحت عنوان: "الاستراتيجية الأمريكية تجاه الخليج العربي: مصالح ثابتة وسياسات متغيرة". هذا المقال كان قد كتب بقلم الكاتب أسامة الغزالي حرب في مجلة المستقبل العربي في نيسان سنة 1982. يأمل الباحث من هذا التحليل المقارن أن يلم بجوانبه المختلفة.
References


