

## Challenges Encountered by Libyan Undergraduate Students in Effectively Translating Canned Food Labels from English to Arabic

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التحديات التي يواجهها طلبة جامعة سبها في ترجمتهم لمصقات الأغذية المعلبة من الإنجليزية للعربية

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### Abstract:

Translation is the process of expressing the meaning of one language in another. It acts as a bridge connecting audiences from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, functioning both as an interlingual activity at the language level and as a means of intercultural dialogue. Translation plays a crucial role in understanding global literature and culture. Within the field of translation studies, a significant link exists between translation and culture. However, there are differences in how food culture is represented and interpreted during the translation of labels, potentially causing confusion for consumers. Translating food names carries cultural significance that can be difficult to understand, presenting various challenges for many translators.

Thus, this research will identify and clarify the linguistic and cultural challenges encountered in the translation of food labels, along with the strategies and methods utilized in the process. The translator highlights both the advantages and disadvantages of translating food labels. The translation of food labels should be approached thoughtfully, as it can greatly influence how a product is perceived by consumers. This study was conducted to analyze food brands with Arabic translations that are present in the Libyan market. To achieve this goal, products with food labels in both languages that are commonly found in everyday use were chosen. This research will deepen our understanding of local culture and international interactions, and it will also examine the translation strategies employed in the context of packaged food labels. Ultimately, this study explores the importance of labels to consumers within the Libyan market.

**Keywords:** Translation, Culture, Food Labels, Linguistic aspects, Consumers.

### المخلص:

الترجمة هي عملية نقل المعنى من لغة إلى لغة أخرى. وهي بمثابة جسر يربط بين جماهير من خلفيات لغوية وثقافية متنوعة، على المستوى اللغوي تعد الترجمة نشاط متعدد اللغات ووسيلة للحوار بين الثقافات. ولا ريب أن الترجمة تلعب دوراً حاسماً في فهم الأدب والثقافة العالمية بوجه علم. وفي مجال دراسات الترجمة بوجه خاص تتكشف الصلات الوثيقة بين الترجمة والثقافة. وتتجلى الاختلافات في كيفية تمثيل الثقافة الغذائية وتفسيرها أثناء ترجمة الملصقات المتعلقة بها، مما قد يسبب إرباكاً للمستهلكين في حال عدم توفر المرادف السليم لبعض المسميات الغذائية وبالتالي تحمل ترجمة أسماء الأطعمة أهمية بالغة، مما يمثل تحديات مختلفة للعديد من المترجمين. وعليه، فإن هذا البحث سوف يعمل على تحديد وتوضيح التحديات اللغوية والثقافية التي تواجه ترجمة ملصقات الأغذية، إلى جانب الاستراتيجيات والأساليب المستخدمة في هذه العملية. وفي هذه الورقة يسلط الباحثون الضوء على مزايا وعيوب ترجمة الملصقات الغذائية. وعلى ألية التعامل مع ترجمة الملصقات الغذائية بشكل مدروس ومهني، لأنها يمكن أن تؤثر بشكل كبير على كيفية إدراك المستهلكين للمنتج. كذلك أجريت هذه الدراسة لتحليل العلامات التجارية الغذائية ذات الترجمات العربية الموجودة في السوق الليبية. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف تم اختيار المنتجات التي تحمل ملصقات غذائية باللغتين والتي تتطلب في الاستخدام اليومي. أملين أن يسهم هذا البحث في تعميق أهمية دور الترجمة في مجال التسويق الغذائي، وأن يسلط الضوء على أهم استراتيجيات الترجمة المستخدمة في سياق الملصقات الغذائية والعلامات التجارية المتداولة بين المستهلكين داخل السوق الليبي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الترجمة، الملصقات، الثقافة، المستهلك، جوانب لغوية، العلامات التجارية.

### 1-1 Introduction:

Manufacturers across the globe utilize a variety of powerful advertising and marketing tools to increase the visibility of their brands and products. In addition to this primary function, labels serve a secondary purpose as advertising or promotional tools. Research on product packaging labels and their text reveals several possible communication functions: informational, expressive, and operational. This understanding helps clarify the true meaning of the texts. Labels should be viewed as an essential component of manufacturers' sustainable marketing and advertising strategies. In essence, a label acts as a communication tool between producers and consumers, assisting in the decision-making process regarding product purchases. Manufacturers use labels to convey important information about their products to consumers, and this communication is generally considered to be one-sided.

## 1-2 Research Objectives

The aim of translating food brands and labels is to market the product and its ingredients effectively. This study intends to identify the key obstacles and challenges translators encounter when translating food labels. It seeks to mitigate the problems faced by consumers in Libyan markets.

## 1.3 Research Problems

Issues related to food translation often arise from the incorrect application of translation methods, and at times, the translator might implement changes that alter or adjust the cultural context of the target audience by omitting or including various elements.

## 1.4 Research Questions

- What challenges and difficulties are present in translating food-related content from English into Arabic?
- What strategies can be employed to address these challenges and difficulties?

## 1.5 Research Significance

This study addresses the lack of research on this subject, making it a significant advancement in this field. Ultimately, this research encourages translators to exercise greater caution during the translation process, resulting in more effective translations. The significance of the study lies in its emphasis on the importance of labeling, as these materials can impact public decision-making and shape perceptions of specific products.

## 1.6 Hypothesis

Accurate and effective translation is essential, and the practice of precise translation warrants serious consideration because meanings can vary based on norms, beliefs, attitudes, and cultural contexts. The researchers hypothesize that when focusing on food brands and labels, the primary factors are adequately considered, and these variances may contribute to issues in international markets globally.

## 1.7 Organisation of Research

This research is structured into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction. The second chapter covers the literature review. The third chapter elaborates on the methodology as well as the methods utilized for data collection and analysis, including the sampling techniques applied in this study. The fourth chapter focuses on data analysis and discussion. The final chapter offers conclusions and recommendations from the researchers.

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction:

The quantity of translated texts related to food, including cookbooks, TV programs, figures, and food labels, has significantly surged in recent years. Despite this rapid growth in the translation of food-related materials, the connection between food, culture, and translation is still intricate. Translation pertains to a wide array of materials that cover food topics. As a result, various countries implement stringent regulations regarding nutritional information displayed on products and food labels. Focusing on branded food labels, two primary factors were considered: cultural and linguistic differences. Cravens et al. (1987) highlighted that language differences are vital in the international market (cf. Chang & Huang, 1997). Tymms (2011) suggested that, in the absence of proper scientific analysis, one could argue that since consumers have varied motivations, abilities, goals, and aspirations, a range of nutrition labeling schemes may effectively meet those diverse needs. Prior research similar to this study was conducted by Naimah & Hayuza (2005) and Mohamed Zain (2009). Hashim et al. (2013) reported that 80% of their respondents experienced communication issues while shopping in Malaysia, coupled with low proficiency in Arabic among shoppers. Previous studies on brand names, such as those by Chan & Hung (1997), identified the semantic requirements for brand names, which include: (1) being positive, (2) not being offensive, obscene, or harmful, and (3) being modern or contemporary. The concept of "linguistics of translation" was put forth by Catford (1991) and has concentrated significantly on lexical, sentence, and semantic correspondences. Arai (2002) investigates whether food and drug labels should be available in languages other than English in the United States, recommending that the Food and Drug Administration mandate labels to be in English, considering the linguistic demographics of the country. Abdulrahman (2015) studies a collection of 70 English-Arabic food product labels regarding translation strategies and issues. He categorizes the strategies used in translating the labels into two groups: source-oriented strategies and target-oriented strategies. His descriptive analysis indicates that the challenges in translation stem from the translators' lack of knowledge and intentional manipulation aimed at attracting a larger consumer base. Alison (2016) underscores the crucial role of food label translation in the competitive market, benefiting both consumers and companies. Alison argues that if nutritional and ingredient information is presented in a customer's native language, it enhances their health and safety. Basem (2006) provides an example of translating terms like hamburger and hot dog, which imply food made from pork and dog meat, respectively, and may conflict with the cultural norms of Arab society. Al-Rushaidi and Ali (2017) also drew attention to the challenges of translating food labels between English and Arabic. They emphasized the necessity of translations on food labels, as not all individuals possess the same information or experiences regarding a food product. Thus, labels and accurate descriptions in the consumer's native language facilitate easier purchasing or selection of food.

Guzzo's work (2014) examines the cultural translatability found in the names of food items. Translators need to recognize that food names, functioning as proper nouns, may not translate effectively into another language and cultural context. Ghafarian, M., Kafipour, R., and Soori, A. (2016) emphasize the role of translation as a connector between different languages and cultures. This function can be elaborated through the two translation strategies presented: the strategy incorporating foreign elements and the strategy incorporating local elements.

## 2-2 Researchers' opinion

Numerous prior studies have illuminated the challenges associated with translating food labels. Some of these studies have highlighted the necessity of translating food labels into both English and Arabic, as the original labels aid in the selection or purchase of food. This is a vital issue that warrants consideration. Other research has focused on the role of translation, the connection between two languages and cultures, and the aspects of rhymed translation observed in food advertisements, such as proper names and translating terms that clash with the customs of Arab society, whether in a positive or negative light. However, this study lacks comprehensive research on the topic and does not tackle it directly or broadly. Experts believe that translators should be cognizant of the original message's intent and how to effectively communicate the same message in the target language. In summary, the main goal of this study is to provide guidance to researchers and translators in enhancing the translation of canned and packaged food items into Arabic. Additionally, it underscores the connection between language and culture in food marketing, as food serves as a representation of cultural identity.

## Methodology

### 3-1 Introduction

This chapter describes the use of a data collection questionnaire to obtain information about the level of understanding and translating food labels.

### 3-2 Data collection

The researchers visited supermarkets in the city of Sebha, Libya and selected some products that are found in these markets. Based on the research problems, the researchers used quantitative methods to collect data.

### 3-3 Instrument of study

To achieve the research objectives, a questionnaire was given to the participants to collect data.

### 3-4 Sample of study

After collecting and analysing the data, the researchers conducted a questionnaire on 40 translation students in the faculty of languages, Sebha University, Libya.

## Data Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

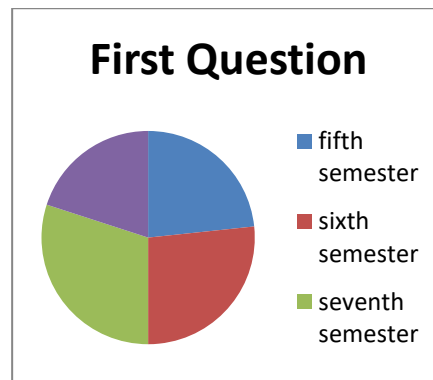
This chapter presents the analysis of the data and findings from the current study. The results of the questionnaire are outlined below.

### 4.2 Data Analysis

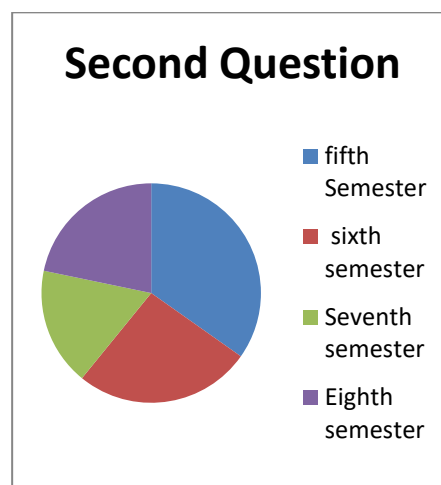
In this study, the researchers employed an analytical method to identify behavioral patterns within the data. This technique is effective for analysing data and drawing conclusions that can be applied to address similar behaviors. to identify behavioral patterns within the data. This technique is effective for analysing data and drawing conclusions that can be applied to address similar behaviours.

Questions	If you say "Yes", write the reason	If you say "NO", write the reason
Is it easy or difficult for you to translate English language written on products?	--	--
Do you commonly read both languages written on products?	--	--
Do you use any translation tools / application in translating products?	--	--
Do you prefer only one language written on products?	--	--
Is the use of two languages on product improves your language?	--	--
Is there any terms that have the same name used on both languages (English & Arabic) ?	--	--

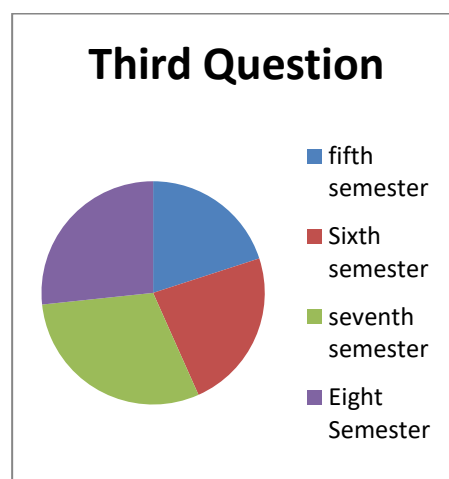
The analyses presented in Table 4.1 indicated that 70% of the 5th-semester students had translated the first question. It was noticed that they had some difficulties in translating food products. In contrast, the sixth-semester sample showed that 80% of them had no prior experience in translating food products. Ninety per cent of the seventh-semester students have not translated food products before. Additionally, 60% of eighth-semester students experience difficulties with translation products.



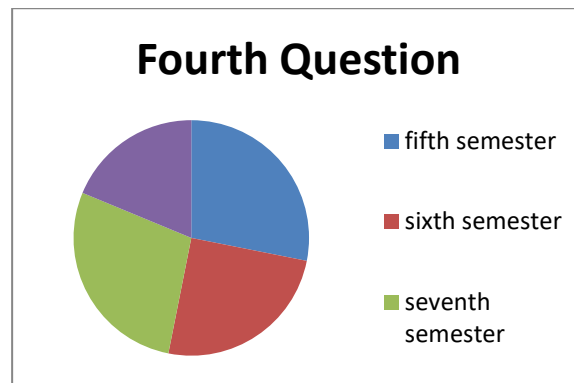
The analysis presented in the second question reveals that 80% of fifth-semester students have read product labels in both languages. Additionally, 70% of sixth-semester students are familiar with the written language on products. In the seventh semester, 40% of students have read the language on products in both languages, while 50% of eighth-semester students share a similar understanding.



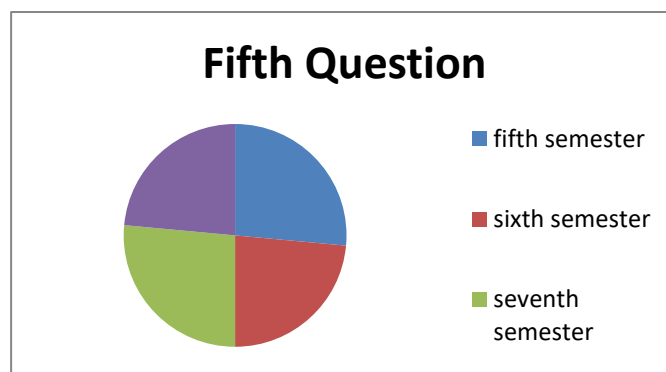
The analysis of the **third question** reveals that 60% of the **fifth semester** students used one of the translation tools in translating written products. Additionally, 70% of the **sixth semester** directly involved the application of translation. 90% of the **seventh-semester** students depended on the translation application more than any other tool, and 80% of the eighth-semester students also depended on it.



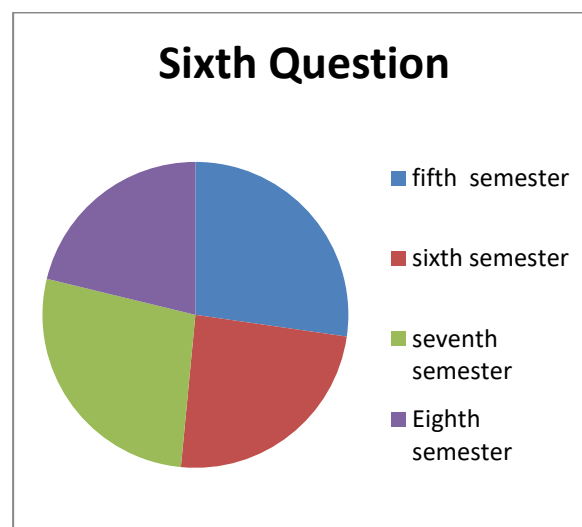
The analysis of the **fourth question** indicated that 90% of the fifth semester preferred to have one language written on the products. In comparison, 80% of the sixth agreed also on the idea that it is preferable to have one language written on the products rather than two languages. 90% of the seventh semester preferred to have only one language, whereas 60% of the eighth semester disagreed with this idea.



The analysis of the **fifth question** reveals that 90% of fifth-semester students noticed that having two languages written on products may assist in improving their language skills. Additionally, 80% of the sixth graders agreed that the English language used on the products may improve their second language and enrich their knowledge. Ninety per cent of **seventh-semester** students agree that using two languages on products can help them develop their English. Eighty per cent of the eighth-semester students shared this idea with their classmates.



The analysis of the **Sixth question** showed that 90% of **the fifth semester** observed that the two languages can share some terms which have the same names in both languages. Additionally, 80% of the sixth-semester students noted that the Arabic language has some products that use terms with the same meanings as those in English. Ninety per cent of the **seventh-semester** students have also agreed that the two languages, Arabic and English, contain some terms with the same names. Seventy per cent of the eighth-semester students shared this idea with their colleagues.



## Conclusion

In summary, food is not merely a natural resource necessary for human survival; it also conveys information regarding the language and culture of a nation or group. Translators must be aware of and sensitive to the details embedded in food items. The translation process undertaken by translators may have both advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes. Precise translation enhances communication across different languages and cultures.

Effective communication occurs when a translator successfully conveys the understanding of both the content and taste of food through the translation of labels and menus. Poor or inaccurate translations can lead to consumer confusion and may create food safety concerns or result in food products failing to reach their intended market. As such, translators should be mindful of both linguistic and cultural factors.

This study aims to explore the translation of food labels and packaging into Arabic. The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the linguistic dimensions of branding while considering cultural values. Furthermore, a focus on nutritional information offers insights into consumer preferences and simplifies the examination of label formats displayed prominently on packaging.

The research team's findings indicated that translation challenges stemmed from inappropriate equivalences. A limitation of this research is the insufficient resources available that address this form of translation. Certain words emerge either because of the translator's lack of knowledge or due to intentional manipulation aimed at enticing consumers towards a specific product. Ultimately, the analysis highlights that a major translation concern in food labels involves particular foreign cultural ideas and metaphors. Therefore, a strong grasp of cultural and linguistic contexts is necessary to address translation challenges and to create target texts that are devoid of misleading.

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notions. Suggestions are offered for future researchers and translators.