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What a Learner Translator Corpus Reveals About Errors in Students' English-to-Arabic Translations

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رصد عثرات متعلمي الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية: شواهد ودلالات من ذخيرة لغوية

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Abstract
In translation classrooms, instructors often know through intuition and/or anecdotal observation what students struggle with, but they rarely have systematic, empirical data to pinpoint why those difficulties arise. This study examines how a small English-Arabic learner translator corpus can help identify these problems and guide classroom teaching. The data was obtained from 17 fourth-semester translation students at Misurata University during the Spring 2025–2026 semester. The students translated 19 English sentences designed to probe specific linguistic trouble spots: polysemous phrasal verbs, light-verb structures, complex syntax, and the language used in a recruitment headline. The participants worked under timed exam conditions with open access to both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries. The resulting corpus contained 323 aligned translation pairs. Analysis identified 196 error instances, classified into four categories: Lexical and Contextual Mismapping (LCM), Syntactic and Structural Transfer (ST), Arabic Orthography and Mechanics (OM), and Pragmatic and Contextual Misalignment (PCM). Lexical and contextual errors were the most frequent, accounting for 42.35% of all recorded errors. Some of these errors may reflect a tendency to select dictionary meanings without considering their suitability in context. Errors in Arabic spelling and grammar accounted for 23.98%, while syntactic and structural transfer represented 22.45%. These findings point to specific areas of difficulty rather than establishing a general lack of language proficiency. They also suggest a need for more focused training in dictionary use, greater attention to differences between English and Arabic sentence structures, and additional practice in Arabic writing. The study shows how a routine classroom examination can provide useful evidence for improving translation teaching.

Keywords: learner translator corpus, Translation, error analysis, diagnostic assessment.

الملخص
كثيرًا ما يلمس أساتذة الترجمة بعض جوانب الضعف التي تعتري ترجمات طلابهم، لكن أحكامهم تستند في مجملها إلى ملاحظات عشوائية متفرقة، دون استنادٍ إلى بيانات تجريبية منظمة تكشف أسباب التعثر وتُحدّد مواطن الخلل بدقة. ومن هنا، تتخذ الدراسة من ترجمات الطلاب في اختبار صفي مادةً لبناء ذخيرة لغوية تضم الجمل الإنجليزية وما يقابلها بالعربية، ثم تعكف على تحليلها للوقوف على مواطن التعثر، واستخلاص ما يُعين على تطوير تعليم الترجمة.
استندت الدراسة إلى بيانات جُمعت من 17 طالبًا وطالبة في الفصل الدراسي الرابع بقسم الترجمة، بكلية اللغات والترجمة، بجامعة مصراتة، خلال الفصل الدراسي الربيعي من العام الجامعي 2025–2026. وقد سُمح للمشاركين بالاستعانة بالمعاجم الأحادية والثنائية اللغة، ضمن اختبار محدد الزمن، وطُلب منهم ترجمة 19 جملة إنجليزية اختيرت للكشف عن صعوبات لغوية بعينها، شملت الأفعال المركبة متعددة المعاني، والتراكيب الفعلية التي يستمد فيها الفعل دلالته من الاسم المقترن به، والبُنى النحوية المعقدة، و وطُلب منهم ترجمة 19 جملة إنجليزية اختيرت للكشف عن صعوبات لغوية بعينها، شملت الأفعال المركبة متعددة المعاني، والتراكيب الفعلية التي يستمد فيها الفعل دلالته من الاسم المقترن به، والبُنى النحوية المعقدة، والترجمة الوظيفية لعنوان إعلان توظيف. وقد قدّم جميع المشاركين موافقتهم الخطية على استخدام ترجماتهم لأغراض البحث العلمي.
نشأ عن تجميع هذه البيانات ذخيرة لغوية تضم 323 زوجًا من الجمل المتقابلة، ونَتَجَ عن تحليلها 196 خطأ ترجميًا، صُنّفت في أربع فئات رئيسة: أخطاء اختيار المقابلات المعجمية والسياقية (LCM)، وأخطاء النقل النحوي والبنيوي (ST)، والأخطاء الإملائية والكتابية في العربية (OM)، وأخطاء الملاءمة التداولية والصياغة الوظيفية (PCM).
وأظهرت النتائج أن مواطن الضعف لا تُعزى بالضرورة إلى قصور عام في الكفاية اللغوية، بل ترتبط بممارسات محددة يتَّبِعها الطلاب أثناء الترجمة. وقد شكّلت أخطاء الاختيار المعجمي النسبة الأكبر (42.35%)، وقد يُعزى بعض هذه الأخطاء إلى اختيار معانٍ معجمية دون التحقق من ملاءمتها للسياق. كما كشفت الأخطاء الإملائية والكتابية في العربية (23.98%) عن ضعف ملحوظ في إتقان بعض قواعد الإملاء والنحو في اللغة الأم، في حين عكست أخطاء المحاكاة النحوية للإنجليزية (22.45%) ميلًا واضحًا إلى استنساخ أنماط التعبير والتراكيب الإنجليزية عند الصياغة بالعربية.

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وتقدّم هذه النتائج أدلة ملموسة يمكن الاستناد إليها في مراجعة مناهج تعليم الترجمة وتطويرها، لا سيما من خلال التدريب المنهجي على الاستخدام الواعي للمعاجم، وتوظيف المقارنة بين اللغتين للحد من الترجمة الحرفية والابتعاد عن نقل التراكيب الأجنبية إلى العربية، وتنظيم ورش علاجية لتعزيز مهارات الكتابة السليمة باللغة العربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : ذخيرة لغوية لمتعلمي الترجمة، ترجمة، تحليل الأخطاء الترجمية، تقويم تشخيصي.

Introduction

Errors are a familiar part of learning to translate. Instructors encounter them regularly when marking student's work, but identifying individual mistakes is not the same as understanding the difficulties behind them. In many classrooms, errors are corrected, feedback is given, and then teaching moves on. What often receives less attention is the large picture. Do certain errors occur more frequently than others? Are some linguistic structures particularly difficult for students? And what can these recurring patterns tell us about their translation competence? Answering such questions requires more than classroom impressions. It calls for a systematic examination of student's translations.

Learner translator corpora have helped researchers better understand how students develop their translation skills (Alfuraih, 2020; Granger & Lefer, 2023). Large corpora are particularly valuable because they bring together translations from different learners and contexts. However, they may not always address the needs of teachers working with a particular group of students. A smaller corpus built from classroom work can serve a different purpose. It focuses on translations produced by students who have completed the same task under the same conditions. Teachers can then identify frequent errors, compare student's choices, and see which aspects of translation appear to cause the greatest difficulty.

The present study explores how a small learner translator corpus can be used to examine errors in students' English-to-Arabic translations. It focuses on the types of errors students make, how frequently they occur, and what they may reveal about areas of difficulty in translation. The study also considers how these findings might help teachers address students' needs more effectively.

Research Questions

1. How are students' translation errors distributed across lexical, structural, orthographic, and pragmatic categories?
2. Which linguistic features are associated with the most frequent translation failures?
3. What can these error patterns tell us about the areas that need greater attention in translation teaching?

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine patterns of errors in students' English-to-Arabic translations using a small learner translator corpus. It seeks to identify and classify the errors found in students' work and determine how frequently each type occurs. It also examines individual test items to find out which linguistic features are associated with recurring difficulties. By comparing students' responses to the same source texts, it considers how these findings can help instructors identify priorities for teaching and provide more focused feedback.

Significance of the Study

The value of this study lies in its use of students' actual classroom work. Instead of treating errors as isolated mistakes, it examines them as part of a larger pattern. This gives instructors a clearer picture of the difficulties their students face and helps them plan lessons that address those difficulties. The study also shows how a small classroom corpus can be a useful resource for translation teaching without requiring large amounts of data or specialized resources.

Literature Review

Learner Translation Errors: Previous Research and Corpus-Based Classroom Approaches

Over the past three decades, corpus-based methods have changed the way translation is studied. Researchers have increasingly moved away from prescriptive debated towards the analysis of authentic texts (Baker, 1993; Bowker & Pearson, 2002). In translator education, learner translator corpora (LTC) have become useful tools for examining how students construct meaning across languages. Research in the Arab world has also highlighted the development and pedagogical value of Arabic-centered learner corpora (Alfuraih, 2020; Alfuraih & El-Jasser, 2024). Yet, compiling and annotating a large corpus can be difficult for an individual lecturer, especially when preparing materials for immediate classroom use. A classroom micro-corpus offers a practical alternative. It applies corpus-based methods on a smaller scale. This allows instructors to examine students' translations in detail and identify recurring problems. It also provides a direct picture of students' translation competence.

Previous studies have also investigated student translation errors using approaches other than corpus-based methods. For example, Alsunousi (2025) examined errors in English-to-Arabic translations produced by undergraduate students at Misurata University. The study identified several recurring problems, including

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grammatical errors, lexical omissions, and difficulties with sentence structure and register. The present research builds on this work but takes a different approach. It uses a small, systematically aligned learner translator corpus to examine both the types and frequency of students' errors. The errors are classified into four categories and analyzed across individual translation tasks. This approach makes it possible to identify the errors students make most often and explore the language related problems that may cause them. The study also explores how these findings can help teachers identify areas that need more attention in translation classes.

Beyond Right and Wrong: Understanding Translation Errors

In language teaching, errors were once seen as bad habits that learners needed to overcome. Corder (1967) challenged this view. He argued that errors reveal how learners understand and develop their knowledge of a language. They provide insight into the learning process and the development of interlanguage. In translation studies, Pym (1992) made a further distinction between binary and non-binary errors. Binary errors are relatively easy to identify. They include grammatical mistakes, incorrect verb tenses, and spelling errors. In such cases, there is usually a clear distinction between right and wrong. Non-binary errors are different. They are particularly common in translation. A student's translation may be grammatically correct and well-structured but still sound awkward or unnatural. It may also fail to convey the appropriate style or meaning in a particular context. This means that evaluating student translations requires more than checking grammatical accuracy. Translation instructors also need to consider whether the translation sound natural and conveys the intended meaning. An effective assessment rubric should therefore account for both grammatical correctness and the appropriate use of language in context.

Method

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

The data for this study was collected during the Spring semester of the 2025–2026 academic year at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University. The participants were 17 undergraduate students enrolled in their fourth semester (Year 2) in the Department of Translation. At this stage, students are still developing their translation skills. Before taking the current Translation Practice Course, they had completed Translation Principles, which introduced them to the basic concepts of translation. They have also studied English through courses covering the four skills. In addition, their previous coursework included Arabic writing and Arabic syntax and morphology I, II, and III. At the time of data collection, their formal training in translating was limited to the introductory course in Translation Principles and their current Translation Practice course.

The translation task was part of a regular classroom examination. Students completed it under timed and supervised conditions. They were allowed to use printed bilingual (English-Arabic) and monolingual dictionaries during the examination. This is important when interpreting the results. Since students could consult dictionaries, their lexical errors cannot be explained simply by a lack of vocabulary knowledge. Some errors may also reflect difficulties in understanding dictionary entries and choosing the most appropriate meanings in context.

All 17 participants gave written consent for their examination scripts to be used in the research. Their identities were kept confidential. Each script was assigned a number, from Script -1 to Script 17, to ensure anonymity.

Design of the Translation Test

The test consisted of 19 English source items divided into three sections. The items were selected to examine languages features that may cause difficulties when translating from English into Arabic. These included changes in word meaning depending on context, sentence structures, phrasal verbs, and idiomatic expressions.

Section 1: Phrasal Verbs and Verbs with Multiple Meanings (Items 01-13). This section focused on common English verbs whose meanings change depending on the words or particles used with them. It included five expressions with break (Break out, break sad news, break up, break away from and break into), five with get (get rich, get round, get at, get over, and get on one's nerves, and three with give up, give one's life to, and give rise to).

Section 2: Sentence Structures and Idiomatic Expressions (Items 14–18). This section examined different sentence patterns and expressions that may be challenging to translate into Arabic. The examples included the impersonal instructions (e.g., "It takes patience…"), and a construction that includes the phrasal verb *carry out* (e.g., Repairs take time to carry out"), It also included common expressions with give (light verbs), such as ("gave her son a big hug", "gave a shout of delight").

Section 3: Job Advertisement Headings (Item 19). This section focused on a job advertisement. Although the full advertisement was provided, students were asked to translate only its headings: "Required". The item was intended to examine their ability to understand and translate a brief heading within its original context.

The 17 students each translated all 19 items, producing 323 student translations. This made it easy to examine individual responses and identify recurring patterns in students' translation errors.

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Error Categories and Classification Criteria

Each student translation was classified using four error categories. These categories helped distinguish between problems in understanding the English source text, difficulties in transferring meaning into Arabic, and problems with the use of Arabic itself.

Lexical and Contextual Mismapping (LCM). This category covered cases in which students chose wrong meaning of a word or expression. It also included unnatural word choices, mistranslations of key nouns and verbs, and difficulties with idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs. For instance, a student might interpret *master* as an academic degree rather than a verb meaning to gain skill or knowledge.

Syntactic and Structural Transfer (ST). This category covered errors that occurred when students followed English sentence patterns too closely in their Arabic translations. Typical cases involved word-for-word translations of light-verb phrases (e.g., "أعطت عناقاً" for "gave a hug"), inserting unnecessary subject pronouns ("هو أعطى"), or imposing unnatural word order.

Arabic Orthography and Mechanics (OM). This category covered errors in Modern Standard Arabic writing rules. These include omitted or misplaced hamzas (همزتا الوصل والقطع), confusion between tāʾ marbūṭa (ـة) and hāʾ (ـه), incorrect case endings on defective verbs, and errors in subject-verb agreement.

Pragmatic and Contextual Misinterpretation (PCM). This category covered cases in which students failed to use the surrounding context to understand the intended meaning of an expression. For instance, some students translated the job advertisement heading "Required" as an imperative command ("اطلب") or as an administrative memo ("أمر تكليف") instead of the standard "مطلوب", or "وظيفة شاغرة".

To check the reliability of the classification, a second coding was carried out on a stratified sample of 65 sentence pairs, representing 20% of the dataset. The result showed a high level of agreement between the two coding sets, with a Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.864 (Cohen, 1960).

Results

The analysis of the 323 student translations revealed 196 errors. Some sentences contained more than one type of error. For example, a student might choose an inappropriate verb and simultaneously misplace an Arabic hamza. Table 1 summarizes the overall distribution across the four categories.

Table 1: *Distribution of Coded Error Instances in the Learner Translator Corpus*

Category	Code	n	Share (%)	Mean per script
Lexical and Contextual Mismapping	LCM	83	42.35	4.88
Arabic Orthography and Mechanics	OM	47	23.98	2.76
Syntactic and Structural Transfer	ST	44	22.45	2.59
Pragmatic and Contextual Misalignment	PCM	22	11.22	1.29
Total error instances	—	196	100.00	11.53

Note. N = 17 student scripts. Total sentence pairs = 323. Multiple errors may occur within a single sentence pair.

The figures in Table 1 show several clear patterns. Lexical and Contextual Mismapping was the largest category, accounting for 42.35%. Arabic Orthography came second, with 23.98%. This was slightly higher than Syntactic and Structural Transfer, which accounted for 22.45%. Pragmatic and Contextual Misinterpretation represented 11.22%. However, these errors were mainly found in particular items, rather than being spread evenly across all 19 items. Table 2 provides a closer look at all 19 items, and highlights the areas where students had the greatest difficulty.

Table 2: *Item-Level Error Diagnostics and Illustrative Student Renderings*

Item	Source prompt	Error Category	Examples of Problematic Students' Rendering	Target benchmark
01	The Second World War broke out in 1939.	---	---	اندلعت الحرب العالمية الثانية سنة 1939.
02	The man broke the sad news to his wife.	LCM / Colloc.	كسر قلب زوجته (Wrong translation); أذاع / نشر / أعطى الأخبار المحزنة لزوجته (awkward translation for context).	أخبر الرجل زوجته الخبر المحزن.
03	The meeting will break up at 6 o'clock.	LCM / Temporal	سوف يبدأ (antonym error); المقابلة (interview for meeting); ساينتهي (spelling).	سينفضّ / سينتهي الاجتماع في تمام الساعة السادسة
04	The prisoner broke away from the soldiers during the transport.	LCM / OM	المحامين (lawyers for soldiers); وسيلة النقل (vehicle for transport); الجنديين (Wrong Plural).	فرّ السجين من قبضة الجنود أثناء نقله.

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Item	Source prompt	Error Category	Examples of Problematic Students' Rendering	Target benchmark
05	No man has a right to break into his neighbor's house.	LCM / Semantic	لاLiteral gender restriction: يحق لأي رجل; عاقل.(unwarranted addition)	لا يحق لأحد / لأي إنسان أن يقتحم بيت جاره
06	Our neighbor got rich after his investment succeeded.	ST / Concord	أصبح جارنا غني (accusative الجيران أصبحو (plural failure; for singular & spelling error)	أصبح جارنا غنيا\ثريا بعد نجاح استثماره.
07	This child is very skillful; she knows how to get round him.	LCM / Syntax	تتحاشى (avoid); تجد (find); يصاحب (befriend); تقنع أبيها (case failure).	هذه الطفلة بارعة للغاية؛ فهي تجيد استمالة والدها\ تعرف كيف تقنع أباها.
08	How can we get at the truth in such a complicated case?	LCM / Syntax	كم تستطيعو تخمين الصح (syntactic breakdown); الحالات.(unwarranted plural)	كيف لنا أن نصل إلى الحقيقة في قضية معقدة كهذه؟
09	He got over his weakness in chemistry after extra study.	LCM / OM	أصبح ضعيفاً (semantic مخاوفه (fears); دراسة reversal); عديدة.(concord)	تغلب على ضعفه في مادة الكيمياء بعد أن كثف دراسته.
10	She gets on my nerves by the way she talks constantly.	ST / LCM	تكون على أعصابي (direct تزعج أعصابي; توتير calque); (spelling/colloquial).	إنها تستفزني / تثير أعصابي بحديثها المتواصل.
11	The doctor advised him to give up smoking immediately.	OM / Spelling	نصحهو (waw for damma); بلإقلاع / بي اقلاع (severe mechanical errors).	نصحه الطبيب بالإقلاع عن التدخين حالا.
12	She gave her life to the study of art and linquistics.	LCM / ST	هي تلقت (voice reversal); ضحت حياتها.(omission)	كرّست / نذرت / وهبت حياتها لدراسة الفن واللسانيات
13	What gave rise to this false rumor in the department?	LCM / OM	من أعطى (wrong literal translation); الأشعة (hamza misplacement)	ما الذي أثار هذه الشائعة الكاذبة في القسم؟
14	It takes patience to master the art of translation.	LCM / Dict.	نيل شهادة الماجستير (dictionary noun/verb confusion); نفذ صبري (distortion).	يتطلب إتقان فن الترجمة صبرا.
15	How many people can your new car take?	LCM / ST	«تأخذ سيارتك» (calqued verb); «شراء سيارة» (wrong translation)	لكم شخص تتسع سيارتك الجديدة؟
16	Repairs take time to carry out.	LCM / ST	اتصليح يأخذ وقت الى نقله للخارج (spelling & syntactic errors); لينفذ.(letter confusion)	تنفيذ الإصلاحات يستغرق وقتا.
17	She gave her son a big hug.	ST / Calque	أعطت ابنها عناقاً كبيراً (Syntactic calquing) حضن كبير، حظن (Spelling & Syntactic errors)	احتضنت ابنها بحرارة.
18	When the boy saw the sea, he gave a shout delight.	ST / Concord	«هو اعطى (pronoun calque شاهدا& hamza omission); البحر (spurious alif); متى الأولاد يرون(wrong dictionary choice for ("when")	صاحا الصبي فرحًا عندما رأى البحر.
19	Required (Job notice heading)	PCM	أمر تكليف / اطلب (Non-conventional forms)	مطلوب \ وظيفة شاغرة

Note. Representative error types and benchmark solutions for the 19 examination prompts across 17 undergraduate scripts.

Discussion

Dictionary Use and Contextual Word Selection

One obvious finding from the study is that access to dictionaries does not necessarily help students choose the correct words. Students also need to know how to use dictionary entries effectively. The Fourth-semester students often relied on the first meaning they found. They did not always check whether it fitted the grammar of

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the sentence or conveyed the intended meaning in context. This suggests that dictionary use alone is not enough. Students also need guidance in selecting the most appropriate meanings for their translations.

A clear example can be seen in Item 14 (“It takes patience to master the art of translation”.) Here *master* is used as a verb in the infinitive form. However, several students interpreted it as a noun referring to a postgraduate academic degree:

Script 11: “لقد طال الصبر لنيل شهادة الماجستير في علم فن الترجمة”

Script 14: “يستغرق صبرا للوصول إلى الماجستير في الأدب والترجمة”

Instead of translating 'mastering the art of translation' as “إتقان فن الترجمة”, several students confused the word *mastering* with obtaining a Master's degree. A similar problem appeared in Item 16 “Repairs take time to carry out”. In Script 12, the student translated *carry out* literally as “اتصليح يأخذ وقت الى نقله للخارج (Repairs take time to carry outside). This suggests that the student interpreted “carry” and “out” as separate words with physical meanings rather than recognizing “carry out” as a phrasal verb meaning to perform or complete a task (إنجاز / تنفيذ).

Taken together, these examples suggest that the students’ difficulties were not limited to unfamiliar vocabulary. They also struggle to understand words in context, recognize phrasal verbs, and identify the grammatical functions of words. In some cases, they selected meanings that did not fit the sentence or the intended message. This shows that knowing how to use a dictionary involves more than simply looking up words. Students also need to consider how words are used in context before choosing their translation.

Syntactic Calquing and English Analytical Habits

Syntactic transfer accounted for 22.45% of all coded errors. It was particularly noticeable when students translated English light-verb constructions. In English, actions are often expressed by combining a general verb with a noun (such as 'give a hug', 'take a look', or 'give a shout'). Arabic, on the other hand, usually expresses actions more directly. It often uses a single verb, such as (عانق /نظر /صاححضن أو) or a cognate accusative (المفعول المطلق).

A clear example appears in Item 17 ('She gave her son a big hug'). More than half the students (10 out of 17 students) followed the English structure quite closely in their Arabic translations:

Script 01: “أعطت ابنها عناقاً…” / Script 05: “هي أعطت إبنها عناقاً كبيراً” / Script 10: “أعطت ابنها حضناً كبيراً”. Although these translations are understandable, they do not sound natural in Arabic. The students seem to have followed the English wording rather than expressing the meaning in a way that is more common in Arabic. A more natural translation would be: *احتضنت ابنها بحرارة*. Similarly, in Item 18 ('...he gave a shout of delight'), some students frequently inserted redundant subject pronouns and literal verbs (e.g., Script 05: هو أعطى صيحة سرور شديد). This translation follows the English quite closely. A more natural Arabic expression would be (صاح الولد فرحا). These examples show that some students relied too heavily on English sentence patterns. They did not always adjust their translations to the way Arabic naturally expresses the same idea.

Difficulties with Arabic Grammar and Writing Mechanics

One important finding from this study is that students’ difficulties were not limited to understanding English. A considerable number of errors (23.98%) involved basic grammatical and writing problems in Modern Standard Arabic. This suggests that some students also struggle with aspects of their own language. Translation programs may sometimes assume that students already have a good command of Arabic. However, the findings challenge this assumption.

Confusion about Hamza rules appeared in several students’ scripts. Some students wrote “الأشاعة” instead of “الإشاعة” (Item 13), “لأتقان” instead of “لإتقان” (Item 14). This is a case of Hamza displacement. An example of Hamza omission is (ياخذ) instead of (يأخذ). Other more serious errors included “بلإقلاع” (Script 04) and “بي اقلاع” (Script 13) in Item 11.

The student also made other spelling and orthographic errors in Arabic. Some omitted the letter (Lam) ل from the definite article (ال). Others used *اتصلح* instead of *التصليح*. Another example involved confusing Fatha and Damma, short vowel marks, with Alif and Waw, respectively. One student wrote *شاهدا* instead of *شاهد* to express “… he saw”. Another one wrote *نصحهو* instead of *نصحه* to express “the doctor advised him”. These are fundamental spelling errors that point to a significant weakness in the students’ command of basic Arabic writing conventions.

In Item 06 ('Our neighbor got rich...'), four students wrote “أصبح جارنا غني”, instead of (أصبح جارنا غنياً). They did not use the accusative case for the predicate of the defective verb (أصبح). This shows a difficulty with applying basic Arabic grammatical rules. Another type of error involved mistaking one letter for another, In Item 17, students in Scripts 13 and 17 spelled “حضن” as “حظن”.

Genre Blindness in Functional Texts

Item 19 ('Required') revealed one of the clearest difficulties in the students’ translations. The item was a single job advertisement heading. In Arabic, acceptable translations can be مطلوب or وظيفة شاغرة. But only two students used such expressions, even though the full advertisement was provided. The other 16 students (94.1%) provided different translations. Their answers varied in accuracy and appropriateness.

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Some translations were functionally acceptable, even if they were not the closed equivalents. For instance, (مكان شاغر) and (فرصة عمل) conveyed the general ideas of an available job. Other students used expressions that did not fit the intended meaning, such as: "اطلب" (Imperative verb: Request! / Order!), "أمر تكليف" (Official task assignment), and "المتطلبات" (Prerequisites).

These suggests that the students need to pay more attention to the function of a text when choosing their translations.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have important implications for translation teaching, curriculum development, and assessment in undergraduate programs.

Teaching Students to Use Dictionaries Effectively

One key finding is that students do not necessarily know how to use dictionaries effectively just because they have access to them. Many treat bilingual dictionaries as sources of ready-made answers and simply select the first meaning they find, sometimes without checking the word's part of speech.

Translation programs should therefore introduce dictionary-use training early in the curriculum. Students need to learn how to analyze words before looking them up. This includes identifying parts of speech, grammatical relationships, and figurative or phrasal expressions. These skills can help them choose more appropriate translations instead of simply accepting the first meaning provided by a dictionary.

Linking Contrastive Analysis to Practical Translation Skills

The findings of this study highlight the need to give more attention to structural differences between English and Arabic in translation teaching. Structural transfer accounted for 22.45% of the errors. This suggests that students need more practice in dealing with differences in how the two languages structure sentences.

When comparing and contrasting English and Arabic, courses should include practical translation tasks. such tasks should focus on areas where the two languages differ in their constructions. Students should also learn to check whether the structures they produce sound natural in the target language. This would help them produce more natural translations and reduce structural interference from English.

Giving More Attention to Arabic Writing Skills

Translation programs often place greater emphasis on improving students' English proficiency. They may assume that students already have good writing skills in their native language. However, the findings of this study suggest that this assumption need to be reconsidered. In the present sample, nearly a quarter of the errors identified involved basic problems with Arabic spelling and sentence structure.

Accordingly, students need support in developing their Arabic writing skills. Translation programs should include proofreading and editing skills in relevant courses. Although students already study Arabic syntax, morphology and writing, these subjects are often taught separately from English. Students should have opportunities to apply this knowledge when translating from English into Arabic. They should also learn to review and edit their translations to identify problems with spelling, grammar, and sentence structure. This way, students would produce more accurate and natural Arabic translations.

The 94.1% error rate in translating the recruitment notice heading points to the need to give more attention to context in translation teaching. Grammar alone is not enough when translating texts. The purpose of the text and its intended audience also matter. When students translate isolated phrases, they may focus on individual words rather than the intended meaning. Translation tasks should include real-life examples that explain the purpose, audience, and context of each text. This pre-translation step helps students move from word-for-word translation and produce more natural and suitable translations.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study examines students' translation choices in detail, but some limitations are worth mentioning. The data comes from just one class of 17 students at Misurata University. This made it possible to examine each translation closely. Nonetheless, the findings may not reflect the experiences of students in other Libyan universities or even in this very university. The test also used separated sentences rather than complete texts. This was deliberate to identify specific language problems. With that said, students had no wider context to guide their translation choices.

Further research could involve students from different classes and universities. It could also follow the same students over several semesters. This would show whether focused practice in dictionary skills and avoiding literal calques leads to real progress over time.

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Conclusion

This study collected and analyzed a 323-sentence learner micro-corpus from fourth-semester translation department students at Misurata University. The findings show how student exam papers can reveal common translation problems. Instead of relying on general impressions, the analysis identifies specific areas of difficulty. These include vocabulary errors caused by uncritical dictionary use (42.35%), problems with Arabic spelling and grammar (23.98%), and the direct transfer of English sentence structures into Arabic (22.45%).

The findings also show that good translation between English and Arabic involves more than knowing the words and grammar rules. Students must know how to use dictionaries correctly. They also have to learn how to express English ideas in natural Arabic. Clear and accurate writing in their mother tongue is equally significant.

Looking closely at students' exam translations can help teachers understand where learners struggle most. It also gives them a clearer idea of what needs attention in the classroom. In this way, regular translation exercises can become useful tools for identifying problems and planning teaching activities that address them.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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