



**Investigating the Impact of Pronominal Errors on the Sudanese University
Translation Students' Performance (English – Arabic)**

Mohamed El-Bashir Mohamed Ahmed - University of the Holy Quran and Islamic
Sciences, Omdurman, Sudan.

ABSTRACT

It is necessary for university translation students to know the pronominal systems of English and Arabic languages when they translate texts using these languages. Lack of such knowledge has a bad impact in their performance. They are expected to make errors if they do not master these two systems. This paper aimed at investigating the impact of pronominal errors on Sudanese university translation students' performance using English and Arabic languages. Two tools were used to achieve the purpose of the paper. A questionnaire was designed to be filled by a number of Sudanese university translation teachers in Khartoum. The targeted students were tested and many personal pronoun errors in their work were found, described and analyzed. In the course of this paper, some reviews of the related concern from around the world were brought closer to make use of them and to support the hypothesis set in the paper. It was found that some differences between English and Arabic pronominal systems cause difficulties that cause such students to make errors. At the end of the paper, the researcher presented some recommendations as an attempt to overcome such errors.

Key words: personal pronouns, masculine, feminine, number

المستخلص:

من الضروري بالنسبة لطلاب الترجمة معرفة أنظمة الضمائر في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية عندما يترجمون نصوصا باستخدام هاتين اللغتين. ففي انعدام مثل هذه المعرفة أو نقصانها الأثر السالب على أدائهم. إذ من المتوقع اقترافهم الأخطاء حال عدم إتقانهم لهذين النظامين. هدفت هذه الورقة لتقصي أثر الأخطاء الضميرية على أداء طلاب الترجمة في الجامعات السودانية باستخدام اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية. وتم استخدام وسيلتين للوصول لهدف الورقة. فقد صُممت استبانة لملئها بواسطة عدد من أساتذة الترجمة في الجامعات السودانية بالخرطوم. كما أن الطلاب المستهدفين قد تم اختبارهم والعديد من أخطاء الضمائر الشخصية تم اكتشافها وتوصيفها وتحليلها. وبين ثنايا هذه الورقة، استعرضت بعض الدراسات العالمية ذات الصلة للاستفادة منها عن قرب ولتدعيم ما تم اقتراضه ههنا. وقد وُجد أن هناك بعض الاختلافات بين أنظمة الضمائر في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية تسبب صعوبات تقود مثل هؤلاء الطلاب لارتكاب الأخطاء. ثم في نهاية الورقة، قدم الباحث بعض التوصيات في محاولة للتغلب على مثل هذه الأخطاء.

INTRODUCTION

In an interview edited by Sarru, B. A. (2001: 163) Norman Shapiro said: "I see translation as an attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass." This pane of glass which was expressed by

Norman Shapiro can be scratched by so many things. Many problems may affect translation badly. One of these problems is misunderstanding or difficulties in the pronominal system of a language.



A pronominal system in a language is related to the pronouns that are used instead of nouns or specify them. To translate these pronouns from one systems in languages are widely studied particularly when they are related with translation. Actually, these studies tend to say that there are real problems when dealing with these systems. According to Livia, A. (2003: 157) "When translating from a language in which there are many linguistic gender markers into a language which has fewer, either gender information is lost..."

In grammatical terms, first person, second person, and third person refer to personal pronouns. According to Zandvoort, R. W. (1965: 128) "

English has three classes of personal pronouns denoting respectively, the person(s) speaking, 'first person', the person(s) spoken to 'second person', other person(s) or thing(s) 'third person'"

The Arabic language is rich with personal pronouns (in Arabic called dhamayir, singular of dhameer). Unlike English – which has only 7 different forms of subject pronouns – the Arabic language has 12 different pronouns. That is because the Arabic language differentiates between male and female pronouns and is also more precise about the number. These pronouns are of two types: independent (free or unattached – in Arabic called munfasil) pronouns and dependent (bound – in Arabic called muttasil) pronouns. The independent pronouns are used in the nominative case. Table 1 below shows some of these pronouns. university translation students face when translating Arabic texts into

English and vice versa and whether they can be overcome or not.

Objectives of the study This study aims at:

1. **Identifying** the common pronominal difficulties that the students of the National Ribat University face when translating Arabic sentences into English and vice versa.

2. **Highlighting** some differences between English and Arabic pronominal systems.

3. **Finding** suitable solutions for these difficulties in order to help university translation students, lecturers, syllabus makers and all people who are interested in translation to overcome such difficulties.

4. Literature Review: Pronominal

of study. It aims to investigate the impact of pronominal errors on the Sudanese university translation students' performance using English and Arabic languages. The researcher hypothesized that these students face some difficulties that cause them to make such errors. So the paper identifies at the common pronominal difficulties that the Sudanese important to understand them; what they refer to and what number they specify. Otherwise, there will be critical errors in this translation. This paper intends to shed light these pronouns and errors they cause when they are misunderstood. It will mainly focus on the personal pronouns (e.g. I, You, They, etc.).

Significance of the Study

The present paper is significant as it touches this area language into another, it is highly.

Table 1
Some Arabic pronouns

Arabic Pronouns	Meaning in English
<i>Anaa</i>	I [am] (masculine and feminine)
<i>Anta</i>	You [are] (masculine singular)
<i>Anti</i>	You [are] (feminine singular)
<i>Antuma</i>	You [are] (masculine and feminine dual)
<i>Antum</i>	You [are] (masculine plural)
<i>Antun</i>	You [are] (feminine plural)
<i>Hum</i>	They [are] (masculine plural)
<i>Hun</i>	They [are] (feminine plural)
<i>Huma</i>	They [are] (masculine and feminine dual)

However, this gender distinction in English according to Lyons, J. (1969: 283-284)

"plays a relatively minor part in the grammar of English by comparison with its role in many other languages."

The same point of view was strengthened by Quirk, R. and Greenbaum, S. (1973) saying that it is not much in English. Therefore, this thing makes pronouns ambiguous. This gender ambiguity in pronouns according to Dawood, M. A. and Mohamed. M. J. (2008: 2)

"may cause translators some difficulties when they translate from source languages in which gender is differently grammaticalized compared with the target language."

Dawood, M. A. and Mohamed. M. J. (2008) supported this point saying that

it is difficult for translation students to determine the gender of the speaker without having some "clues". They cited some of these clues that can be helpful in this regard such as:

Expressions almost exclusively used by one sex not the other, like razor and lipstick.¹

1. **Biological** qualities exclusively associated with one sex not the other like pregnancy and face-shaving.

2. **The** availability of proper nouns like Linda and Tom.

Al-Jarf, R. S. (2010) carried out a study attempting to examine the nature of transfer of independent subject pronouns from English into Arabic. Her results revealed students' inability to recognize the differences in usage between English and Arabic independent subject pronouns.



Abdellah, A. S. (2007) touched a very specific area in this regard. His study in the tendency of mistranslating the plural inanimate Arabic pronoun with the singular inanimate English pronoun showed that a large number of students make this error.

He enumerated some sources of such errors. For example, Students tend to use a holistic approach, rather than an analytic one; they focus on the overall meaning. Students seem to lack basic information about the functions of the Arabic pronominal system. Academic training programmes in the department of English lack training in contrastive linguistics. Moreover, he also suggested remedial procedures such as:

- 1· Basic refreshing courses on Arabic grammar should accompany the translation courses given in departments of English.
- 2· Contrastive grammar should be integrated in the linguistics courses given to students at different levels.
- 3· Analytical training can help in overcoming this problem; by training students to trace the antecedent of each pronoun and to examine its number, gender and case.

It is worth mentioning that in Arabic, personal pronouns are often added to verbs (i.e. implied). For example, *Ummuha taskunu fi alkhartoum*. which means: Her mother she lives in Khartoum (although we do not find such a structure in English). Salim, J. A. (2013) conducted a contrastive study of English-Arabic morphology. It found that English personal pronouns are not as complicated as in Arabic. They are rather simple with regard to number, gender and case distinction. In Arabic, there is a full set of distinction for number, gender, and case.

Arabic has two types of personal pronouns, namely:

dependent and independent. Arabic has twelve forms of independent pronouns, distinguished in number as: singular, dual, and plural.

Whereas, English has eight personal pronouns distinguished in number as: singular and plural.

It has no gender distinction between second person singular and plural, whereas, this gender distinction is found in Arabic.

Thus, almost all the previous intellectual works coincide with the researcher's hypothesis that Sudanese university translation students face some grammatical difficulties that cause them to make such pronominal errors when translating Arabic texts into English and vice versa.

6. Materials and Methods In this paper, the researcher adopted the descriptive and analytical methods to achieve the hypothesis claimed in it. The researcher compared and contrasted between English and Arabic pronominal systems showing to what extent the Sudanese university translation students face difficulties when using these two languages. Two tools were used to collect data.

A diagnostic test was conducted for collecting such data. This test which was carried out in 2017 contained some questions. These questions included sentences in both English and Arabic languages to be translated by the targeted students into these two languages. The researcher also used a questionnaire for the same purpose.

30 university translation teachers in Khartoum participated filling in this questionnaire. Likert – 5 point scale: (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree) was adopted in it.



The study sample of the paper was the third year translation students (with total of 113 students) at the National Ribat University in Khartoum, Sudan. The whole number was taken to carry out the study. 25 subjects were dropped because they were absent for bad weather conditions and some other reasons. Another female student had a sudden illness and left the test room. Thus the final number of the sample was 87 students. The 87 students sat for a translation test of two different versions: English-Arabic translation test (for 41 students) and Arabic-English translation test (for 46 students). They were all Sudanese who spoke Arabic as a native language. These students were already divided in their semi-final year into two majoring groups:

1. English – Arabic translation students who were going to be specialized in English – Arabic translation.

2. Arabic - English translation students who were going to be specialized in Arabic – English translation. The researcher intended to display and discuss the results of collected data to prove whether the hypothesis is true or not. The Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) was the software programme that was used for this purpose.

6. Results and Discussion

Each group of the targeted students was given a separate test containing paragraphs and individual sentences to be translated into the targeted languages. The following tables show the required results. The first four tables (2-5) show the students' results in the tests containing all types of errors (personal pronouns were included). However, the remaining tables focus on the pronominal errors in particular.

Table 2

Distribution of frequencies and percentages of the English –Arabic translation students' results

Grade	Frequencies	Percentage
Pass	31	75.6%
Failure	10	24.4%
Total	41	100%

As shown in table (2) above, the frequencies and percentages of pass grade are higher than that of failure.

Table 3

Demonstrating the one sample t. test among the students' marks in the English-Arabic translation test

Students' marks %	Mean	STD	T.test value	DF	Sig.
	56.634	11.0922	32.69	40	0.00

The results in table (3) show that there is a significant difference between the mean of students' marks and the T.test value at the significant value (0.00) which is less than 0.05.

Table 4

Distribution of frequencies and percentages of the Arabic-English translation students' results

Grade	Frequencies	Percentage
Pass	12	26.8%
Failure	34	73.2%
Total	46	100%

As shown in table (4), which illustrates the frequencies and percentages of pass and failure grades, the failure grade in Arabic-English translation test is higher than the pass.

Table 5

Demonstrating the one sample t. test among the students' marks in the Arabic-English translation test

Students' marks %	Mean	STD	T.test value	DF	Sig.
	43.4130	14.6539	20.093	45	0.00

The results in table (5) show that there is a significant difference between the mean of students' marks in the Arabic-English translation test and the T.test value at the significant value (0.00) which is less than 0.05. It was noticed that the mean of marks

in the English-Arabic translation test was greater than the mean of the Arabic-English translation test. It means that English-Arabic translation students were better than Arabic-English translation ones.

Table 6

Distribution of frequencies and percentages of number of pronominal errors in English and Arabic translation tests

Personal Pronouns	Frequencies	Percentages
English-Arabic translation test	121	29.23%
Arabic- English translation test	293	70.77%
Total	414	100%

Results in table 6 above show the frequencies and percentages of the personal pronouns both in English and Arabic. These frequencies and percentages appear at high rates in English-Arabic translation test. It means that students were not able to translate personal pronouns properly from English into Arabic which proves gender and number ambiguity of these pronouns in English. As for the questionnaire, it also contained several grammatical statements. Only personal pronouns were highlighted in this respect. The following two tables show the results

Table 7

Some non-finite English personal pronouns (e.g. *you*) cause difficulties when translated into Arabic.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	16%
Agree	17	56.7%
Neutral	4	13.3%
Disagree	4	13.3%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Total	30	100.0%

Results in table 7 above show the respondents' points of view. They indicate high percentages in "agree and strongly agree" options representing "(56.7%) and (16.7%)"

respectively with the total (73.4%). So these high percentages reflect a positive trend for the statement and all answers are agreeable. Therefore, this statement was successfully achieved.

Table 8

Richness of Arabic personal pronouns makes meaning more specified than that of English.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	16	53.3%
Agree	10	33.3%
Neutral	2	6.7%
Disagree	2	6.7%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Total	30	100.0%

Results in table 8 above show the respondents' points of view. They indicate high percentages in "Strongly agree and agree" options representing "(53.3%) and (33.3%)" respectively with the total (86.6%). So these

percentages also reflect a positive trend for the statement and all answers are agreeable. Therefore, this statement was also successfully achieved.

7. Findings

The present study found out that:

1. Sudanese university translation students make pronominal errors in translation from English into Arabic and vice versa due to some pronominal difficulties in these two languages.

2. It was noticed that English pronominal system is more confusing than that of Arabic.

3. Such pronominal errors affect negatively in English-Arabic translation.

4. Misunderstanding of some areas in these languages' pronominal systems overshadows the translation performance.

5. Having no real exposure to both English and Arabic pronominal systems and practice of translation leads to poor performance.



6. Designing translation syllabuses for Sudanese university translation students without considering their real needs causes fatal results.

7. Demotivated Sudanese university translation students will always have nothing to present.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings, the followings recommendations are suggested.

Sudanese university translation students badly need to be helped mastering English and Arabic personal pronouns as an attempt to avoid facing difficulties when they translate them from and into these two languages.

1. **Syllabus** designers, coordinating with Sudanese university translation and language teachers, should consider the real needs of the Sudanese university translation students.

2. **Intensive** exposure to contrastive grammar between English and Arabic will be of great value.

Encouraging both creative university translation teachers and students is a must.

1. **Sudanese** university translation and language teachers should frequently be trained and provided with updated

techniques of teaching translation and languages.

4. **Sudanese** university translation students should be motivated and made aware of what they study.

5. **Refreshing** courses in basic pronominal areas of both English and Arabic languages have to be done.

Summary of the Paper

The present paper aimed at investigating the impact of pronominal errors on the Sudanese university translation students' performance using English and Arabic languages. It showed to what extent pronominal systems of these two languages are different and how such differences affect Sudanese university translation students' performance. Two tools were used to achieve the purpose of the paper. Data obtained from these tools showed that Sudanese university translation students made a lot of personal pronoun errors on which the paper focused. It was found that English pronominal system is more confusing than that of Arabic. This confusion had a bad impact on translation of the targeted students. Some other findings were also considered. However, many suggestions were given to help avoid making such errors.



References

1. Abdullah, A. S. (2007). English Majors' Errors in Translating Arabic Endophora: Analysis and Remedy. Ain Shams University. Ain Shams. Egypt.
2. Al-Jarf, R. S. (2010). Interlingual Pronoun Errors in English-Arabic Translation. King Saud University. Riyadh. Saudi Arabia.
3. Dawood, M. A. and Mohamed. M. J. (2008). The Ambiguity of Gender in English - Arabic Translation. ADAB AL-RAFIDAYN Vol. (52) University of Mousl. Mousl. Iraq.
4. Hornby, A. S. (1995). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Oxford University Press. Oxford. UK.
5. Livia, A. (2003). "One Man in Two is a Woman": Linguistic Approaches to Gender in Literary Texts. In J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff (Ed.) The Handbook of Language and Gender. (pp. 142-158). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. At
6. <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/corpus/UCCTS2010Proceedings/papers/Al-jarf.pdf>. 6.9.2017.
7. Lyons, J. (1969). An Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
8. Quirk, R., and Greenbaum, S. (1973). A University Grammar of English. Longman. England.
9. Salim, J. A. (2013). A Contrastive Study of English-Arabic Noun Morphology. International Journal of English Linguistics; Vol. 3, No. 3; 2013 Canadian Center of Science and Education. Online Published: May 17, 2013. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v3n3p122>.
10. Sarru, B. A. (2001). International Conference on the Challenges of Translation and Interpretation in the Third Millennium. Notre Dame University, Louaize. Zouk Mosbeh. Lebanon.
11. Zandvoort, R. W. (1965). A Handbook of English Grammar. Longman. England.