

## Analysis of Syntactic Errors on the Sudanese University Translation Students' Performance (English – Arabic)

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### ABSTRACT

Syntactic errors cause bad impacts when translating texts from one language into another. That is because syntax is the part of a language which is related to the structure of a meaningful sentence and the meaning of this sentence will change when it is wrongly built. This paper attempted to analyze such errors on the Sudanese university translation students' performance using English and Arabic languages. The paper aimed at identifying the common syntactic difficulties that the targeted students face when translating Arabic sentences into English and vice versa. It also shed light on some differences between English and Arabic syntactic systems. The descriptive and analytical methods were used to achieve the objectives of this paper. The targeted students were tested and many types of syntactic errors in their work were found, described and analyzed. It was found out that Sudanese university translation students face syntactic difficulties in translation from English into Arabic and vice versa. The nature of these two languages caused difficulties that lead to such errors. It was recommended that Sudanese university translation students need to be helped mastering English and Arabic syntax in order to perform a good translation, free from the errors mentioned above.

**Key words** :sentence, words, meaningful

### المستخلص

تسبب الأخطاء النحوية آثاراً سلبية عند ترجمة النصوص من لغة لأخرى. حاولت هذه الورقة تحليل مثل هذه الأخطاء على أداء طلاب الترجمة في الجامعات السودانية باستخدام اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية. ذلك لأن النحو هو ذلك الجزء من اللغة الذي يتعلق ببناء الجملة المفيدة ذات المعنى وأن معنى هذه الجملة سيتغير إذا ما اختل البناء. هدفت الورقة للتعرف على الصعوبات النحوية الشائعة التي يواجهها الطلاب المستهدفون عند ترجمة جمل من اللغة العربية إلى الإنجليزية والعكس. كما سلطت الضوء على بعض الاختلافات بين الأنظمة النحوية الإنجليزية والعربية. وقد استخدمت الطرق الوصفية والتحليلية لتحقيق أهداف هذه الورقة. فقد تم اختبار الطلاب المستهدفين في هذه الورقة والعديد من أنواع الأخطاء النحوية في أعمالهم تم اكتشافها وتوصيفها وتحليلها. ومما توصلت إليه الورقة أن طلاب الترجمة في الجامعات السودانية يواجهون صعوبات نحوية في الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية والعكس. وأن طبيعة هاتين اللغتين تسببت في صعوبات أدت بدورها لمثل هذه الأخطاء. وأوصت الورقة أن طلاب الترجمة في الجامعات السودانية بحاجة للمساعدة لإتقان علم النحو في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية حتى يؤديوا ترجمة جيدة خالية من الأخطاء سالفة الذكر.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** جملة، كلمات، ذات معنى.

### INTRODUCTION

Syntax according to Chomsky, N. (2002: 11)  
"is the study of the principles and processes

by which sentences are constructed in  
particular languages",



**Syntax** is one of two parts in a language grammar. It is related to the sentence structure in a language. If such a sentence is wrongly built, it will wrongly be translated and many errors will happen. Identifying the syntactic differences between these two languages helps Sudanese university translation students to avoid making such errors.

**This** paper is significant because it intends to investigate the syntactic errors made by the Sudanese university translation students when they are asked to translate texts from Arabic into English and vice versa. The researchers hypothesized that these students face some syntactic difficulties that drive them to make such errors. So the paper identifies at the common syntactic difficulties that the Sudanese translation students face when translating Arabic sentences into English and vice versa. To have a good performance in translation, they need to know such and how they can deal with. The paper is expected to be useful to all people who are interested in translation. **Literature Review**

A lot of valuable works are frequently seen in many areas of translation particularly that are related with syntax both in English and Arabic. For example, Bell, R. T. (1991) focused on five points that a translator should master. One of these points is the syntactic knowledge. However, El-Zeini (1994) identified six main problems in translating from Arabic to English and vice versa. One of them is syntax.

**Khalifa**, E. M. (2015) carried out a study investigating the translation problems of English and Arabic languages' structure made by Saudi students of English. Students' test, teachers' questionnaire, and experts' interview were used for data

collection. The study concluded that poor knowledge about English structure beside the difference between the two language families that both languages belong to, cause problems. He touched a very important point when he talked about the different origins of English and Arabic. The problem is that foreign language learners must never think in their mother tongue when learning another language. Each one has its own system that ought to be considered. Al-Jarf R.'s study (2000) is much related to the present paper because it tries to understand learners' transfer competence, the difficulties they face in first or second language translation. Al-Jarf's study focuses on interferences in the system of grammatical agreement.

**Al-Shehab**, M. (2013) conducted a study investigating the syntactic difficulties which encounter translation students at Irbid National University in Jordan from Arabic into English. A validated test of 20 Arabic sentences was given to a random sample of 20 students to be translated into English. What is good in his study is that he used transliteration. However, he followed one direction of translation in his study, (Arabic – English translation). English and Arabic belong to two different families. While the English language belongs to the Germanic family in the west, the Arabic language goes back to Semitic family in the east. They are very far from one another. Therefore, there are syntactic differences between them. Some of the major differences are the order and type of sentences. The sentence is the basic meaningful component for understanding the whole language. Thus, to understand a sentence according to Chomsky, N. (1968: 28)

“it is necessary (though not, of course, sufficient) to reconstruct its representation on each level,” The concept of “sentence” (in Arabic called *Al-jumla*) according to Abdullateef, M. (2003) was never shown by Seebawaih who never used the term as tackled by the scholars who came after him. This does not necessarily mean that he did not perceive the meaning of a “sentence” or “speech”. However, it seems that Seebawaih and the preceding scholars were interested in exemplification more than definition. The term “speech” was mentioned by Seebawaih implying the meaningful “sentence”. The following paragraphs explain the sentence structure both in English and Arabic in order to overcome facing syntactic difficulties while students translate texts from Arabic into English and vice versa. In order to have

a good translation, they must know the components of a sentence in these two languages, their functions and how they are ordered correctly to have a full meaning. A sentence, in English, is a group of words, usually containing a verb, that expresses a complete thought in the form of a statement, question, instruction, or exclamation and starts with a capital letter when written. Unlike Arabic, English grammar has only nominal sentences. In other words, an English sentence cannot grammatically be correct unless it contains a main verb. Moreover, it can have many components. However, not all of these components are required at a time. They may be added to enrich such a sentence. The followings are the components and their functions in a sentence.

Component	Function	Examples
Adjective (adj.)	Describes nouns or pronouns	beautiful,
Adverb (adv.)	Describes the verb	beautifully, fast
Article (art.)	Modifies a noun	a (indefinite article), the (definite article)
Conjunction (conj.)	Connects words, phrases, clauses, or sentences	and, as, because, but
Interjection (interj.)	Expresses a strong sense of emotion or feeling	hey, oh
Noun (n.)	Names people or things	John, beauty
Preposition (prep.)	Relates one thing to another	in, before
Pronoun (pro.)	Used instead of a noun to avoid repetition	I, they
Verb (v.)	Expresses an action or a state	eat, is

The following sentence shows these components:

Oh, there was a frightening film in the bus, but I watched it fearlessly.

Word	Component
<i>Oh</i>	Interj.
<i>there</i>	Adv.
<i>was</i>	V.
<i>a</i>	Art.

<i>frightening</i>	V.
<i>Film</i>	N.
<i>in</i>	Prep.
<i>The</i>	Art
<i>Bus</i>	N.
<i>but</i>	Conj.
<i>I</i>	Pron.
<i>watched</i>	V.
<i>It</i>	Pron.
<i>fearlessly</i>	Adv.

Usually, the sentence is of four structures; simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.

A simple sentence contains only one independent clause. An independent clause is a group of words (with a subject and a verb) that expresses a complete thought. For example, *Ahmed kicked the ball.* is an independent clause. It contains a noun (*Ahmed*) which is called the subject of the sentence, a verb (*kicked*), a definite article (the), the noun (ball) which stands for the object of the sentence and it expresses a complete thought.

A **compound sentence** contains at least two independent clauses. These clauses are joined by a coordinating conjunction or a semicolon. A coordinating conjunction is a word that glues words, phrases, or clauses together. For example, in “*Ahmed kicked the ball, and it hit Ali.*” *Ahmed kicked the ball* is an independent clause. *It hit Ali* is also an independent clause. And is a coordinating conjunction joining the two independent clauses. *Ahmed* kicked the ball, and it hit *Ali* is a compound sentence.

A **complex sentence** contains a subordinate clause and an independent clause. A subordinate clause is a group of words that

has a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. For example, *Ali cried because the ball hit him.* *Ali cried* is an independent clause. Because the ball hit him is a dependent adverb clause modifying the verb cried. *Ali* cried because the ball hit him is a complex sentence.

A **compound-complex** sentence is a sort of like a mixture of a compound sentence and a complex sentence. It contains at least two independent clauses and at least one subordinate clause. For example, *Ali* cried because the ball hit him, and *Ahmed* apologized immediately.

*Ali* cried and *Ahmed* apologized immediately are both independent clauses. They are being joined by the conjunction and. Because the ball hit him is a dependent adverb clause modifying the verb cried. The whole sentence is a compound-complex sentence. **As in English**, misunderstanding of an Arabic sentence may also cause such grammatical difficulties in translation. However, an Arabic sentence is of two types: a nominal sentence and a verbal sentence.

**The nominal sentence** (in Arabic called Al-*jumlatul Ismiyya*) begins with a noun or – sometimes – a pronoun.



The Nominal sentence has two parts: a subject (in Arabic called *Mubtada*) and a predicate (in Arabic called *Khabar*). The subject of the nominal sentence is a noun or a pronoun, while the predicate can be a noun, adjective, preposition and noun, or verb. Each of the subject */Mubtada/* and the predicate */Khabar/* are original in the nominative case, i.e. the last letter takes a single */dhamma/* if definite (with the definite article */al/*) and takes two */dhammas/* if indefinite (without the definite article */al/*). */Mubtada/* is the subject of the sentence, i.e. it represents a person or thing which is described in a sentence and the

*/Khabar/* is the description or the explanation of the */Mubtada'/*. For example, when it is said: Muhammad is standing then "Muhammad" is the subject and "is standing" describes his condition and is the predicate. When the nominal sentence is about being, i.e. if the verb of the sentence is 'to be' in English, this verb is not given in Arabic. Instead, it is implied and understood from the context, the thing that can confuse English language students who are used to have a verb in each sentence. The followings examples show where the verb to be is not given in the Arabic sentence. The subject is underlined:

Example	Meaning in English
<u>Ahmedu</u> waladun muhathab.	Ahmed is a polite boy.
Waaliduhu <u>Sudani</u> .	His father is Sudanese.
<u>Hum</u> min al-Sudan.	They are from the Sudan.
<u>Ahmedu</u> yal'abu kura talgadam.	Ahmed plays football.

On the other hand, a verbal sentence (in Arabic called *Aljumlatul Fe3liyya*) mostly begins with a verb (in Arabic called *fe'3l*). It has at least a verb and a subject (in Arabic called *fa'3el*). The subject can be indicated by the conjugation of the verb, and not written separately. Some people prefer

verbal sentences to nominal sentences whenever a verb needs to be used in the sentence. However, this is not necessarily the case, and the choice of which word to use at the beginning of a sentence depends on what you want the focus of the sentence to be. Here are some examples:

Example	Meaning in English
<u>Adrusu</u> .	I study.
<u>Darastu</u> .	I studied.
<u>Yadrusu akhy</u> fe al-jami3a.	Studies my brother at university.
<u>Akhy yadrusu</u> fe al-jami3a.	My brother studies at university.

So we have seen some syntactic differences between both English and Arabic languages. If they are not thoroughly studied by those

who want to translate texts in these two languages, there will be some problems in their product.

### 3. Materials and Methods

-In this paper, the researchers adopted the descriptive and analytical methods to achieve the hypothesis claimed in it. A diagnostic test was used for collecting data. This test that was carried out in April 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 study sample of the paper was the third year translation students at the National Ribat University in Khartoum – Sudan. These students were already divided into two majoring groups:

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

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

**The** researchers 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.

**4. Results and Discussion** Each group of the sample students was given a separate test containing paragraphs and individual sentences to be translated into the targeted language. The following tables show the final results:

**Table 1**

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%

The results in table (1) above show the frequencies and percentages of pass and failure grades. They show that the failure grade in the test is higher than the pass.

**Table 2**

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 (2) 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 3**

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%

The results in table (3) show the frequencies and percentages of pass and failure grades. They show that the failure grade in the test is higher than the pass.

**Table 4**

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 (4) 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. After having a look at the result of two groups of students, 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 which means that English-Arabic translation students were better than Arabic-English translation ones.

Syntactic errors can be classified into various categories according to tables 5 and 6 below.

**Table 5**

Distribution of frequencies and percentages of number of errors in English-Arabic translation test

Category	Number of errors	Percentage
Articles	153	82.26%
Connectives	13	6.99%
Prepositions	11	5.91%
Word order	9	4.84%
Total	186	100%

**Table 6**

Distribution of frequencies and percentages of number of errors in Arabic- English translation test

Category	Number of errors	Percentage
Adjectives	69	9.77%
Articles	59	8.35%
Capitalization	265	37.54%
Conjunction	49	6.94%
Nominal sentence	46	6.52%
Objects	56	7.93%
Prepositions	138	19.55%
Word order	24	3.4%
Total	706	100%

According to tables 5 and 6 above, Sudanese university translation students make various types of syntactic errors when they translate

texts from English into Arabic and vice versa. Moreover, such Students are weaker in Arabic syntax more than the English one.



**5. Findings** It was found that Sudanese university translation students face syntactic difficulties in translation from English into Arabic and vice versa. Such difficulties cause them to make errors. Different origins of these two languages have a bad impact on translation. Moreover, having no real exposure to both languages and practice of translation leads to poor performance.

**6. Recommendations** It is recommended that Sudanese university translation students need to be made aware of the nature of both English and Arabic languages. They must intensively be exposed to both languages of translation in order to have real practice. Finally, Sudanese university translation and language teachers must frequently be trained and provided with updated techniques of teaching languages and translation. Finally, this paper aimed at investigating the impact of syntactic errors on the Sudanese university translation students' performance using English and Arabic languages. It gave some syntactic differences between these two languages supported by some examples in both languages. The sample students of the paper were given a translation test to prove the hypothesis set in it. After analyzing the results, many syntactic errors of various types were found. Such errors were due to some reasons. The researchers had some suggestions that can help overcoming such errors. .

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