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Problems and Approaches to Translation with Special Reference to Arabic

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Abstract. This paper addresses the issue of translation in terms of the following: Translation and interpretation, translation and EFL, the skills of the professional translators, the difficulties of translation from and into Arabic, translation and Arabization and translators and the job market. Suggestions are offered for the teaching of translation. The paper presents the reader with practical examples of translation problems facing Arabic-speaking translator trainees at the college level. The role of using translation in EFL classrooms is discussed and the merits and demerits of this approach in EFL teaching are explained.

Introduction

Nowadays there is a tremendous interest in translation; special programs and courses have been established at several Middle Eastern universities, and in Great Britain where MA degrees are offered in translation at some universities, e.g., Bath, Manchester, Edinburgh, Heriot- Watt, for example. Skilled translators are needed in many countries specially oil-rich Arab countries.

Translation is a channel through which ideas and cultures pass [1]. Arab heritage benefited considerably from materials translated from Greek, Persian, and Indian works, as other nations benefited from the Arabic works they translated into their languages. The translation activities reached the zenith during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'moun, who established a special house for translation, the famous Dar-Al-Hikma, in Baghdad where proficient philosophical materials were translated into Arabic.

In more recent times translation as Convey stresses, assumed a renewed importance in international affairs such as the Peace Treaty of Versailles, 1918, and the

establishment of the United Nations at San Francisco, USA, in 1945 where four official languages were recognized. These languages were: English, French, Spanish and Russian. Arabic was made an official language of the United Nations in the late seventies.

In this paper, an attempt is made at defining translation, distinguishing between translation and interpretation, and determining skills needed by translators. The major portion of this paper, however, will address the nature of the problems and types of difficulties encountered by translators. Subsequent sections will deal with translation and the computer, translation in the EFL classroom, special training in translation, and career opportunities in translation. The paper concludes by giving some implications.

What is Translation?

Translation is a profession besides being an art. Newmark [2] defines translation as "the attempt to produce approximate equivalence or respectable synonymy between two chunks of different languages on various levels, of which the two main ones are thought and linguistic form." He adds that translation is partly an exercise in the art of writing as well as a field of comparative applied linguistics. Newmark further says that the word, not the sentence, is the essential element of translation.

Al-Darawish [3] indicates that translation is "interpreting speech into another tongue." Translation according to him involves three things:

i. interpreting the foreign meaning by an Arabic meaning;

ii. interpreting the foreign sentence by an Arabic sentence;

iii. transmitting science and arts from any language into Arabic.

Transmitting art or science from a foreign language into Arabic follows two methods. The first method involves mental interpretation of words in the foreign text so that the translator reaches what he wants in Arabic. The second method is that the translator conceptualizes in his mind the foreign sentence then he expresses it in a corresponding Arabic sentence whether the number of words is equal in both languages or not. This method is better and easier than the first method.

What is translatable includes meaning particles, foreign verbs, all meaning nominals, and *asmaa' al-'awaat*. As for proper nouns, they are Arabized as they are. Translation is also one of the important means for Arabizing sciences.

Newmark [2] indicates that there are four persons involved in the process of

translation: the author, the first reader, the translatoı, and the second reader. Of all these four persons, the last is all important.

Newmark also says that till about 1945, translation simply meant literary translation, since no one thought any other kind of translation worth discussing.

There are two types of translation according to Newmark. "Publication translation" by professional translators in the translators' guild, and "information translation" which could equally well be a paraphrase or a summary, and, therefore, not a translation at all.

Hatim and Mason [1] define translation as a useful test case for examining the whole issue of the role of language in social life. They emphasize the role of translation as a communicative process which takes place within a social context.

Difference between a Translator and an Interpreter

Convey makes an important distinction between a translator and an interpreter. An interpreter works on a speech in TV or a speech delivered orally whereas the translator works on a written text.

In international conferences, interpreters are always needed. There are two types of interpretation: Simultaneous interpretation and consecutive interpretation. In simultaneous interpretation, the interpreter usually sits in a booth and interprets at the same time that the speaker delivers his speech. The interpretation is conveyed by means of electronic facilities to the listeners who hear the interpretation only. In consecutive interpretation on the other hand, the interpreter sits in the same room, listens and takes notes summarizing what he hears in the source language; then he interprets into the target language. Consecutive interpretation also needs memory training.

There are certain essential characteristics of a good interpreter. These include:

1. Displaying no emotions.
2. Readiness of speech and being witty.
3. Good memory.
4. Knowledge of at least three languages: one native language and two foreign languages.
5. Good command of active and passive vocabulary.

6. Wide knowledge of current political, economic, and scientific affairs.

7. Being quick on the output and possessing split-second decision-making.

8. A lot of practice.

9. A great deal of concentration.

A translator usually works on a printed text. He has certain advantages over the interpreter. The translator can use dictionaries and other reference materials. Also he has a lot of time to do the translation so he can work at a leisurely pace unlike the interpreter. This gives him the opportunity to polish and improve his style.

Skills Needed by Translators

The essential task of translators is to transfer written information from one language to another. In doing so, they must distort that information as little as possible. The translator must not only convey the same message as the original text, but also convey the emotional content and writing style of the original. The personal writing style of translators should not be apparent in the translation.

Perhaps the most obvious skill that translators need is the ability to read and understand a second language.

With very few exceptions, translators translate materials *from* the source language into their native tongue. To translate information into English, translators' ability to write English must be well above that of the average native English speaker. Translators must be capable of expressing, in English, ideas that someone else has formulated in the source language. That is a far more difficult task than expressing one's own ideas. Whereas most foreign language students are taught to "think in the language," translators must be able to receive ideas in one language and express them in another.

In addition to knowing a second language, translators need to know as much as possible about as many things as possible. The demand for translators in any given field is rarely great enough to provide full-time work. Therefore, translators must be capable of doing competent translations in several subject areas. They should have one or two broad areas of knowledge (the equivalent of an undergraduate major or minor) and should be familiar with the technical jargon of many fields. Equally important is the ability to recognize what they do not yet know and to know where to find it. They also need a thorough knowledge of the "tools of the trade" (dictionaries, encyclopedias, reference books, catalogs, bibliographies), where to find them, and how to use them. The ability to do this kind of research is vital.

Problems and Difficulties of Translation

Translation, the Italians say, is treachery. To a large extent, they are right. Few translations succeed in conveying the meaning of the original with both accuracy and beauty. Certainly, the translation of Arabic literature into English provides plenty of examples of pitfalls.

The two languages, and the two cultures, are far apart. To bring them closer together through the arduous act of translation requires a series of finely-judged compromises. Some Arabs even go far as to argue that the effort is not justified by the results and suggest that it would be best not undertaken. Others ask how one culture's literature can be shared by those who do not know the language.

In this section, several problems and difficulties encountered by translators will be discussed in some detail. Some of these problems are general while others are more specific.

Al-Darawish [3] discusses the following general difficulties in any translation:

- No two languages are exactly identical in their phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic features.
- Languages differ with respect to sentence arrangement or syntax.
- The translator is forced to front or move backwards certain items.
- It is rather impossible for a translator to completely master two languages. However, this problem can be resolved through specialized scientific committees.

The following general problems crop up frequently in translating any two languages:

1. Word order is not the same in any two languages. For example, English word order in statements is : Subject -Verb -Object, while in Arabic it is Verb-Subject- Object.

2. One common pitfall for translators is to be literal. As the Scottish critic W P Ker once put it, in another context, "instead of translating like free men, they construed word for word, like the illiterate of all ages." Translators should avoid literal expressions that make the Arabic expression weak. Example: The ship was sunk by a submarine.

3. Closely related to the point above is that translators should translate literally except in idioms in which case they should avoid translating into an unsuitable idiom.

4. Tense should be kept the same in both languages.

5. Signs of punctuation and paragraphing should be used even if the source text is unpunctuated.

6. Some types of poetry are more accessible to translation than others. One Arab literary critic argues that classical poetry presents the translator with a more complex task than freer modern verse, and poets whose language draws heavily on literary and cultural allusion present particular difficulties.

Al-Chalabi [4] focuses on linguistic problems facing English-Arabic translators. He says that a serious problem that has had a considerable impact on modern Arabic terminology and bilingual lexicography, is the controversy between the influential language purists and the innovators. The former group believes that new terms must be derived from classical Arabic linguistic patterns or by semantic extension of older forms. On the other hand, the latter group, under the increasing influence of Western civilization, accepts the numerous borrowed words in modern Arabic today and advocates free borrowing from these two languages in order to enable Arabic to cope with the problems of ever-increasing numbers of scientific and technical terms.

Lexical confusion in Arabic has been attributed to interlingual and intralingual factors stem from the problem of diglossia Ferguson [5], the existence of various socio-economic and regional dialects in addition to literary Arabic, and the richness of vocabulary in Arabic which often leads to the use of several synonyms to express a single concept. These problems are further complicated by interlingual factors. Both English and French are the source languages of the majority of borrowed terms in modern Arabic, sometimes leading to confusion. For example, both 'nitrogen' and 'azote' have been adopted. Lack of standardization within the source language itself has led, for instance, to the translation of both American and British terms 'electronic' tube' and electronic valve' into Arabic.

Newmark [2] discusses several specific problems in translation in general. A very common problem is that a certain word has different shades of meaning in languages. Eastman [6] gives an example of the word *light*_which can be used as a noun, an adjective, and a verb in English. Each one of these English words *light* corresponds to a different Russian word. The translator has to be prepared for every possible meaning. A simple sentence: "The ball hit me," is ambiguous and has many different meanings. The number of possible meanings or interpretations is almost indefinite.

Al-Darawish [3] notes that luckily for those whose field is science, translating scientific materials is the easiest type of translation because the meanings of scientific terms are usually restricted.

In countless texts, authors refer to an object or process by more than one term in order to avoid overemphasis or monotony, or often out of an unreasonable fear of repetition. Newmark [13] gives as an example the fact that "victor at Jena" and "loser at Waterloo" both refer to Napoleon. The translator may have difficulty in perceiving that these two expressions refer to the same person.

In translating a compound noun, a collocation or a noun phrase consisting of two or more nouns, there is often a choice between word-for-word translation and an expression having the meaning unambiguously.

Languages express oppositions through lexical words (true/false), negative affixes (non-; -less) or lexical affixes as in German. They may have different extremes as their point of reference to show the same grading. An extreme or positive in one language may be translated by its negated antonym in the other. A double negative is usually, but not always, weaker than a positive. All put it "zero-words," such as operator verbs, when they govern verbal nouns (e.g. do a bunk). Translators usually omit "zero words."

An extra dimension is added to the difficulty of translation by the phonological factor; the writer often uses all its resources (rhythm, meter, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia) and those of connotation (metaphor, polysemy, symbolism) as well as conventional and original lexis and grammar to achieve his meaning. If the translator altogether abandons the rendering of sound effects, connotations, and unusual language and produce 'a plain prose,' he is offering a useful guide and invitation to read and study the original.

Newmark [2] indicates that certain assumptions of tone underline all utterance, and graphemic signals for modulating them (italics, inverted commas, exclamation marks, etc.) are rather inadequate. A translator has to discover these assumptions before he can deduce the meaning of a passage. The assumption of tones include use; irony; warning; complaint; threat; deceit; nonsense; exaggeration; understatement; speech with stresses not graphemically marked; ambiguity; ambivalence; technical language; code; phatic communion; fact; fiction; natural reference; artificial reference (applies particularly to medicine and plastics); degree of generality and affectivity.

Al-Darawish [3] suggests that one difficulty of translation lies in what he terms as 'the music of languages." The beauty of expressions and their music influence the writer. So he chooses a certain term because of its melody. He also argues that Arabic has a special music which makes translation from it specially difficult if we take all

rhetorical devices of Arabic into consideration.

Figurative language and metaphorical language constitute another important difficulty in translation. Figurative language includes metaphors, idioms, and cultural references. The translator has to find either the corresponding figure in the target language or a matching explanation giving the tenor of the figure of speech. Thus a Hebrew equivalent of "white as snow" is 'white as milk' or 'white as leprosy;' a 'tenor' or 'information' equivalent is 'pure white." The more subtle the metaphor, the more remote the translation will be from any kind of literalness. Metaphorically, any "grammatical" sentence (like abstract art) can be made into sense. Thus Chomsky's notorious "colorless green ideas sleep furiously" might mean "Weak, half-baked ideas will not be quiescent for long, and may later have a shattering effect," say in a fanatic's mind.

Of course, a translator's life would be a great deal easier if people used words and sentences in "ordinary language." Nevertheless, he thrives on unraveling esoteric language, and his ability to do so may perhaps be counted as the hall-mark of his trade.

A translator has to bear in mind that the more commonly a word is used in a single sense, the more imprecise it becomes in denotation. G K. Zipf in his book *The Psychobiology of Language* (1935) noted that the more frequently a word is used, the shorter it is likely to become, through the removal of a compound, acronym, substitution. The more frequently it is used, the more senses it acquires (e.g. "jack").

Newmark [2] indicates that it is more important for a translator to produce a well-formed lexical structure than to preserve the integrity of the source language grammatical structure. By "lexical structure" Newmark means a collocation of two or more words that have significance.

Thus, "His intelligence allows the solid man to think" (from French) is an acceptable grammatical but an unacceptable lexical structure.

Nida [7] introduces the idea of "dynamic equivalence" by which he means that the target language text must have the same effect on its readers as the original text did on its own readers. Dynamic equivalence is all-important. Formal equivalence- that is, phonological, syntactical, and lexical correspondence between source and target language texts- has no intrinsic importance whatsoever, but dynamic equivalence is not possible without the maximum amount of formal equivalence.

The governing factor in the source language text is the writer's personal use of language (his dialect) rather than the equating of a well-established collocation in the source with one in the target language.

Paraphrase or explanation is a translator's pisaller (last resort), to be used when he has no alternative. His primary job is to use a term as it is used by the reader "in the trade" of the text, not to replace semantic elements by encyclopedia definitions and descriptions, however appropriate.

The less ambiguous the lexis and the syntax, the less necessary is a knowledge of the external situation, always provided that the idiom is "standard" and local variants can be safely ignored. Conversely, the better the translator knows about the situation, the more he can ignore ambiguity of language, provided, again, he is "at home" in the variety of language he is using.

Translation and the Computer

In the mid 1950s, many linguists became interested in using machines for the objective analysis of language as accumulated speech. The general field in which computers are used is known as computational linguistics. Machine translation works on the principle that a dictionary or a list of corresponding morphemes in another language could be matched to those of the first language using a program that could add, substitute, delete, and rearrange morphemes. Figure 1 below illustrates the branches of computational linguistics.

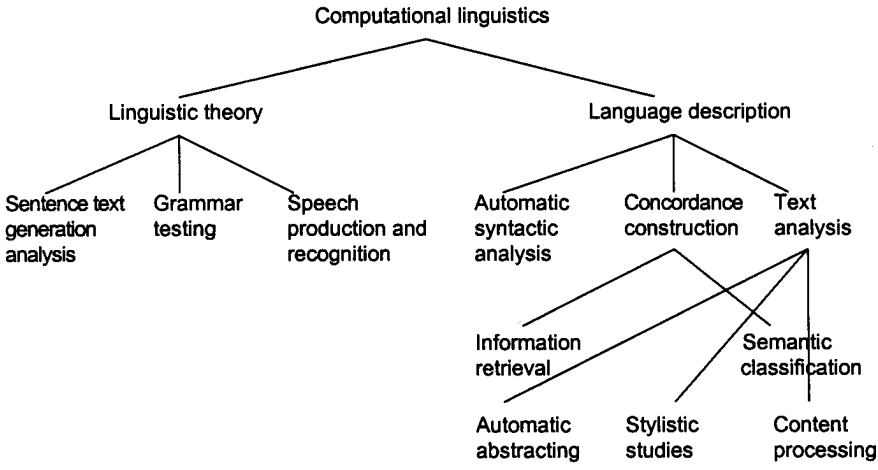

Fig. 1. Branches of computational linguistics. (adapted from Eastman).

In general machine translation involves three phrases: Analysis of the input sentence, conversion of one source to another target, and decoding of the converted code to the output sentence.

There were a number of problems with machine translation:

1. The analyzed parts did not **jibe** with the synthesized whole.
2. Some forms are found in one language but not in another language.
3. The grammatical value of inflected words is a problem.
4. There are words with a number of meanings.

Linguists involved in executing translations from one language to another with machines realize that they must keep abreast not only of developments in linguistic analytical methods but of the idea that linguistic theory will lead to an integration of theory and method.

The results of early morpheme- to -morpheme translations were relatively unsuccessful. Until linguistic theory and method can account for and analyze syntax and semantics, machine translation will be equally limited. However, computers are being used by linguists to dissolve semantic operations. Computers can do rough translations from a source to a target language.

More recently, there have been more advances in the use of computers in translation. Under this title: "Translation Letting Computers Do It," *Newsweek* [8] reports that scientists have long predicted that computers would one day help speed up the arduous task of translating text and now that time has come [19]. Systems designed follow one of two basic approaches. The "direct" method uses rules of syntax and grammar to translate one language into another, while the "interlingual" approach employs an internal intermediate language as a bridge between the 'source" and "target" languages.

Still difficulties remain. Few programs can yet resolve the ambiguities in such sentences as 'ship sinks today." Is it a newspaper headline or an order to send out a shipment of sinks? Editors still must refine the translations by interpreting some idioms and deciphering unfamiliar words. But the programs are improving, and the companies involved are optimistic. " In ten years' time," says the head of one Japanese firm, "more than 80 percent of all translation work will be done by machines." Figure 2 illustrates the principles of translation by computers.

Translation in the EFL Classroom

In foreign language learning, the role and use of translation have been controversial. Tushyeh indicates that translation has been fluctuating from total emphasis to almost neglect. The Grammar-Translation method, as its name implies, places an inordinate emphasis on translation. The Direct Method almost discards it. The

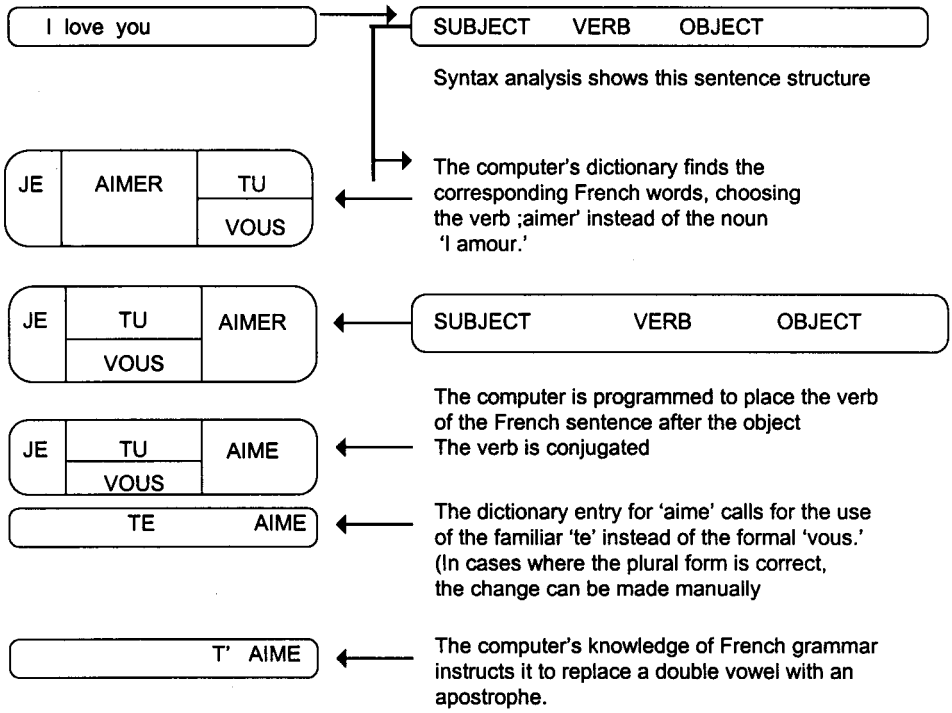

Fig. 2. English into French: How a machine does it.

Audio-Lingual method is inclined to use translation in advanced stages. Finally, the Cognitive-Code method uses translation, where necessary as an aid for grasping the meaning and gaining conscious control of the language.

With the advent of the communicative approach to language teaching in recent years [9-12], translation in the EFL classroom came to be viewed with a new light. Levenston [13] says that however "communicative" we strive to be in our teaching, many of us were trained in the heyday of 'audioling-ualism," and remain suspicious of translation and its place- or places- in the EFL classroom. But blanket condemnation of "(grammar) - translation" is no longer appropriate; what we need to do is to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the *different* classroom functions of translation in either direction.

1) to provide mother-tongue equivalents for newly-encountered lexical items (L2 → L1);

2) to improve the stimulus for oral pattern drills (L2 →L1);

3) to practise grammatical structures in written exercises (L1 → L2);

4) to test listening comprehension (L2 → L1);

5) to test reading comprehension (L2 → L1);

6) to practise speaking by role play in situation involving interpreting (L2 → L1, L1 → L2);

7) to enhance appreciation of literary texts (L2 → L1);

8) to train translators, i.e., as an end in itself (mainly L2 → L1).

Potentially, there is no skill to which translation may not be relevant and no level at which it could not be useful.

Special Training for Translation

There are special translator-training programs at some US and British universities. Georgetown University (Washington, DC) and the Monterey (CA) Institute of Foreign Studies offer translator- and interpreter training (T &I) programs in several languages. Stanford (CA) began a T & I program in the Department of German Studies in 1971, which it later expanded to the Department of Slavic Studies. Carnegie-Mellon in Pittsburgh (PA) has a T & I training in most European languages and Arabic, and the University of California at Santa Barbara has programs in German and French.

In Great Britain several universities such as Bath, Manchester, Edinburgh, and Heriot- Watt University offer graduate programs leading to the degree of MA in Applied Linguistics and Translation. British Council offices everywhere provide information about these programs. A more complete list of schools offering translator training all over the world is included in the standard reference by Congrat-Butlar [14].

Career Opportunities in Translation

The best opportunities for steady work and financial stability are in the field of nonliterary translation. The largest single employer of translators in the USA is the federal government. The Department of State, and the National Security Agency are among the agencies which hire foreign language majors. However, the number of translators hired is very small, and prospects for employment with the federal government are not very good.

In the Middle East, translators are handsomely paid in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states such as Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In these countries, huge

local companies such as ARAMCO and foreign companies operating there employ large numbers of translators.

The United Nations also hires translators. The U. N. translators must know two languages in addition to their native tongue. One of these three languages must be French. Starting salaries at the U. N. are higher than those in the federal government, although the difference in salaries for experienced translators is less significant.

International agencies which hire translators include the International Development Bank, the Telecommunications Satellite Organization, the Organization of American States, and the Pan-American Health Organization.

Private industries which make use of translators generally offer higher salaries than the government or international agencies. American companies which maintain a staff of at least one translator include Rockwell International, Kodak, John Deere Tractor, and Dow Chemical.

International banks, research laboratories, and chemical companies are among the industries which most frequently have staff translators. However, their translators are required to know several languages.

A most recent study of American businesses and service organizations by Inman [15] showed that most of their translation needs are met by employees whose main job is in a non-language- related area. These employees view knowledge of a second language as a valuable secondary skill. If no appropriate staff are available, they hire freelance translators as needed. Freelance translators may be hired directly by the company. The government, especially, has reduced its number of salaried translators by contracting work to translation service companies. The rates for government contract translators are often lower than experienced translators will accept.

Freelance translators are generally paid by the number of words either in the original text or the translation. Rates may vary from under $20 per one thousand words to over $100 per thousand words. Most translators hired directly by the client will be paid somewhere in the middle range. A good freelance translator can earn a good living and can also have a flexible work schedule.

Russian, German, Japanese, French and Spanish are the languages most in demand. In addition, there is a growing need for competent translators in Chinese, Arabic, and Portuguese. A translator would be wise to know one or more of the major languages as well as one of the less-commonly- taught languages.

Conclusion

Translation is an activity of increasingly vital importance in the educational, political, economic, and cultural fields of human endeavors. Translation, as this paper attempted to show, is a complex process beset by several difficulties and many problems, yet at the same time it has a wide scope with almost unlimited applications and prospects.

One fruitful approach to the problems of translation might be the collaboration of Arabs and native speakers of English. A collaboration of this sort took place in Cairo during World II between an Englishman, Herbert Howarth and an Egyptian, Ibrahim Shukrallah. They produced an anthology- *Images from the Arab World* (1944). More recently, Fawwaz Tuqan and Ian Wedde of the University of Jordan have come closer than anyone in conveying the quiet essentially Palestinian poetry of Mahmoud Darwish. Another fruitful collaboration, between Abdullah al-Udhari and George Whightman, produced *Birds Through a Ceiling of Alabaster,* stimulating translations of three Abbasid poets. A fundamental concept in translation — surely vindicated by the short, sad history of past endeavors — is that only one creative writer can translate the work of another.

The Arabic language nowadays is witnessing an international recognition and significance. Arabic is the sixth official language used at the United Nations. As William Coveny indicates, the use of a certain language as one of the official languages of the United Nations depends on the military might of the country, the number of the speakers of the language, and its financial obligations to the United Nations.

The increasing awareness of the importance of the Arabic language has led to an active movement for Arabizing university curricula at Arab universities in the Arab World. In fact, some Arab countries, like Syria, have gone a long way toward Arabizing university curricula at various colleges such as the college of medicine and the college of engineering. However, there are some obstacles that have to be dealt with in order that the Arabizing movement can succeed. First, translations of university textbooks are sometimes incomplete. This problem is related to the unavailability of specialized experts to write in their respective fields. Second, language academies in the Arab World have to unify terminologies and expressions. Finally, proficient university teachers should be relieved from teaching to devote themselves entirely to translation activities. These teachers might be more useful and productive in translation than in teaching.

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مشكلات واتجاهات الترجمة بالرجوع إلى العربية

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ملخص البحث. يستعرض الباحث عملية الترجمة من الجوانب التالية: تعريف الترجمة التحريرية والترجمة الشفوية، علاقة الترجمة بتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، والمهارات المطلوب توافرها للمترجم، الصعوبات التي تواجه المترجم من وإلى العربية، وقضية الترجمة والتعريب، والمترجم وسوق العمل، ويقدم الباحث مقترحاته بشأن تدريس الترجمة. كما يتضمن البحث أمثلة عملية من واقع الترجمة في قاعات الدرس للمشكلات التي تواجه الطلبة المتدربين على الترجمة في المرحلة الجامعية الأولى؛ وأخيراً يناقش الباحث دور الترجمة في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية موضحًا السلبيات والإيجابيات لهذا الاتجاه في تعليم اللغة الأخرى.