

## THE IMPACT OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE AND CULTURAL PROFICIENCY IN TRANSLATION QUALITY

(A case study of EFL fourth-year students at Gezira College of Technology)

**AHMED HAGGAR SAKIN AHMED**

Assistant professor in translation & ELT  
Faculty of Arts, English Department University of Sinnar

### ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to investigate the importance of linguistic competence and cultural proficiency in translation quality. It aims to find out the impact of linguistic competence and cultural proficiency on students' translation quality production. As such, this study focuses on English and Arabic statements that require linguistic competence and cultural proficiency to translate correctly. It intends to present the Sudanese students with the importance of linguistic competence and cultural proficiency on how to produce an acceptable translation, towards a means of a particular written text and arrival at its intended writer's meaning through linguistic competence and cultural proficiency. Therefore, this study is an outline of a model of implementing linguistic competence to translate English and Arabic contexts correctly. The previous studies have shown that most errors of students in translating from English into Arabic and versa are due to mother tongue interference and overgeneralization. Therefore, this study targeted the students of Gezira College of technology.

To achieve the objectives of this study a sample of 90 students from the population was chosen. The instrument of this study is a test that is handed to the students to inspect the influence of linguistic competence and cultural proficiency in their translation production. For data analysis, the researcher adopted (SPSS) program. The main findings of the study is that fourth-year students in Gezira College of Technology encounter problems in translating sentences from English into Arabic or from Arabic into English but the errors increase in translating from Arabic into English. Also, the study showed that the students lack facilities needed for effective translation such as their linguistic competence is should be enhanced in order to play a vital role in translation, as well as the students, must orient themselves for different cultural facilities such as reading different books in English and Arabic such as Islamic, scientific, religious, etc... to achieve cultural proficiency so that they can translate different texts easily.

### Abbreviations

EFL English as Foreign Language

TL Target Language

SL Source Language

ELT English Language Teaching

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the time of social media, cultural change, knowledge, essential variations, the increase in intercultural communications, science, and well commercial, scientific, and political relations technology between peoples, have faced humanity with exceptional challenges in knowledge and information. The assimilation of useful and necessary Therefore, in favor of successful communication to take place between any two or more systems. The translation is considered to be one of the most effective an instrument in transferring knowledge and skills in culture, politics, economics, commerce, legal, military, and other important fields, and different aspects of translation. Translation has been the most efficient and effective means of communication between nations, peoples, and groups. And through translation the exchange of common interests take place, and through it the culture, customs, habits, beliefs, and traditions of other communities will be known.

The importance of translation has been growing gradually, particularly in the era of the internet and globalization, where people need to communicate with each other more than they used to do previously. In The volume of translation "this regard Mona, B. (2001: 12) states that: conducted worldwide has increased dramatically in the last fifty years.

Even though English may have become a lingua franca of world trade, it is the increasing globalization and the advent of the internet that has meant that promotional literature, technical manuals, Webpages, and all ranges of other communication are being translated into other languages at a faster and faster pace. Furthermore, the growth of international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union has made interpreting at meetings and translation of documentation a necessity. The translation is viewed as a process of converting one language into another. In this sense, Bell (1993: 13) refers to translation as a process that involves the activity of translation, a product of the process of translating, and the abstract concept that encompasses both the process of translating

The process of "and the product of that process. He assumes that: is a type of human information processing that aims at translating reproducing as accurately as possible all grammatical and lexical features of the source language.

## 2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

"As for the process of translation, it is often dangerous to translate more than a sentence or two before reading the first two or three paragraphs, unless a quick glance through convinces that the text is going to present few problems." Newmark, P. (2003).

Critically reviewed, it has been assumed that EFL learners in general and Sudanese EFL learners, in particular, are accustomed to learning and translating into their habitual language use (i.e. their mother tongue) since they think that is the only way they can translate naturally, accurately and with maximum effectiveness and further appropriateness. In fact, however, most EFL advanced translators act beyond this translating behavior and do translate out of their own language and contribute greatly to many people is hilarity in this context.

Generally, the main objective of ELT is to develop EFL learners' competencies linguistically and communicatively, as well as to use English in real-world situations and express

themselves in the target language. Furthermore, translation is a part of applied linguistics, however, teachers do not seem to be aware of this importance and they do not often give it enough attention. EFL students in Sudan have some translation skills, information, background, and knowledge, and they often think that their skills are good because they know how to translate short and simple sentences, but if they translate compound or complex sentences into the target language (TL) unluckily, it is very often deprived and with many lexicons and grammatical errors, spelling errors, using linking words, using quotation marks as a result of lacking linguistic competence and cultural knowledge. Therefore, students' translation skills need to be improved.

### **2.1 Significance of the study**

This study focuses on the importance of both linguistic competence and cultural knowledge as prerequisites for translating various texts in general and these need cultural competence in particular effectively. This study also intends to prove how to produce reasonable translation if linguistic competence and cultural knowledge are enhanced by the learners. Accordingly, this study suggests EFL learners must develop their linguistic and cultural competencies to overcome the weaknesses of translation in arriving at the writer's or speaker's intended meaning.

### **2.2 Questions of the study**

In investigating the influence of linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, the following questions are generated:

1. Do the students rely on their linguistic competence and cultural proficiency in translating from SL into TL?
2. To what extent do linguistic competence and cultural proficiency affect in translation quality?
3. Are linguistic competence and cultural proficiency important for increasing translation quality?
4. Do students read various English and Arabic books to develop their linguistic competence and cultural proficiency?

### **2.3 Hypotheses of the study**

In answering the research questions, the following hypotheses will be formulated:

1. Students rely on their linguistic competence and cultural background in translating from SL into TL.
2. Linguistic competence and cultural proficiency affect translation quality.
3. Linguistic competence and cultural proficiency are important for increasing translation quality.
4. Students read various English and Arabic books to develop their linguistic competence and cultural proficiency.

## **3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To analyze the answers of the students that require linguistic competence and cultural proficiency.
2. To observe the points and the causes of students' errors in translation according to their linguistic competence and cultural proficiency.
3. To find out the significant differences between the answers of the respondents.

### **3.1 The Scope and Limitation of the Study**

In introducing the procedural characteristics of this research, certain scopes and limitations will be shown.

#### **1. Scope**

Although translation is a vast and rich area for research questions punctuations, cohesive devices, discourse mechanics, stylistics, etc..., the present paper will comprise the correlation between linguistic competence and cultural knowledge in translation quality.

#### **2. Limitation**

As a topic limitation, the current study will be confined to conducting about error analysis of sentences that require linguistic competence and cultural background to translate them without considering the impact of other similar linguistic factors such as punctuation, cohesive devices, etc... on these learners' translation products because linguistic competence and cultural knowledge according to the researcher, are influential entities beside another factor such as grammatical competence, prepositional competence, vocabulary competence, etc... Actually, the exclusion of other factors associated with the learners' translation problems such as the ones exemplified above from the scope of this study does not mean that they are of no significance to translation issues or less problematic to learners. In contrast, each of them can be viewed as a rich field for translation queries. However, these and other aspects relevant to translation troubles are left to be topics on their own for further research in the field by other researchers.

### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive and analytic approaches will be adopted as a methodology for this study. The test is the optimal tool for the study. It has been handed to the students to measure the correlation between linguistic competence and cultural knowledge in translation quality. For data analysis SPSS program will be used to prove that linguistic competence and cultural proficiency are prerequisites for effective translation.

#### **4.1 Data Gathering**

This study has mainly targeted the fourth-year Sudanese EFL university students of Gezira College of Technology among other academic levels as a sample of its empirical survey for the reason that the fourth-year academic level is supposed to be a standard model stage, because they have covered the whole academic curricula, and they are exposed to a variety of translation courses.

#### **4.2 Procedures**

In so achieving, the subject chosen from the study population are given an equal chance to practice in the experimental test, the students are tested during the month of April 2021 in their lecture room during their prescribed lecturing times and they are supervised by the researcher.

#### **4.3 Instruments**

The researcher employs two instruments to collect the data:

A. A test which is administered by the researcher is the main instrument used in collecting the needed data for this research. The test contains two parts, the first part implies Arabic statements, and the second part contains English sentences which were also translated by the students.

B. The researcher observed the phenomenon and reported the difficulties of producing poor translations for different types of sentences as they happened.

#### **4.4 The need for linguistic competence and cultural proficiency**

It is clear that from the previous discussion fourth year students at Gezira College of Technology need both linguistic competence and cultural proficiency to translate texts or sentences from English into Arabic or from Arabic into English. Unless they acquire linguistic competence and cultural proficiency they cannot translate properly. This makes linguistic competence and cultural proficiency for the students at Gezira College of Technology necessary tools because they wish to translate different texts correctly.

In the process of translation, it is often dangerous to translate more than a sentence or two before reading the first two or three paragraphs, unless a quick glance through convinces that the text is going to present a few problems. Newmark, P. (2003).

Critically reviewed, it has been assumed that EFL learners in general and Sudanese EFL learners, in particular, are accustomed to learning and translating into their habitual language use (i.e. their mother tongue) since they think that is the only way they can translate naturally, accurately and with maximum effectiveness and further appropriateness.

Generally, the central aim of ELT is to develop EFL learners' competence linguistically and communicatively, as well as to use English in real-world situations and express themselves in the target language. Although translation is a part of applied linguistics, teachers do not seem to be aware of this importance and they do not often give it enough attention. Most EFL University students in Sudan have some translation skills, and they often have an idea that their skill is good because they know how to translate simple sentences, but if they are asked to translate a paragraph or an essay into the target language unluckily, it is very often poor and with many grammatical errors, spelling errors, using cohesive devices, using quotation marks as a result of lacking linguistic competence and cultural knowledge.

#### **4.5 Translation from a cultural perspective**

According to Liu (2010:94), the School of Translation Studies has always focused on the study of translation issues from a cultural perspective, with their own distinctive cultural awareness. Since the term cultural turn of Translation Studies proposed by Snell-Hornby was advocated by Bassnett and Lefevere in the anthology of "translation, history, and culture" compiled in 1990, the school of Translation Studies began to tackle translation problems from their different cultural perspectives and formed different theories of translation studies. The famous translation theorist Snell-Hornby in "Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach" enthusiastically describes a culture-oriented translation theory and points out that translation is a cross-cultural communication activity; Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere introduced many new concepts, including "history", "function" and "Rewriting" in Translation Studies and claims that translation should adapt to cultural requirements; André Lefevere's theory of "patronage, poetics, and ideology" investigates translation by putting the literary system into the larger social and cultural context to analyze the constraints on the translation mechanism and norms that translators abide by describing different translation phenomenon. Therefore, the interrelation between translation and culture needs to be considered.

#### 4.6 Language and Culture

Language and culture may thus be seen as being closely related and both aspects must be considered for translation. When considering the translation of cultural words and notions, Newmark, 1988: 96 proposes two opposing methods: transference and componential analysis. As Newmark mentions, transference gives "local color," keeping cultural names and concepts. Although placing the emphasis on culture, is meaningful to initiated readers, he claims this method may cause problems for the general readership and limit the comprehension of certain aspects. The importance of the translation process in communication leads Newmark to propose a componential analysis that he describes as being "the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message" (Newmark, 1988: 96).

The definition of "culture" as given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary varies from descriptions of the "Arts" to plant and bacteria cultivation and includes a wide range of intermediary aspects. More specifically concerned with language and translation, Newmark defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression" (1988: 94), thus acknowledging that each language group has its own culturally specific features. He further clearly states that operationally he does "not regard language as a component or feature of culture" (Newmark 1988: 95) in direct opposition to the view taken by Vermeer who states that "language is part of a culture" (1989: 222). According to Newmark, Vermeer's stance would imply the impossibility to translate whereas for the latter, translating the source language (SL) into a suitable form of TL is part of the translator's role in Tran cultural communication.

The notion of culture is essential to consider the implications for translation and, despite the differences in opinion as to whether language is part of the culture or not, the two notions appear to be inseparable. Discussing the problems of correspondence in translation, Nida confers equal importance to both linguistic and cultural differences between the SL and the TL and concludes that "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure" (Nida, 1964: 130). It is further explained that parallels in culture often provide a common understanding despite significant

formal shifts in the translation. The cultural implications for translation are thus of significant importance as well as lexical concerns.

Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings that language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhabit are 'the same . . . In fact, the process of the cultural inscription of a meaning transfer has less to do with finding Simon (1996: 139). Moreover, its value reconstructing term than translation as a social practice is shaped by these three cultures that contributed to the general vision of the other, i.e. of other cultures as well as to the reception and appropriation of knowledge and values belonging to other cultures. Simon (1996: 139).

"Translation is a cultural form and as a cultural form, it satisfies the specific social need of a particular social group. It keeps foregrounding the ideas of the social experience and the strain of thought of that particular group. For example, in the first few decades of the twentieth century, the translations that took place from English to Kannada brought in the concepts related to western rationality. Undoubtedly these translations played a vital role in further shaping Kannada culture."

Translators believe that culture is an important part of language and society. Therefore, they should adopt a culture-biased approach to translation. Professor Peter Newmark (1988:94) defined culture as the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression. He draws a successful distinction between three types of language: cultural, universal, and personal. The universal language, in his view, means common words of neutral reference like eat, speak, door, may, etc. personal language on the other hand means to express yourself in a personal way like the use of your own dialect and idiolect. The cultural language is the practicality of placing culture in its proper status in language and translation. Then Newmark presents five major categories of culture:

- 1) Ecology: plants, animals, local winds, mountains, plains, ice.
- 2) Material culture (artifact): food, cloth, housing, transport, communication, etc.
- 3) Social culture: (work and leisure)
- 4) Organization, customs, ideas (political social, legal religious, artistic).
- 5) Gestures and habits (nonlinguistic features).

But the culture is not only related to literal translation. It can be extended to reach the culture of the text of different disciplines that a translator needs to be aware of such as technical translation which according to Byrne (2006:3) it includes economics, law, business, etc. In reality, "technical" means precisely that, something to do with technology and technological texts because there is specialized terminology, doesn't make something technical. In discussing technical translation, it is useful to make the distinction between specialized and technical translation. For example, religion has very specific terminology and very definite conventions, styles, and document structures but it is never regarded as "technical". The tendency among certain theorists to include LSP texts such as legal, financial, and economic texts within the field of technical translation is less than helpful not least because each area has its own unique characteristics, requirements, and constraints. Simply because a field or subject area has unique or specialized terminology does not make it technical. This is not to say that financial translation, or indeed legal translation, does not deserve to be studied in

detail as areas in their own right, in fact, there are a number of extremely useful books on these areas such as Alcaraz & Hughes (2002). And Translator's Role Robinson (2003:142) maintains, "Translators don't translate words they translate. The translator works with words in contexts "what people do with words not in isolation because a word in isolation is meaningless. For example, the word "fine" generally means "good" but in a legal context, it means the money you paid as punishment.

#### 4.7 Data analysis and discussion

The test includes two parts Arabic part and the English part, according to the analysis of the sentences proved to be significant for the study. The table below indicates the number of students, the mean, the standard deviation, and maximum and minimum marks.

**Table 1: Statistics analysis**

		English part	Arabic part
N	Valid	90	90
	Missing	0	0
Mean		8.12	4.54
Median		9.00	4.00
Mode		0	0
Std. Deviation		5.411	4.807
Variance		29.277	23.105
Range		20	16
Minimum		0	0
Maximum		20	16
Sum		731	409

This table illustrates that the total number of students is 90, the mean is 8.12 for English sentences and 4.54 for Arabic sentences, the standard deviation for English sentences is 5.4 and for Arabic sentences is 4.8, and the minimum mark in the Arabic part is 0 as it is in English, the maximum mark for English part is 20 and for the Arabic part is 16.

**Table 2: Frequency table of English sentences**

Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1	13.3	13.3	13.3
		2			
	1	4			
	2	4			
	3	3			
4	3	3.3	3.3	28.9	



	5	3	3.3	3.3	32.2
	6	5	5.6	5.6	37.8
	7	2	2.2	2.2	40.0
	8	8	8.9	8.9	48.9
	9	6	6.7	6.7	55.6
	10	7	7.8	7.8	63.3
	11	11	12.2	12.2	75.6
	12	2	2.2	2.2	77.8
	13	6	6.7	6.7	84.4
	14	2	2.2	2.2	86.7
	15	5	5.6	5.6	92.2
	16	2	2.2	2.2	94.4
	17	1	1.1	1.1	95.6
	18	1	1.1	1.1	96.7
	19	2	2.2	2.2	98.9
	20	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3: Frequency table of Arabic sentences**

	Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	32	35.6	35.6	35.6
	1	5	5.6	5.6	41.1
	2	6	6.7	6.7	47.8
	3	1	1.1	1.1	48.9
	4	11	12.2	12.2	61.1
	5	2	2.2	2.2	63.3
	6	5	5.6	5.6	68.9
	7	2	2.2	2.2	71.1
	8	5	5.6	5.6	76.7
	10	5	5.6	5.6	82.2
	11	4	4.4	4.4	86.7
	12	4	4.4	4.4	91.1
	13	5	5.6	5.6	96.7
	14	2	2.2	2.2	98.9
	16	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

The above tables 2 and 3 indicate the marks which were obtained by students for the English part and Arabic parts. It has been observed that the number of students who failed the English test is 50 students and in the Arabic are 69 students, while those who pass the English test is 40 students and the Arabic test is 21 students so the numbers of the students in the two levels are comparable which help to achieve the objectives of the study, there for the researcher has classified them into two levels according to their response. The classification is indicated by the tables of the figures below:

**Table 4: English part**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Failed (0 – 19)	50	55.6	55.6
Pass (20 – 40)	40	44.4	44.4
Total	90	100.0	100.0

**Table 5: Arabic part**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Failed (0 – 19)	69	76.7	76.7
Pass (20 – 40)	21	23.3	23.3
Total	90	100.0	100.0

This classification is crucial in this study and it is taken into account because it facilitates the achievement of the objectives of the study. In addition to that, the frequency and the percentage are almost comparable which helps achieve the objectives by varying the results among the participants. The table shows that the majority of the participants failed the test because they scored less than 20, which means that they lack linguistic competence and cultural proficiency to translate properly.

In discussing the hypotheses of the study the statistical analysis and the discussion of the test ensures that EFL students at Gezira College of Technology encounter problems in translating sentences from English into Arabic or from Arabic into English due to many reasons such as lack of linguistic competence in English and Arabic because they do not read books such as academic, scientific, Islamic, etc.... in order to enhance their abilities in translating various sentences that contain terminologies in English and Arabic which would help the students to translate correctly.

## 5.0 FINDINGS

According to the analysis of the data in the previous, it was observed that the performance of fourth-year students at Gezira College of Technology was not effective in translating sentences that contain different terms. As far as the results were concerned, it had been

observed that linguistic competence and cultural proficiency in translation were totally overlooked. Therefore, it is axiomatic to indicate that the analysis produces the results of the constituents of this research paper. The linguistic competence and cultural proficiency in English and Arabic are the main constituents of the research, thus the students encounter multifaceted translation problems and barriers in relation to English and Arabic to translate the sentences correctly because they lack linguistic competence and cultural awareness of the source and target languages especially the area of semantics. Thus, the overall errors produced by the students in translating the sentences occurred as a result of lacking linguistic abilities and knowledge, lack of practicing translation, syllabuses not enough for effective translation, and Interlingua and overgeneralization of rules between source and target language.

**In brief, the most significant findings of the study are:**

- EFL Students at Gezira College of Technology encountered problems in translating Arabic and English sentences that contain different terms.
- Syllabuses of translation did not meet the needs of the students to translate effectively.
- There were no laps for translation at Gezira College of Technology to enhance students' translation competence.
- Students did not practice translation adequately during their college studies.
- Translating from Arabic into English was more difficult than translating them from English into Arabic.
- The students translated English and Arabic sentences literally rather than contextually.
- Misunderstanding of some of these words that were used in the test caused the students to commit errors in translating the sentences correctly because they lack linguistic competence.

**6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- students must be aware that translation is being demanded nowadays in different fields. Also, different nations from varied countries can be met everywhere either for tourism, investment, working, etc.... therefore, students must study translation seriously.
- students must be exposed to a variety of linguistic contexts that contain English and Arabic contexts to develop their linguistic competence and cultural proficiency.
- students should be encouraged to search for any information that they need for translation in general and translating different sentences because of a wide range of knowledge, and culture, and to strengthen their ability in translation.

- English department at Gezira College of Technology is recommended to establish new programs that help the students to become professional translators such as creating a translation society, holding seminars, debating, and forums.
- The library of the college should be provided with updated references for translation.
- students namely fourth year are advised to try all means that will help them to improve their translation quality such as translating long sentences, paragraphs and stories in English and Arabic because they include linguistic aspects as well as cultural information.

## **REFERENCES**

- Alcaraz, Enrique and Brian Hughes (2002). *Legal Translation Explained*, Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Baker, M. (2001) *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, London & New York: Routledge.
- Bassnett, S. (1980/2002) *Translation Studies*, London: Routledge.
- Bell, R. T. (1991) *Translation and translating: theory and practice*. London and New York: Longman.
- Ghazala, Hassan 1995/2006 *Translation as problems and solutions*, Dar Wa Maktabat Alhilar, Beirut.
- Lefevere, A. (1992) *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of the Literary Fame*, London, and New York: Routledge.
- Mona, B. et al. (2001) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, London & New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Newmark, P (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. London: Prentice-Hall International.
- Nida, E.A. y C. Taber (1969): *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: Brill.
- Robinson, D. (1997) *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained*, Manchester: UK: St Jerome.
- Simon, S. (1996) *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. London: Routledge.