

International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies

ISSN: 2308-5480



Problems in Translating *Five Days in Paris* into Arabic: Linguistic Analysis

[PP: 01-09]

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ABSTRACT

There are daily countless translation activities around the world. Translators undertake different text types including, but not limited to, scientific, literary, religious, cultural, business and philosophic. Translation takes place between languages which are either related or distinct. It is generally hypothesized that the more related two languages are, the easier the translation task and vice versa. English and Arabic belong to two different language families and are thus different in their linguistic structures. Given this, there may be some challenges in rendering certain linguistic structures between these two languages. The degree of such challenges may vary according to text types. In this respect, this paper discusses the Arabic translation of Danielle Steel's *Five Days in Paris*. The linguistic analysis of chapter one aims to highlight the linguistic inaccuracies the translator faced while working on this novel and the effects thereof. The paper starts with defining translation, translatability and equivalence and offers the linguistic analysis and discussion of the problems encountered while translating the above mentioned text into Arabic. Based on the findings, the paper offers some useful pedagogical suggestions.

Keywords: Translation Problems, Equivalence, Linguistic analysis, *Five days in Paris*, linguistics inaccuracies

ARTICLE INFO | The paper received on: **16/02/2015**, Reviewed on: **12/03/2015**, Accepted after revisions on: **28/03/2015**

Suggested Citation:

Altarabin, M. (2015). Problems in Translating *Five Days in Paris* into Arabic: Linguistic Analysis. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 3(2), 01-09. Retrieved from <http://www.eltsjournal.org>

1. Introduction

The linguistic structure of English is different from that of Arabic. The effects of such difference may be noticed in different types of texts translated into Arabic. English and Arabic may use a different number of words to say the same thing as in *I am a student* translated into Arabic as أنا طالب *ana talib* (masculine) and أنا طالبة *ana talibah* (feminine). English may also lexicalize certain words which are understood in Arabic but such words have no equivalent words in Arabic as in the case of *outsourcing*. Translation from English into Arabic is a daily activity which includes different text types of which literary translation is one. This paper is about the linguistic problems in the translation of *Five Days in Paris* by Danielle Steel. The paper shows how the translator deviated from the source text (ST) through rendering a completely different meaning, introducing odd structures and inaccurate linguistic structures in Arabic and sometimes deletion of ST words which are significant.

2. Review of Literature

Before moving to the linguistics analysis of *Five Days in Paris* and the challenges faced while translating it into Arabic, it is essential to offer a brief summary of the literature on the concepts related to the topic under investigation. Therefore, this part discusses the definition of translation, translatability and equivalence. It aims to show that translation is possible and equivalence is relative and not absolute.

2.1 Defining Translation

Since the 1950s, different definitions of translation have been proposed. Hornby (2010, p. 1646) has stated that the verb *translate* means (1) to express the meaning of speech or writing in a different language; (2) to be changed from one language into another. In Arabic, the root ترجم *tarjama* (to translate) means “to explain speech into another language” (Ma’loof et al.,

1908/1984, p. 60) and (Al Bustani, 1998, p. 69), “transfer speech into another language” (Al-Basha, 1992, p. 253).

Nida and Taber (1974, p. 12) have stated that translating means “reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style”. Catford (1965, p. 20) defined translation as “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)”. In this respect, Steiner (1975, p. 414) also argued that “translation is the interpretation of verbal signs in one language by means of verbal signs in another.”

Catford’ and Steiner’s definitions are general in nature and do not mention important concepts in translation such as meaning and equivalence. Nida’s definition highlighted *meaning* as a priority but it is not clear how can a translator achieve equivalent effect when the source and target texts belong to two different cultures and times.

Larson (1984, p. 3) defined translation as “transferring the meaning of the source language into the receptor language.” Such meaning can be transferred by moving from the form of the source language to the form of the receptor language. She stresses that it is only meaning which is transferred and such meaning should be constant. It is only form which changes in translation (ibid.). Her definition seems to be more practical because it highlights meaning as the main priority in translation. It also gives translators flexibility in terms of form and structure which is effective in the cases of languages which have different structures.

Translation theorists have not yet come to a consensus on a general definition of translation. No theory even exists to address different text types. In this context, (Hatim and Munday, 2004, p. 224) have asserted that “it remains debatable whether it is possible to



determine any universals or, indeed, a general theory of translation that is valid for all texts and situations.” But to sum up, translation, as seen above, means *expressing, changing, explaining, transferring, reproducing* or *interpreting* speech or writing from a source language into a target language. What is important is that translators should focus on meaning as a central theme in translation.

2.2 Translatability

The volume of translation activities shows that translation is possible. Theo Hermans (1998, p. 300) argued for the same. Pym and Turk (1998, p. 273) believed that translatability means transferring from one language to another without fundamental change. Catford (1965, p. 93) says that “Indeed, translatability here appears, intuitively, to be a *cline* rather than a clear-cut dichotomy”. This means that translatability is associated with a change rather than a contrast between two things which are entirely different. Larson (1984, p. 3) stressed a similar approach saying that meaning is constant but form changes. According to Catford (1965, p. 93) “SL texts and items are *more* or *less* translatable rather than absolutely *translatable* or *untranslatable*”. In this context, Hatim and Munday (2004, p. 15) have argued that “translatability is a relative notion and has to do with the extent to which, despite obvious differences in linguistic structure (grammar, vocabulary, etc.), meaning can still be adequately expressed across languages.” They maintain that meaning, communicative purpose, target audience and purpose of translation should be taken into consideration. This means that translation is relative and translators should apply different strategies to account for the meaning of the source text in the first place.

Translatability remains a relative concept and is influenced by linguistic structures and cultural norms. In addition, the ability to translate depends on some degree of flexibility under which translators may make necessary changes in linguistic structures to achieve natural TL structure.

2.3 The Nature of Equivalence

Equivalence is a central theme in translation and is the ultimate goal translators seek to achieve. However, this notion has caused controversy among translation theorists and linguists alike regarding its nature and types. Biguenet and Schulte (1989, p. xiii) discussed this notion and argued that “some languages are richer than others in their word count” and that “an exact equivalence from one language to another will never be possible. This could be characterized as both the dilemma and the challenge for the translator” (ibid.). Gregory Rabassa (in Biguenet and Schulte 1989, p.1) believes that “a translation can never equal the original; it can approach it, and its quality can only be judged as to accuracy by how close it gets”. Toury (1980, p. 39-65) in Schaffner (1999, p. 5) said that a translation is a text which a given community regard and accept as a translation. He also believes that equivalence is not more than a label attached to a translation relation existing between two texts (ibid.).

Equivalence is classified into different types. Nida and Taber (1964, p. 159) proposed formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence. Formal correspondence “focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content”, while dynamic equivalence focuses on “the principle of equivalent effect” (ibid.). Baker (1992) proposed different types of equivalence which include world level equivalence, above word level equivalence, grammatical equivalence, textual

equivalence and pragmatic equivalence. She discussed some translation pitfalls at these levels and provided some recommendations for translators.

House (1997, p.24), in this respect, has said that a translation text is doubly bounded to the source text and to the recipient's communicative conditions. She argued that linguistic-textual approaches aim to "specify, refine, modify and thus to try to operationalize the equivalence relation by differentiating between a number of frameworks of equivalence". Ivir (1996, p.155) has also argued that "equivalence is ... relative and not absolute... it emerges from the context of situation as defined by the interplay of (many different factors) and has no existence outside that context."

As Catford (1965, p. 21) explains, the main problem in translation is that of "finding TL translation equivalents". Catford here indicates the difficulty of finding absolute TL equivalents. This is in connection with the notion of translatability he discussed (ibid.: 3) when he denied the absolute translatability of source language items. He believes that "a central task of translation theory is therefore that of defining the nature and conditions of translation equivalence" (ibid.: 21).

Equivalence is a relative match between the source text and the target text. It exists on different levels of language and aims to account for the source text meaning and form respectively. Understanding the linguistic structures of the SL and the cultural norms thereof is an important element in rendering sound translations. In this respect, translators can make use of various TL linguistic structures to replace the SL ones.

2.4 Equivalence between Arabic and English

Although Arabic and English belong to two different language families, and therefore exhibit two different linguistic structures, equivalence between the two languages can be achieved. An English word

may be rendered as one, two or more words in Arabic. A combination of two words in English may be rendered as one word or as two words. The following are some examples:

1. One word to one word: work in English can be a verb and a noun. In Arabic يعمل *ya'mal* (work) is a verb and عمل *'amal* (work) is a noun.
2. One to many: *outsourcing* does not have an equivalent Arabic word. This is an example of the absence of lexical equivalence in Arabic. However, the meaning of the term can still be rendered through gloss. Hornby (2010, p.1081) has defined *outsourcing* as "to arrange for somebody outside a company to do work or provide good for that company". This meaning can be rendered into Arabic. However, the absence of this word in Arabic should not be considered as an example of linguistic untranslatability. SL words, which are not lexicalized in the TL, can be paraphrased or explained to reflect the meaning of the SL words.
3. Two words to one word: commit suicide in English equals ينتحر *yantahir* in Arabic.
4. Two words to two words: pass a law = يسن قانونا *yasunnu qanunan*.
5. Equivalence at idiomatic level: actions speaks louder than words = العبرة بالأعمال وليست بالأقوال *al'ibrah bil a'malwa laysat bil' aqwal* (lessons are drawn by actions not by words).

3. Methodology

This paper is partially based on the text analysis proposed by Christiane Nord (1991). Nord (ibid., p. 1) has argued that "before embarking on any translation the translator should analyze the text comprehensively, since this appears to be the only way of ensuring that the source text (ST) has been wholly and correctly understood." Following this, a linguistic analysis of selected quotations of chapter one of *Five Days in*



Paris was carried out to assess the level of the translator's understanding of the ST and the linguistic difference between the ST and TT. Text analysis is partial here as it focuses on the linguistic analysis. The whole novel was translated into Arabic but only selected quotations were chosen from the first chapter because of the word limitations in this paper. In addition, the focus was on the first chapter because inaccuracies were found in the first paragraph of the first chapter. Similar inaccuracies also exist in other chapters but the analysis here is representative.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Analysis

There are ten source text units (words, phrases) selected for the linguistic analysis. The analysis compares the meaning of the ST words/phrases to their TT 'equivalents'. This aims to evaluate the translation of the selected words/phrases into Arabic, highlight the inaccuracies at the linguistic unit and suggest procedures to avoid such inaccuracies. The method used here is linguistic analysis. This method was selected based on the assumption that translation starts at the linguistic level.

The following are the ten examples taken from chapter one of *Five Days in Paris*:

1. **Taxing**: Hornby define taxi as "(of a plane) to move slowly along the ground before taking off or after landing" (2010, p.1586). *Taxing* was translated as تماماً توقفت *tawaqqafat tamaman* (stopped completely). There is no Arabic equivalence for the verb *taxi*. The translator failed to account for the meaning of the source language word. *Taxing* (noun) can be translated as السير على المدرج *assayru 'ala almudarraj* (moving on the runway).
2. **Line**: "He was almost smiling as he got on the customs line, despite the heat of the day and the number of people crowding ahead of him in the line."

The underlined *line* was translated as رتل *ratl*. The word *ratl* means a string of horses or a group of cars following one another (ALC 2004, p.327). The translation of *line* in this example as *ratl* is inappropriate. *Line* here should be translated as صف *saf* which refers to group of people standing in one line (ALC 2004, p.517).

3. "They were just inches from final victory". *Just inches from* was literally translated as انشات قليلة من *inshat qalilah min* (few inches from). Such literal translation sounds odd in Arabic. *Just inches* can be rendered as أوشكوا *awshaku 'ala* (they were about to). Victory collocates with *achieve* which is not explicitly used but implied here. Therefore, the resulting Arabic sentence may read as أوشكوا على تحقيق النصر النهائي *'awshaku 'ala tahqiq annasr anniha 'i* (There were about to achieve the final victory).
4. "**Flickering candles**": was translated as تومض ببصيص الشموع *tumiDu bibasi ashumu'* (flickering with the shine of candles). The addition of *basi* (shining) does not convey any additional meaning in Arabic. *wamid* means to shine unsteadily. *basai*, (shining) means reflecting a bright light which is not the case in *flickering candles*. *Basi* should be deleted so that *flickering candles* can be rendered as شموع مومضة *shumu'un mumidah*.
5. "**Most recent**": was translated as أكثر حداثة *aktharu hadathah* (more recent). There are two problems with the translation of this phrase. (1) *most* (superlative) was translated as أكثر *akthar* which means *more* (comparative). (2) the translator did not account for the structural difference between English and Arabic in this example. *Most recent* is rendered in Arabic as one word, i.e. الأحدث *al-'hdath* (the most recent).

6. **Finishing** in “*I’m finishing school*” was translated as أتابع *autabi’u* (I am continuing). *Finishing* should be rendered as *finishing* not as *continuing* in Arabic. Thus, *I’m finishing school* may be translated as أنهى دراستي *unhi dirasati* (I am finishing my study).
7. “**Quirk of fate**” was translated as نوعا من القدر *naw’an min al-qadar* (a type of fate). The SL term means *very strange* or *unexpected*. Hornby (2010, p. 1245) defines *quirk* as “a strange thing that happens, especially by accident.” This meaning should be accounted for in the target language rendering. *Quirk of fate* can be rendered as أمر غريب *amrun gharib* (strange thing) or أمر غير متوقع *amrun ghayru mutawaqqa’* (an unexpected thing). القدر (*qadar*) *fate* is one of Islam’s six articles of faith. It is a multidimensional topic. *Fate* is looked at differently by the writer, translator and readers. Given that *quirk of fate* means *strange* or *unexpected*, it is better to avoid reference to *fate* and adopt *strange* or *unexpected* in the translation.
8. “**Informed consent**” was translated as يوقع علانية *yuwaqqi’u ‘alanyatan* (sign publically). This rendering does not account for the meaning of the SL term. *Informed* means “having or showing a lot of knowledge about a particular subject or situation” (Hornby 2010, p.799). *Informed consent* means that the permission, agreement or acceptance is granted in full knowledge of possible consequences. *Sign publically* does not convey this meaning in Arabic. It is more appropriate to render *informed consent* as موافقة مستنيرة *muwafaqah mustani:rah* (lit. consent informed = informed consent).
9. “In the case of drugs to be used in life-threatening diseases”. The underlined *in* was literally translated as في *fi* (in). Although *treatment* is not mentioned in the example, it is meant when mentioning *drug*

and *disease*. Therefore, we prefer to add *treating* in the Arabic translation so that *in* would be rendered as علاج في *fi ‘ilaj* (in treating).

10. **Privacy** in “How could he do that to you?” she had raged in the privacy of his old bedroom” was deleted from the Arabic text. Using *privacy* shows that the author of the novel wanted to show that the conversation was private. This should be reflected in the Arabic rendering.

4.2 Findings

Analyzing the above examples, it was noticed that the translation pitfalls at the linguistic level include:

1. Complete change of meaning as in examples 1 and 6.
2. Using a word collocating with another referent than the actual referent as in example 2.
3. Rendering an odd literal translation into Arabic as in example 3.
4. Unnecessary addition as in example 4.
5. Inappropriate Arabic structure of the ST superlative adjective form.
6. Failing to produce an appropriate Arabic collocation which can account for the meaning of the ST collocation as in example 8.
7. Deletion of important information as in example 10.

4.3 Discussion

This paper suggests that translators should focus on the linguistic analysis of the ST. Such analysis enables them to understand the meaning of the ST words and phrases in the source language. The findings of the study are similar to Baker’s (1992) classification of translation problems at world level and above word level. Literal translation can be acceptable as in *heavy industries* translation into Arabic. However, in example 3, such translation renders an odd structure where the meaning of the ST unit is not made clear.



As specified above, the paper attempted to highlight the importance of the linguistic analysis of the source text. Christiane Nord (1991, p.1) has argued that “before embarking on any translation the translator should analyze the text comprehensively, since this appears to be the only way of ensuring that the source text (ST) has been wholly and correctly understood.” Taken this into consideration, the linguistic analysis enables the translator to proceed to other levels of translation such as the cultural level. Failing to take such analysis into consideration may lead to serious implications as noticed in the analysis of the ten examples above.

The review of literature has highlighted the nature of translation, translatability and the problems of achieving equivalence in translation. The findings of the study reflect that the translator of *Five Days in Paris* rendered inappropriate translation of the selected examples. Such inappropriate renderings could be attributed to the failure to account for the linguistic difference between English and Arabic. This problem is very clear in the translation of *taxing* which has not Arabic equivalent word. Despite this, such a problem can be addressed by paraphrasing words which have no Arabic equivalents.

Suggestions

As one of the objectives of this analysis was to make certain useful suggestions, it is suggested that -

1. Understanding the meaning of SL words and phrases before attempting translation should be a priority.
2. One should use certain strategies such as paraphrase to render non-lexicalized target language words which have no equivalents in Arabic. *Taxing* is an example.

3. One should avoid addition of words in the target text to add meaning which was not explicitly stated in the ST. Example 4 discusses this pitfall.
4. One should avoid deletion of ST words which were purposefully used to convey a certain meaning. Example 10 discusses this point.
5. One should avoid odd structures in Arabic. Translators should be aware of the structural difference between English and Arabic. Some two words English collocations are rendered as one word on Arabic. Refer to example 5.

5. Conclusion

By way of concluding this paper, it is important to highlight that translation is possible. Translation activity involves different levels. The first level is the linguistic analysis level where translators analyze the linguistic units of the SL text. Afterwards, translators use translation strategies to transfer the SL text into appropriate TL text. What we mean by appropriate here is that care should be taken to account for the SL text form, content and meaning in a manner which does not violate the norms of the TL. Meaning is the key factor in translation and translators should be able to apply different strategies to render such meaning into a TL.

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Appendix:

Sample quotations from chapter one of *Five Days in Paris* along with their Arabic translation below:

The weather in Paris was unusually warm as Peter Haskell's plane landed at Charles de Gaulle Airport. The plane taxied neatly to the gate, and a few minutes later, briefcase in hand, Peter was striding through the airport. He was almost smiling as he got on the customs line, despite the heat of the day and the number of people crowding ahead of him in line. Peter Haskell loved Paris.

كان الطقس في باريس دافئا على نحو غير اعتيادي حين هبطت طائرة بيتر هاسكل في مطار شارل ديغول. توقفت الطائرة قرب الباب تماما، وبعد بضع دقائق، والحقيبة في يده، كان بيتر هاسكل يسير في المطار وهو يبتسم حتى وصل إلى صف الجمارك، على رغم حرارة الجو وعدد الأشخاص المزدحمين أمامه في الرتل. أحب بيتر هاسكل باريس.

But that wasn't the point for Peter. The point was life, and the quality of those lives, severely dimmed, they were flickering candles in the dark night of cancer. And Vicotec was going to help them. At first, it had seemed like an idealistic dream, but now they were just inches from final



victory, and it gave Peter a thrill every time he thought of what was about to happen.

لكن ليس هذا المهم بالنسبة إلى بيتر. المهم هو الحياة، ونوعيتها، الباهتة بشدة، التي تومض ببصيص الشموع في ليل السرطان المظلم. وسوف يساعدهم فيكوتيك. في البداية، في البداية، بدا ذلك مثل حلم مثالي، لكنهم أصبحوا الآن على بعد إنشآت قليلة من النر النهائي، وكان بيتر يشعر بالحماس كلما فكر فيما هو على وشك الحدوث.

"What are you doing here?" he asked nervously, as though she were only supposed to exist in his memories of his school days. She had haunted him for months after he left college, and especially when he first went into the service. But he had long since relegated her to the past, and expected her to stay there. Seeing her suddenly catapulted her right back into the present.

"ماذا تفعلين هنا؟" سألتها بعصبية، كما لو أنه يفترض أن تكون موجودة فقط في ذكرياته المدرسية. لقد طارده لأشهر عدة بعدما غادر الكلية، ولاسيما حين ذهب لأداء خدمته العسكرية. لكنه أحالها إلى ماضية وتوقع أن تبقى فيه. إلا أن مشاهدتها مجددا أعادتها فجأة إلى الحاضر.

"I'm finishing school," she said, holding her breath as she looked at him. He seemed taller and thinner, his eyes were bluer and his hair even darker than she remembered.

"إنني أتابع الدراسة"، قالت وهي تحبس أنفاسها فيما تنظر إليه. لقد بدا أكثر طولاً ونحافة، وكانت عيناه أكثر زرقة وشعره أكثر دكنة مما تذكر.

And somewhat coincidentally, eighteen years before, Peter Haskell had married Frank's daughter. It hadn't been a "smart move" on his

part, or a calculated one. In Peter's eyes, it had been an accident, a quirk of fate, and one which he had fought against for the first six years he knew her.

وقبل ثمانية عشر عاماً، وعن طريق الصدفة تقريبا، تزوج بيتر هاسكل من ابنة فرانك. لم يكن ذلك "خطوة ذكية" من قبله، أو محسوبة سلفاً. وبالنسبة إلى بيتر، كان ذلك حادثاً، نوعاً من القدر حارب ضده طوال الأعوام الست الأولى التي عرفها فيها.

The "Fast Track" process was used in order to speed the various steps toward approval, in the case of drugs to be used in life-threatening diseases.

والموافق أن عملية "الخط السريع" تستعمل لتسريع مختلف الخطوات نحو الموافقة في حالة العقاقير المستعملة في الأمراض المهددة للحياة.

Once they got approval from the FDA, they were going to start with a group of one hundred people who would sign informed consent agreements, acknowledging the potential dangers of the treatment. They were all so desperately ill, it would be their only hope, and they knew it.

وبعد الحصول على موافقة دائرة الأغذية والأدوية الأمريكية، سوف تباشر الشركة التجارب مع مجموعة من مئة شخص يوقعون علانية على بيانات موافقتهم ويعترفون بالمخاطر المحتملة للعلاج. إنهم مصابون جميعاً بالمرض إلى حد اليأس، وسيؤذي ذلك أملهم الوحيد. وهم يعرفون ذلك.

"How could he do that to you?" she had raged in the privacy of his old bedroom.

"كيف استطاع فعل ذلك بك؟" قالت بغضب في غرفة نومه القديمة.