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MOST COMMON ERRORS IN ARABIC TO SERBIAN TRANSLATIONS BY SERBIAN AFL LEARNERS

This paper investigates the most common errors in Arabic to Serbian translations made by Serbian Learners of AFL. The paper is based on the corpus of the total of 100 translations of several Arabic texts that were given to Serbian AFL learners during the examination process in translation. The university level course in Arabic to Serbian translation is a compulsory one, and Serbian students take it for one semester, on their 3rd year, two classes per week. The translated texts deal with general topics specific to the Arab culture and they all belong to the newspaper functional style. The aim of this paper is to list, classify, describe, and analyze the most common errors on the word-level, phrase-level, sentence-level, or the levels of pragmatics as well as stylistics. It is also our intention to determine the main causes of these errors.

Key words: translation errors, binary errors, non-binary errors, pedagogical translation, AFL (Arabic as a foreign language).

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the most common errors in Arabic to Serbian translations made by Serbian Learners of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL). Our aim is to list, classify, describe, and analyze the errors at the word-level, phrase-level, sentence-level, and the discourse level. Since most of the Serbian students start learning Arabic as a foreign language at the university level as absolute beginners, an investigation into the translation errors they make will provide us with valuable information, not only about their overall translation competencies, but also regarding the challenges they have in learning AFL, since many of the mistakes are direct consequence of these difficulties.

Pym (1992) divides translation errors into two categories:

"A binary error opposes a wrong answer to the right answer; non-binarism requires that the target text actually selected be opposed to at least one further target text$_2$ which could also have been selected, and then to possible wrong answers. For binarism, there is only right and wrong; for non-binarism there are at least two right answers and then the wrong ones" (Pym 2009: 282).

The paper is based on the corpus of 100 translations of 6 Arabic texts that were given to Serbian AFL learners in the examination process during their course in translation. Compulsory translation course (Arabic to Serbian) lasts one semester, on

the 3rd year of studies, two classes per week, 90 minutes in total. These classes serve as in introduction to the basic principles and practices of professional translation of various types of texts, and it is mostly based on pedagogical translation which, broadly speaking, has two main goals, as Piletić (2011) puts it. The first goal is students' acquisition and use of knowledge pertaining to the target/foreign culture. The second one is to guide the students towards the acquisition of competence so that they can reproduce the target text as functionally equivalent to the source text (Piletić 2011: 351).

The translated texts in the exam which served as a corpus for our investigation belong to the newspaper register or functional style and deal with news or events connected to the Arab culture. The examination texts were unknown to the students, and some of the unknown words were given to the students with the text, but students were also allowed to use printed dictionaries. At the same time, students were not allowed to use sources from the internet during the exam. The students were familiar with the exam type and the general style, type and topic of the texts, since these were the most often translated types of texts.

2. Most common translation errors on the word-level

Among the binary and non-binary word-level translation errors, we have noted down the most common ones and we have classified them into several categories, according to their nature.

A. Most common binary word-level translation errors:

1. Recognition of names and titles;

2. Differentiation between verbal/nominalized usage of participles and verbal nouns.

B. Most common non-binary word-level translation errors:

1. Choice among multiple equivalents.

Regarding the wrong recognition of names and titles, it occurs as an often mistake among the Serbian AFL learners. For example:

Example 1:

ST: *al-ḫalīfa al-fāṭimī*;[1]

TT: „halifa Fatmi / halifa Fetim";

Suggested translation: „fatimidski halifa";

Example 2:

ST: *[al-ḥākim] sayf al-dawla*

TT: – „mač države";

Suggested translation: „Sejf Daula";

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[1] We used DIN 31635 standard for Arabic transliteration.

Example 3:
ST: *al-quds*
TT: „Kuds / Kades";
Suggested translation: „Jerusalim";

Example 4:
ST: *al-ʾārāḍī al-muḥtalla*
TT: „okupirane zemlje / okupaciona zemlja / okupacione zemlje",
Suggested translation: „Okupirane teritorije".

The main reasons for this error in translation are found in both lack of linguistic and extra-linguistic competencies. The lacking linguistic competencies include general insufficient competency regarding the reading/understanding of the text, but most of all the inability to differentiate between various nominal words that may or may not share the same form, such as: contextual forms of adjectives, i.e. as constituents of adjective phrase where they agree with corresponding nouns in gender, number, case and state, according to the rules of Arabic grammar; substantives derived from adjectival forms which behave as homographs (i.e. *muḥīṭ*, as an adjective means 'surrounding', and as a substantive 'ocean'). Learning reading skills in Arabic poses a great challenge and it is slower to develop with the learners of Arabic in comparison to other foreign languages, both because of the orthography, and word recognition issues (Ryding 2013: 148-151). Swaffar et al. emphasize in general that "vocabulary remains one of the greatest stumbling to fluent reading" (Swaffar et al. 1991: 43). This claim can be freely extended to reading comprehension, as well, as this binary word-level translation error suggests.

As for the extra-linguistic competencies, students are expected to know and/ or recognize some of the basic history-, geography-, and culture-specific terms, and to be able to find their equivalents in the recommended dictionaries. Such errors can also be the result of using smaller and/or inadequate dictionaries, but avoiding such mistakes also demands from the translator to be first and foremost aware of the fact that he/she is dealing with a name or a title through both linguistic and extra-linguistic context.

As our corpus shows, erroneous translation of the names and titles can also be result of inadequate grammatical "decoding" or "deciphering" of names that are part of phrases such as the construct state or attributive construction, or the two combined, as in the following example:

Example 5:
ST: *maktabat al-malik ʿabd al-ʿazīz **al-ʿāmma***
TT: „biblioteka kralja Abdulaziza **al-Ama**"
Suggested translation: „**javna** biblioteka kralja Abdulaziza".

Erroneous rendering of names often happens while dealing with foreign names transliterated in Arabic. In these cases, students simply transcribe the foreign name

as it is pronounced in Arabic, without considering its possible Serbian equivalent. The most compelling example for that is:

> Example 6:
> ST: *ġlāskū*
> TT: „Glasko /Gilasko"
> Suggested translation: „Glazgov".

This type of error can be attributed to the lack of linguistic competence, but also to the lack of concentration. Nevertheless, examples 5 and 6 support the earlier claim regarding importance of the skills of reading and reading comprehension in the process of translation.

Non-binary word-level translation errors is exemplified in inaccurate choosing between multiple possible equivalents. The following examples are the most illustrative ones:

> Example 7:
> ST: *al-**maktabāt** al-miṣriyya*
> TT: „egipatske biblioteke",
> Suggested translation: „egipatske knjižare";

> Example 8:
> ST: ***ṣāḥib** al-maktaba*
> TT: „prijatelj knjižare",
> Suggested translation: „vlasnik knjižare";

> Example 9:
> ST: *al-maʿriḍ*
> TT: „sajam",
> Suggested translation: „izložba";

> Example 10:
> ST: *al-ramziyya*
> TT: „simbol / simbolizam",
> Suggested translation: „simbolika";

> Example 11:
> ST: *al-handasa*
> TT: „inženjerstvo",
> Suggested translation: „geometrija";

> Example 12:
> ST: *al-taṭwīr*
> TT: „razvoj",
> Suggested translation: „renoviranje";

Example 13:
ST: *al-fa''āliyyāt*
TT: „produktivnost / efikasnost“,
Suggested translation: „aktivnosti“.

The main reasons for these errors (examples 7-13) in general are: a) not consulting or inadequate consulting the dictionary for additional check due to mistakes in morphological analysis of the lexemes; b) implementation of certain linguistic habits, i.e. previously taught meanings, and not implementing the practiced translation techniques; and we will deal with this later separately; c) not recognizing the contextual differences and/or functional style.

Of course, the three reasons are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are most often mutually related.

3. Most common translation errors on the phrase-level

Our corpus shows that the binary and non-binary translation errors occur on the phrase-level as well. We have noted down the most common ones and classified them into several categories, according to their nature.

A. Most common binary phrase-level translation errors:
1. Mistranslation of the construct state;
2. Mistranslation of Arabic phrases with temporal meaning.
B. Most common non-binary phrase-level translation errors:
1. Literal translation of partitive phrases.

The construct state is "a syntactic phrase consisting of at least two members, mostly nouns that are in a genitive relation" (Benmamoun 2006: I, 477), and it "expresses a wide range of possessive and partitive relationships. These include both material and inalienable → possession, location, part/whole relationships, measure or quantity, and comparison" (Hoyt 2006: III, 432).

The challenges that occur during the translation of this type of construction mostly arise from the difficulties that Serbian AFL learners have in determining and translating the exact type of specification which is expressed by it (i.e. possession, location, part/whole relationships etc.). For example:

Example 14:
ST: *fawānīs ramaḍān*
TT: „fenjeri ramazana“,
Suggested translation: „ramazanski fenjeri“;

Example 15:
ST: *fikrat al-fānūs l-miṣrī*
TT: „egipatska ideja o fenjerima“,
Suggested translation: „ideja o egipatskom fenjeru“ or „ideja egipatskog fenjera“, or simply „egipatski fenjer“;

Example 16:
ST: *markaz ġlāskū li al-ʿulūm*
TT: „centar Glazgov za nauku“,
Suggested translation: „Glazgovski naučni centar“;

Example 17:
ST: *mabnā bīmāristān nur al-dīn*
TT: „zgrada bimaristan Nur el Din / zgrada bimaristan Nur el Dina“,
Suggested translation: „zgrada Nur el dinovog / Nurudinovog bimaristana“.

As examples 14-17 indicate, one of the reasons for the mistranslation of the construct state is also not implementing some of the transposition techniques. In some cases, such as *fawānīs ramaḍān*, or *markaz ġlāskū li al-ʿulūm*, students opted for literal translation instead of converting the construct state-like construction into a simple adjectival phrase.

Our teaching practice and teaching experience also suggest that students often tend to translate Arabic phrases with temporal meanings literally. The analyzed corpus confirmed this binary phrase-level translation error. For example:

Example 18:
ST: *fī al-yawm al-tālī li wafāt al-šāʿir al-kabīr*
TT: „Narednog dana za smrtni slučaj velikog pesnika / sledećih dana zbog smrti velikog pisca / u idućim (narednim) danima dogodila se smrt velikog pesnika / sutradan o velikoj smrti pesnika / dan pred smrt / sledećeg dana nakon smrti / u ponedeljak kada je veliki pesnik umro / sledećeg dna do smrti / u danu koji je sledio smrtni slučaj“,
Suggested translation: „dan posle smrti velikog pesnika“ or „dan nakon smrti velikog pesnika“;

Example 19:
ST: *ʿalā madd al-ʿuṣūr*
TT: „tokom proteklih perioda / tokom perioda / kako je vreme prolazilo“
Suggested translation: „tokom istorije / vekovima / kroz epohe“.

The most likely reason for frequent literal translation of these and other phrases with temporal meanings is lack of linguistic competences (mostly lack of adequate bottom-up and top-down processing of the text while reading), and/or lack of translation competences, most often exemplified in word-for-word translation.

In the analyzed translations we have also found often occurrence of literal translation of partitive phrases as examples of non-binary phrase-level translation errors. Literal translations occur whether these partitive phrases are expressed by the use of partitive prepositions such as *min* – "from", "of", or some other constructions that express "separation from a group, kind, or species" (Cantarino 1975: 266). For example:

Example 20:
ST: *'iḥdā wasā'l al-'iḍā'a*
TT: „jedno od sredstava osvetljenja",
Suggested translation: „sredstvo osvetljenja";

Example 21:
ST: *tu'add al-fawānīs min 'ašhar maẓāhir al-iḥtifāl*
TT: „fenjeri se smatraju / ubrajaju među",
Suggested translation: „fenjeri se ubrajaju u najpoznatije";

Example 22:
ST: *yu'add [...] min ḍarūrāt al-taḥḍīr*
TT: „[...] ubraja se u neophodnosti pripreme",
Suggested translation: „[...] deo je neophodnih priprema".

Partitive phrases are very common in the Arabic language, but they rarely call for literal transfer into Serbian since partitivity is not expressed in Serbian in the same way.

4. Most common translation errors on the sentence-level

Our corpus indicates that there are two common types of translation errors on the sentence-level. The binary sentence-level error occurs as erroneous recognition of the sentence type, and/or the function of the sentence parts. On the other hand, literal rendering of the Arabic word order is the non-binary sentence-level error.

As for the first type of error, the analyzed material suggests that students have difficulties with complex relative sentences, asyndetic relative sentences, complex nominal sentences, and generally speaking, with complex sentences that have different subjects in the main and the dependent clause. For example:

Example 23:
ST: *[…] fa 'inna al-waṯīqa bi 'unwān "waṯīqat 'abbās bāšā" nisbat[an] 'ilā al-ḥadīwī 'abbās, tu'add min 'ahamm maṣādir al-ma'lūmāt al-tārīḥiyya ḥawl sulālāt al-ḥuyūl al-'arabiyya al-'aṣīla, allatī kān ḥadīwī miṣr yuḥibb ğam'ahā min muḥtalif 'anḥā' al-minṭaqa al-'arabiyya.*

TT: „Dokument sa naslovom „Dokument Abas-paše" odnosi se na hediva Abasa, ubraja najbitnije istorijske činjenice porekla pasmina originalnih arapskih konja, hediv Egipta koji je voleo da ih sakuplja sa različitih arapskih područja."

Suggested translation: „dokument pod naslovom 'Dokument Abas-paše', po hedivu Abasu, ubraja se u najvažnije istorijske izvore o izvornim arapskim pasminama konja koje je egipatski vladar voleo da skuplja s različitih arapskih područja."

Example 24:
ST: *[…] ḥāṣṣatan fī al-fatra al-ḥāliya allati tuwāğih fīhā al-ḥaḍāra al-'islāmiyya ittihāmāt bi […]*

TT: „[…] posebno u današnje vreme koje suočava islamsku civilizaciju […] "
Suggested translation: „[…] u kom se islamska civilizacija suočava sa […]"

The prevailing cause of these and other errors of that type is the lack of linguistic, namely syntactic competence of the students and their lack of ability to recognize these syntactic forms in the context. Our teaching experience reveals that the students know the theory behind these forms, i.e. they can give theoretical description of these sentences, even if they are not able to recognize them in the body of text. What only increases the difficulty is the fact that the Arabic sentence is usually very long in comparison to Serbian or English sentence. Also, the Arabic punctuation marks are usually scarce and not always reliable. This is why the students often feel stressed even with the simple task of recognizing where one sentence should end and the other begin.

Inaccurate rendering of the word order in Arabic to Serbian translations is by all means the most often translation error. Students transfer the Arabic neutral VSO word order literally instead of changing it into its Serbian neutral counterpart – SVO. For example:

Example 25:
ST: *'ustuḫdima al-fānūs […]*
TT: „Koristio se fenjer […]",
Suggested translation: „Fenjer se koristio […]";

Example 26:
ST: *tuʿadd al-fawānīs min […]*
TT: „Ubraja se fenjer u […]",
Suggested translation: „Fenjer se ubraja u […]";

Example 27:
ST: *tanqasim al-maʿriḍ 'ilā […]*
TT: „Podeljena je ova smotra/Podeljena je izložba […]",
Suggested translation: „Ova izložba je podeljena […]";

Example 28:
ST: *wa yattafiq ṣāḥib al-maktaba al-mašhūra maʿanā […]*
TT: „Slaže se vlasnik poznate biblioteke […]",
Suggested translation: „Vlasnik poznate knjižare se slaže […]";

Example 29:
ST: *māt naǧīb maḥfūẓ […]*
TT: „Umro je Nagib Mahfuz […]"
Suggested translation: „Nagib Mahfuz je umro […]".

The main cause of this type of error is the lack of translation competence. Nevertheless, erroneous transfer of the word order can also be the consequence of the inadequate analysis of the sentence parts and their contextual meaning, i.e. mostly linear processing of the text during the reading. For example:

Example 30:
ST: *yuqām fī brīṭānyā ma'riḍ yatatabba' tārīḫ al-ḫayl al-'arabī munḏ al-qadam.*
TT: „U Britaniji se održava izložba koja od davnina prati istoriju arapskog konja.",
Suggested translation: „U Britaniji se održava izložba koja prati istoriju arapskog konja od davnina."

Such translations result in misinterpretation the general meaning of the sentence or its part, as the previous example (no. 30) clearly demonstrates, and they can't be equated with the earlier described word-order error (examples 25-29), since it is by all means caused by lack of syntactic competence, i.e. the inability to recognize the function of sentence parts.

5. Most common translation errors on the level of pragmatics and stylistics

When discussing level of pragmatics and stylistics, Serbian students of AFL mostly encounter problems when translating elements that serve to express textual coherence and cohesion at discourse level. They also often encounter difficulties with reproducing the register or functional style. The first type of error belongs to non-binary translation errors, while the second one is binary.

Regarding the translation of Arabic elements of textual coherence and cohesion into Serbian, our examples reveal that students often opt for literal transfer of the connectives from the Arabic text (the conjunctions *wa* – "and", *fa* – "and, so", etc.). Connectives "can be defined as utterance-initial words, phrases, and clauses that share the primary function of linking utterances in discourse" (Kammensjö 2006: 470). For example:

Example 31:
ST: **wa** *tabqā li al-fānūs ramziyya ḫāṣṣa [...]* **fa** *qad tanāqalat al-'aǧyāl al-taqlīd [...]* **wa** *al-qāhira min 'ahamm al-mudun [...]* **wa** *tu'alliq fīhā al-fawānīs [...]*
TT: „I ostaje posebna simbolika […] I generacije su bile prenosile tradiciju […] I Kairo je jedan od najvažnijih […] I u njemu se fenjeri kače […]",
Suggested translation: „Fenjer je zadržao posebnu simboliku […] Tradicija se prenosila generacijama […] Kairo je jedan od najvažnijih gradova […] U njemu se fenjeri kače […]".

Connectives such as conjunction *wa* at the beginning of the sentence or in its resumptive role, as well as the particle *fa* in its resumptive meaning, are usually omitted in the target text when translating into Serbian. The reason for that is to be

sought in what Mughazy noticed best when comparing Arabic and English cohesion strategies:

"The most obvious differences between Arabic and English cohesion strategies is that Arabic uses clausal conjunctions far more frequently, and it allows coordination conjunctions at the beginning of paragraphs" (Mughazy 2016: 167).

The same difference applies for the Serbian language, too.

Mughazy further on notices that linguistic issues are the main source of translation problems when speaking of discourse/text relations, since these relations are universal (Mughazy 2016: 167). The same applies for numerous other connectives with different meanings beyond the scope of this paper.

The examples from our modest corpus also indicate that students lack the competence of the overall textual analysis from the stylistic and pragmatic point of view. This can be explained by obstacles in bottom-up and top-down processing of the text, as well as lack of monitoring and wider learning competence. This binary-type error leads to incorrect choice of equivalent. For example:

Example 32:
ST: *ṣinā'at al-fawānīs*
TT: „industrija",
Suggested translation: „izrada";

Example 33:
ST: *wa yartafi' al-mablaġ li yaṣīr mustaḥilan fī **al-'a'māl** al-muǧamma'a*
TT: „biznis",
Suggested translation: „dela";

Example 34:
ST: ***al-baḫt*** *'an darwīš*
TT: „istraživanje o Dervišu / Pretraga o Dervišu / Potražnja za Dervišom / Traženje Derviša",
Suggested translation: „Potraga za Dervišom / Traganje za Dervišom / U potrazi za Dervišom";

Example 35:
ST: *'abr al-'adīd min **al-taġārib** al-sābiqa*
TT: „u prethodnim brojnim eksperimentima / ispitivanjem broja prethodnih eksperimenata / prethodnih istraživanja",
Suggested translation: „Putem brojnih prethodnh iskustava / Kroz brojna prethodna iskustva".

The main reason for this type of error is the lack of linguistic competence regarding the recognition of appropriate register or functional style, but it can be

also traced to the fact that students tend to implement certain linguistic habits, i.e. previously taught meanings of the terms in question, without questioning them regarding the obvious differences in the context.

6. Conclusion

Analyzed material indicates that the majority of translation errors at word-, phrase – and sentence-level is due to the lack of linguistic competences, led by dominant linear processing of the text, inadequate bottom-up and top-down processing of the text, and not having of learning competence. This results in weaker ability to analyze the contextual linguistic usage, both in form and meaning. Weaknesses in extra-linguistic and translation competencies which were detected also contribute to translation errors suggesting that students need more hands-on translation practice when dealing with linguistic analysis at all levels, as well as when using basic translation tools, such as various dictionaries and encyclopedias. Such practice would improve their overall competences, but it would also boost their self-confidence and autonomy.

We also hope that there will be further interest for this topic. In that manner, we believe that future research of the examined issues should encompass a more detailed look into the analyzed as well as other errors, where a quantitative research of a representative corpus would be a must. Likewise, an investigation into Serbian AFL students' textual/stylistic competences through specifically designed tests would give more precise direction for improving both translation and language classes. We are certain that both translation and language classes would benefit from such research.

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