

Semantic Errors Affecting the Translation of Literary Texts by MA Students

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Abstract: This study investigates the semantic errors in the literary texts that MA students face in translating from English into Arabic and vice versa, and the strategies and techniques that employ and use to whenever they come across any difficulty, during their translating the literary texts. The study is based on translating five literary texts (prose, novel, poem, and short story) that vary in their difficulty. The number of participants in this study was Thirty of the master students, in both, Faculty of Languages and Translation and Center of Translation and Studies – University of Aden. Two different instruments were used to collect the data of the study: The questionnaire and text translated test. Results of the questionnaire and text translated test were analysed by using quantitative and qualitative analysis. The research results revealed that most of the participants in the research lacked the ability to understand the meaning (the main idea of the text), as well as following the literal translation method to avoid deep understanding of the literary text, which leads to the emergence of semantic errors in literary translation. The main recommendations of the study were, providing literary sources and books related to literary texts in libraries of Translation and English department, encouraging students to read different literary texts, attending training courses and workshops in the field of literary translation. For the master's students, the researcher recommends more research in literary aspects, in addition, focusing on meaning away from the literal translation technique.

Key words: Literary Texts, Errors, Semantic Errors, and MA students.

1. Introduction: Translation of literature is fundamentally different from other types of translation. It means that in addition to rendering information to the reader, literary translation has aesthetic functions, starting from this perspective, Tuory (1981, P.11) wrote that literary translation text is "every literary text in the target system (and in target language) which is

equivalent to another text in “source language.” However, literary translation problems remain the most complex, especially when these problems relate to semantic errors and their relationship to understanding the literary text. Kuepper (1977, P.244) supported this idea by stating “a literary text does not have a correlative in an objective reality, but rather generates a fictional reality through the reading process. The meaning cannot be contained in the text but constitutes itself differently each time it is read”. Similarly, Wimonchalao (1994, P. 59) attributes semantic mistakes in translation to a lack of vocabulary and idiom knowledge. She describes that the students have difficulty understanding what words should fit in each context. Even worse, the students do not realize that many English words have various meanings, depending on where and how they are used. Moreover, misinterpretation of noun and pronoun reference can cause semantic errors. Therefore, translating semantic errors is one of the areas in translation studies that is of importance because producing a high-quality piece of translation has always been a matter of concern, Whereby the main principle of literary translation is the dominance of poetic communicative function. The more errors a piece of translation has, the lower quality it possesses.

1.1. Statement of Problem: Literary translation involves literary concepts and expressions which most master’s students are not able to understand when translating from one language to another. It was noticed that the students in English language have a difficult in a concept of understanding the English literary texts and its semantics, literary translation involves concepts and expressions that the students may understand it lexically, but not semantically. Consequently, different literary texts may create problems to translators (students). Inaccuracy in understanding these aspects lead to semantic errors, which negatively affect the translated text. Hence, it is worthy to investigate this issue and to inquiry its implications. In this study, the researcher shed light on the semantic translation errors that master’s students might encounter in the process of literary translation, find out their causes and suggest some solutions to overcome such difficulties.

1.2. Objective of the Study: The current study aims:

- 1- To determine the semantic translation errors that are most common in translating literary texts by MA students.
- 2- To identify the methods of the MA students in translating the literary texts
- 3- To find out possible explanations for the causes of the semantic translation errors in translating literary texts by MA students.
- 4- Suggest suitable solutions to overcome such semantic errors.

1.3. Questions of the Study:

Based on the former research objectives the research questions of this study are:

- 1- What are the semantic translation errors that are most common in translating literary texts by MA students.?
- 2- What are the methods of the MA students in translating the literary texts?
- 3- What are the possible explanations for the causes of the semantic translation errors in translating literary texts by MA students?
- 4- What solutions to solve out these difficulties in literary translation?

1.4. Importance of the Study

The importance of this study is mentioned in the following lines:

It enables students to know the methods of literary translation when teaching a translation course early in their undergraduate studies and before entering graduate studies to develop a specialization. It is necessary to develop and improve the translation curriculum by including literary translation within the course in order to help students and build a knowledge base about literary translation and semantic errors resulting from the lack of correct understanding and in a literary style of what the translated text means, that the interest in refining the literary knowledge of the student at the bachelor's stage inevitably leads to facing the shortcomings in the graduate program while studying specialization in this field. Therefore, it could be said that study is significant as it sheds light on the importance of including the study of literary translation and knowing its semantic errors dimensions, whether in the translation department or the English language department. Nevertheless, there is a need to identify and analyze semantic translation errors. Some researchers note that error analysis is an important tool to learn the psycholinguistic processes (Salebi 2004) and research some “unresolved and partially understood issues” (Ndung’u 2013: 1). In literary translation, it helps to see the cultural and expressions features of the two languages.

In addition, it increases students' awareness of understanding what is meant by (semantic meaning) as one of the basic aspects in understanding literary texts.

Moreover, it promotes and encourages students to use their imagination and develop creative thinking to understand literary translation and avoid falling into semantic errors.

1.5. Limitations of the Study:

The current study is conducted in the Department of Translation, Faculty of languages and Translation, and the Center of Translation. University of Aden. It focused on Semantic Errors Affecting the Translation of Literary Texts by MA Students. The focus of this study was from two perspectives, the general perspective related to literary translation of literary texts, and the specific perspective, which includes semantic errors in the translation of literary texts.

In addition, the study was limited to the MA students of Translation of the Academic Year 2021-2022. It was conducted the first semester of the Academic Year 2021-2022.

2. Literature Review

This section highlights the literature related to the topic of the study. It includes literary translation texts, semantic errors in literary texts and previous studies relevant to the topic of the study.

2.1. Literary texts

Literary texts from general perspective are literary and creative works that are grouped into a variety of genres, including poetry, novels, prose, essays, and plays. On the other hand, Literary translation text, requires a more comprehensive approach to the text for a meaningful and convincing translation. Balbir (1963, p.155) determines quality in literary translation as "that experience by a reader of the translation which transports him to the atmosphere contained in the original through the medium of his own language without feeling that what he is reading is a translation and not an original work." Thus, an ideal translation, according to him, "should be a lively expression of the flexibility and richness of the language into which it is done without sacrificing the flow and style of the original.

Indeed, because it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find a TL word or expression that is identical in both sense/s and communicative value to an SL word or expression, reproducing the style of the SL text and respecting the literary norms of the TL seems to be an impossible task to be accomplished.

Despite these views 'differences, some translation theorists assume, paradoxically enough, that a good translation is that which preserves the stylistic features of the original text without distorting the stylistic norm of the language of the translation. On the other hand, Culler adopts in his *Literary Theory: A Very short introduction* a two-pronged approach: the designation 'literature' serves as 'institutional label', denoting a "speech act or textual event that elicits certain kinds of attention" (ibid.: 27). However, for historical reasons attention of the literary kind has been focused on texts displaying certain features, notably such things as Hermans (2007, p.79) stressed this by saying "foregrounding of language, the interdependence of different levels of linguistic organization, the separation from the practical context of utterance, and the perception of texts as both aesthetic objects and intertextual or self-reflexive construct".

2.2. Semantic error

The concept of "semantic errors" (or "lexical errors") covers several sets of semantic errors. Some of them includes the wrong word in the sentence. The second relates to the use of the incorrect choice of existing word (synonyms, errors that arose due to the lexical incompatibility of this phrase, incorrect matching synonyms (similar words in satire, but with a different dictionary of meaning) Semantics deals with words and their meaning. It is true that culture has impact on words, the meaning should be very intricate. Yemeni's master students have

difficulties selecting a word for a translation task since their exposure to the English culture and knowledge of semantics at their level are very limited. There are certain semantic errors that trigger translation errors. First, Baker (1992) concludes that the semantic errors in translation come from five causes.

(1) The source language concept is not lexicalized in the target language this means that the source language word is well understood in the target language but has no ready equivalent for it.

(2) The source language word is semantically complex It is obvious that if the word is too complicated to understand in a target language, it readily poses a translation problem., and there is a lot of words or vocabulary, it is hard to translate it from English into Arabic because of its complicated meaning (Tongsopit. 2001: 357).

(3) The target language lacks a superordinate or hyponym It is that the target language has no general word for specific lexicons in the source language or, conversely, the target language has no specific terms for some words in the source language.

(4) Differences in expressive meaning this problem deals with the evaluation of word meaning. In other words, each culture has its own attitudes toward the words. The source culture may find a word positive while the target culture considers the same word negative.

(5) The use of loan words in the source text Loanwords poses a problem in translation since their grammar; meaning and prestige are already adapted to suit the borrower's tongue. This adaptation is related to culture and often not realized by second language learners. Kemmer (2003) also has a strong statement that loanwords are troublesome to their users. Once the word is borrowed, its meaning is changed. This meaning adaptation always causes an error in translation. From another perspective, Wimonchalao (1994: 59) attributes semantic errors in translation to a lack of vocabulary and idiom knowledge. She describes that the students have difficulty understanding what words should fit in each context. Even worse, the students do not realize that many English words have various meanings, depending on where and how they are used. Moreover, misinterpretation of noun and pronoun reference can cause semantic errors.

3. Research Methodology

This study used a mixed methods design: qualitative and quantitative design. The quantitative data was collected by the questionnaire; the qualitative data was collected by the literary text. The study consisted of five types of literary texts; thus, the major source was the analysis of papers that gave to them. Structured questionnaires and translated texts test for students comprised the most significant method of data collection. Student's questionnaire has been administrated to thirty of master's students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, and Translation and studies center, University of Aden. It designed to be a comprehensive one in the way that enables the researcher to get answers for the research questions of this study.

3.1. Research Participants

The participants of this study were thirty of master's students, from the Faculty of Languages and Translation/ and Center for Translation and studies, University of Aden. The selection of the students was based on the availability sampling (convenience Sampling), fifteen students were taken from the Faculty of Languages and Translation, and fifteen students from the Center for Translation and Studies. University of Aden.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

The data in this study was collected in two ways, the first method, by instead questionnaire answers, and the second method, by analyzing the translated literary texts. The test consists of five different types of literary texts. The data collection procedure of papers analysis enables the researcher to obtained information on the abilities of the students' translation based on the criteria of, effective test design, the reliability and validity.

The validity and reliability of this test has been checked by a panel of four an expert (from University of Aden and Abyan professors) to find out whether the test and questionnaire questions examine what they are supposed to test.

3.3. Data Analysis

After collection of the questionnaires, they were checked for inclusive and labeled according to categories: accurate, accepted, and wrong answers. Regarding the students' answers to the questionnaire, the answers were classified in data analysis according to the similar answers, in other word, all participants who answer were positive were added together, and the same pattern was followed with the negative, as well as the wrong answers. Although it was difficult to ascertain whether "wrong answer" was due to a genuine lack of knowledge of literary texts and the meaning of semantic errors, or due to the lack of time available.

4. Results and Discussion

The quantitative analysis of the data collected by the questionnaire showed the master's students perspectives of literary translation and semantic errors that appeared through students' translation of literary texts, the questionnaire of this study consisted of 12 items, which included choosing the correct answer and choices between (usually, sometimes, seldom, rarely, never). Figure (1) below shows the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the results of the questionnaire:

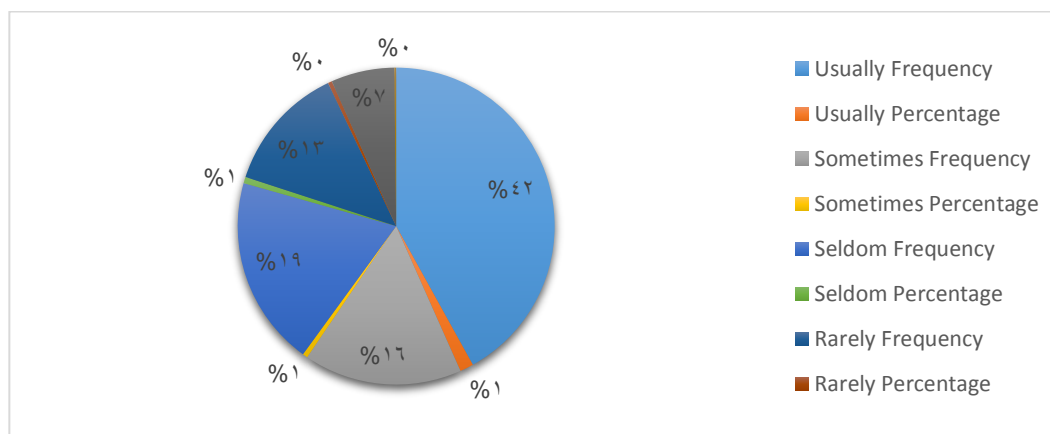


Figure (1)- (shows the interpretation of results of the questionnaire items)

It is clearly shows in figure (1), that MA students had problem in understanding the nature of semantic errors and how to avoid yhis type of errors, because of the wrong understanding of the literary text and focusing mainly on conveying and translating the meaning literally. Microsoft Excel Sheet was used to get the mean score and percentages of student's correct answers in the three categories.

In figure above, (42%) of participants agreed that they are usually interested in literary texts and tried to understand the text as it is, also they think that understanding the text semantically is important to avoid semantic errors and the problem is the lack of knowledge in semantic aspect, as well as (19%) of participants chose the choice of sometimes for the above choices. While (16%) of participants chose (seldom) for answering the items of questionnaire. The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire showed the results as follow:

- Most of participants are interested in literary translation of all types, despite its difficulty.
- Most of the participating students do not have enough knowledge and experience to understand the concept of semantic errors.
- Regarding participants in this research, the most have had difficulty in translating literary texts.

Figure (2) below shows the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the results of test translated text:

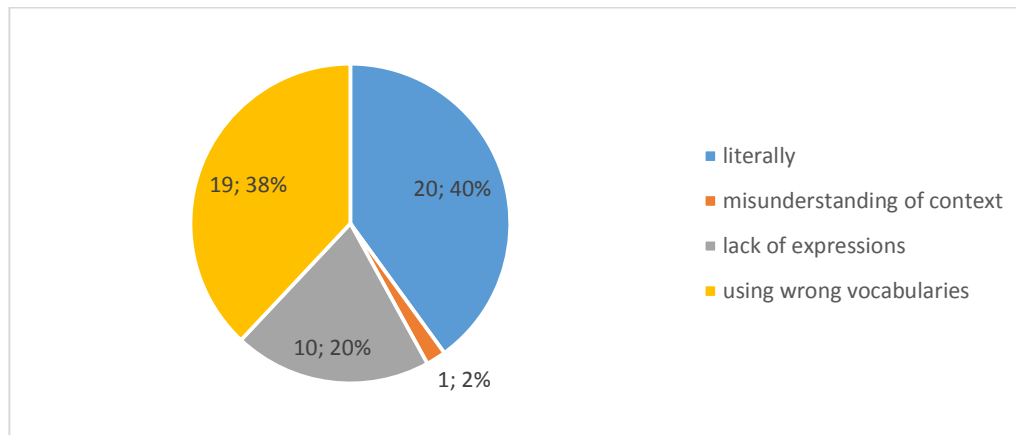


Figure (2)- (shows the interpretation of results of the text translated test)

As for the text-translated test, the researcher followed the method of analysing the content of the text by collecting the similar translation and then compared with the original text, to find out the semantic errors that appeared in the literary texts.

As shown in figure 2. the problem of translation text translated test was in translation literally and focus on the text as separate sentences not as one unit, also the respondents had another problem, which was in misunderstanding the idea of the literary.

Most of the results revealed that there are semantic errors, like those in translated literary texts in style, collocations, and lexical words. It also showed that the greater the differences between the source and the target language, the greater the difficulties. The absence of the Arabic counterpart for certain linguistic areas makes students error.

In the figure above, that (20%) of participants followed literal translation without understanding the texts within the context of the text, as well as (19%) of participants used wrong vocabularies or synonym to in expressing the meaning of the literary texts. While (10%) of participants had a problem in expressing the meaning and the way it was translated to describe the state of the literary texts. The qualitative analysis of the text translated test showed the results as follow:

- Regarding the difficulties that students face in translating a literary text, it is concentrated in understanding the context and idea of the text.
- Regarding the types of translation, and according to the text that was translated by the MA students, the literary text, is one of the most difficult texts, because it includes many rhetorical, aesthetic, and descriptive images of the literary text, which leads to the emergence of many semantic errors that confuse the translation of the text into the target language.

- Regarding the semantic errors in literary texts is one of the most types of errors that may emergence during translation process, simply because the student does not have a full knowledge of the meaning of semantic error, and its relationship to the translated text.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, analysis of the translation from Arabic into English and vice versa, of selected literary texts which were undertaken by a group of MA students uncovers a wide range of semantic errors, since translation is simultaneously a theory and a practice, the translators, beside dealing with the semantic errors inherent to the translation of literature, avoided or overtook to think about the artistic features of the text, its exquisiteness and approach, as well as its marks (lexical, grammatical, or phonological). Students should not forget that the stylistic marks of one language could be immensely different from another.

A blind reliance on word for word rendition has often led to either a meaningless or an incomprehensible rendition of several cultural expressions. Thus, the analysis of the translation from Arabic into English and vice versa of selected short texts, which were individually undertaken, by a group of students uncovers a wide range of semantic errors. The linguistic problems were specifically manifest in a series of recurrent grammatical and semantic errors. The analysis also revealed that the students' translation product suffers from more acute problems in semantics. The major difficulties in this connection have to do with language-specific idiomatic expressions, word collocations, and choice of appropriate vocabulary for the appropriate context, all of what mentioned lead to semantic errors because of inability of understanding the given text semantically. These semantic errors mainly were manifested in the depend on to the literal translation, Inability to find the suitable equivalence (that describe the events within the context) in the target language.

6. Recommendation

This study presents the following recommendation:

- It is recommended that, reading more texts, research and literary articles relating to the semantic perspective in translation the literary texts.
- It is recommended that, the necessity of working on the inclusion of translation subject on regular basis in the bachelor's program, to facilitate practicing literary translation efficiently and effectively.
- It is recommended that, attending training courses and workshops in literary translation.
- It is recommended that, gaining more awareness in the content of literary field.
- It is recommended that teachers should give the chance to adapt teaching methods and strategies in promoting understanding of the meaning of a literary text in a semantic way to understand the meaning more accurately.

- For the master's students, the researcher recommends more research in literary aspects, in addition, focusing on meaning away from the literal translation technique.

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الأخطاء الدلالية المؤثرة في ترجمة النصوص الأدبية من قبل طلاب الماجستير/ تخصص ترجمة

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الملخص: تبحث هذه الدراسة الأخطاء الدلالية في النصوص الأدبية التي تواجه طلاب الماجستير/ ترجمة أثناء ترجمة النصوص الأدبية من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية والعكس، كما تبحث هذه الدراسة الاستراتيجيات والأساليب التي يستخدمها الطلاب في مواجهة الصعوبات والتعقيدات أثناء ترجمه النصوص الأدبية. تعتمد الدراسة على ترجمة خمسة نصوص أدبية (نثر، شعر، رواية، قصيدة وقصة قصيرة) تتفاوت في درجة صعوبتها وسهولتها. بلغ عدد المشاركين في هذه الدراسة ثلاثون طالب ماجستير، في كلا من كلية اللغات والترجمة، ومركز الترجمة والدراسات/ جامعة عدن. وقد تم استخدام اداتين مختلفتين لجمع بيانات الدراسة: اختبار الاستبانة والنص الأدبي المترجم، تم تحليل نتائج الاستبانة واختبار ترجمة النص باستخدام التحليل الكمي والكيفي حيث كشفت نتائج البحث ان معظم المشاركين في البحث يفتقرون الى القدرة على فهم المعنى والفكرة الرئيسية للنص، بالإضافة الى اتباع أسلوب الترجمة الحرفية؛ لتجنب الفهم العميق للنص الأدبي، مما يؤدي بدوره الى ظهور أخطاء دلالية في ترجمة النص الأدبي. تمثلت اهم توصيات الدراسة في ضرورة توفير المصادر والكتب الأدبية ذات العلاقة بالنصوص الأدبية في مكتبات قسم الترجمة واللغة الإنجليزية، تشجيع وتحفيز الطلاب على قراءة النصوص الأدبية على اختلاف أنواعها واساليبها، فيما يتعلق بطلاب الماجستير، يوصي الباحث بمزيد من البحث في الجانب الأدبي، بالإضافة الى التركيز على المعنى وسياق النص ودلالته في ترجمة النص الأدبي بعيدا عن اتباع أسلوب الترجمة الحرفية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النصوص الأدبية، الأخطاء، الأخطاء الدلالية، طلاب الماجستير.