

Error Analysis in Translation Pedagogy (A Study of EFL Students at Al-Saeed University)

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ABSTRACT

Students who are studying translation face challenges and unique problems when they translate texts from Arabic into English and vice versa. Therefore, a study of translation errors is needed to investigate the most common types of translation errors that affect the process of translating from Arabic into English, and vice versa. The purpose of this study is to examine the translation errors of fourth year students in the Bachelor of Arts program in translation studies at Al-Saeed University (SU) in Yemen. During SU's academic year 2021-2022, data was collected in order to determine the extent to which the formal training of students contributes to the errors they make during the translation process. This study argues that the problems encountered by translators can be overcome or minimised if factors such as literary genre, gender, and directionality in the process of translation are considered. It was concluded that there is a relationship between the directionality of the translation (i.e., Arabic to English, and vice versa) and errors. The outcomes of this study will be used to improve translation courses and graduate translation competency in Yemen. This study recommends that teaching materials should be updated, and that all translation sub-competencies be assessed.

Keywords: Error Analysis (EA), Translation errors (TE), Source text (ST), Target text (TT).

1. Introduction

1.1 Errors in Translation Pedagogy

The analysis of translation errors has played a great role in language pedagogy since the 1950s. Nonetheless, in the 1970s, a new, demanding role for error analysis (EA) emerged in applied linguistics research. In 1980, EA achieved a transitional development in the field of applied linguistics (Richards,1980). Since then, there has been a great bulk of literature on the types, causes, and assessments of errors committed by student translators.

Errors are common and prominent characteristics of learning any language, which raises one of the significant questions in this study: what are the causes of learners' errors? Errors indicate the nature of the difficulties that language learners face; and can be useful to learners, particularly when they are able to correct the errors themselves. Therefore, different approaches and methods have been used to categorize and study the mistakes that language students make, and the methods through which they are checked and graded.

The way of categorizing and evaluating translation errors differs from one linguist to another, and accordingly, there exists no systematic model to distinguish their nature, causes, and seriousness in context. There are many causes of translation errors, such as misunderstanding or misusing of vocabulary, which may cause serious problems in translation. Pym (1992) identified two types of translation errors: binary and non-binary errors. Pym (1992) explained that "binary errors refer to any errors that count as incorrect translation, whereas non-binary errors refer to a translation that is not totally wrong but may not be appropriate and can be improved" (1992:118). Burt and Kiparsky (1974) distinguished between global and local errors. The former affects "the overall structure of a sentence" and the latter affects "a particular constituent" (1974:73).

Corder (1974) classified errors into three categories: (1) pre-systematic errors, (2) systematic errors, and (3) post-systematic errors. Errors that occur because of ignorance of the rules in the target language (TL) are called pre-systemic errors. Systemic errors are those that occur as a result of learning incorrect rules. Post systematic errors, also known as "slips," occur when learners utilize language that they have already mastered, but are sloppy, weary, or experiencing cognitive overload (their concentration is strained). Errors also occur when the learner is fully aware of the TL rules but uses them inconsistently. Corder's study (1976) also identified a model for error analysis that included collecting, identifying, describing, explaining, and evaluating or correcting errors, as shown in Figure (1). Similarly, Ellis (1995) expanded on this model, giving an example to identify and analyze the errors of the learners: "(1) the initial step requires the selection of a corpus of language followed by (2) the identification of errors; (3) Then, classification of errors. After giving a

grammatical analysis of each error, the next step is to explain the different types of errors” (1995: p.51-52).

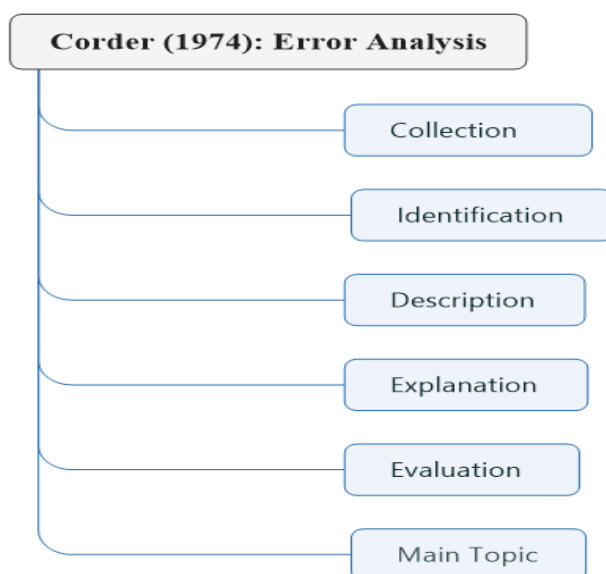


Figure (1): Corder’s (1974) Steps in Error Analysis

Selinker (1974) on the other hand, categorized errors into three types: simplification, communication-based errors, and teaching-induced errors. According to him, a simplification error is any type of error made by the learner when attempting to reduce the target language to a less complex system. However, when the learner names an object wrongly, but communicates a chosen concept successfully, it is called a communication-based error. Teaching-induced errors are the result of inappropriate training. James (1998:178) further subcategorizes teaching-induced errors into (a) material-induced, (b) teacher-talk, (c) exercise-based, (d) induced by pedagogical priority, and (e) look-up errors.

Na Pham (2005:146) classified linguistic errors into five taxonomies. They are morphological, grammatical, syntactic, collocational, and inappropriate word form. Selinker and Gass (2008) identified six steps of conducting error analysis: Collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, quantifying errors, analysing sources, and remediating. Yet, a considerable number of researchers hold the view that errors provide significant information on the strategies that learners use to acquire a language (Corder 1967 1974; Richards, 1974; Taylor, 1975; Dulay and Burt, 1974). These studies on classifying errors are valuable in shaping the second stage of assessment; the evaluation of errors to promote learning and foster learner’s

achievement.

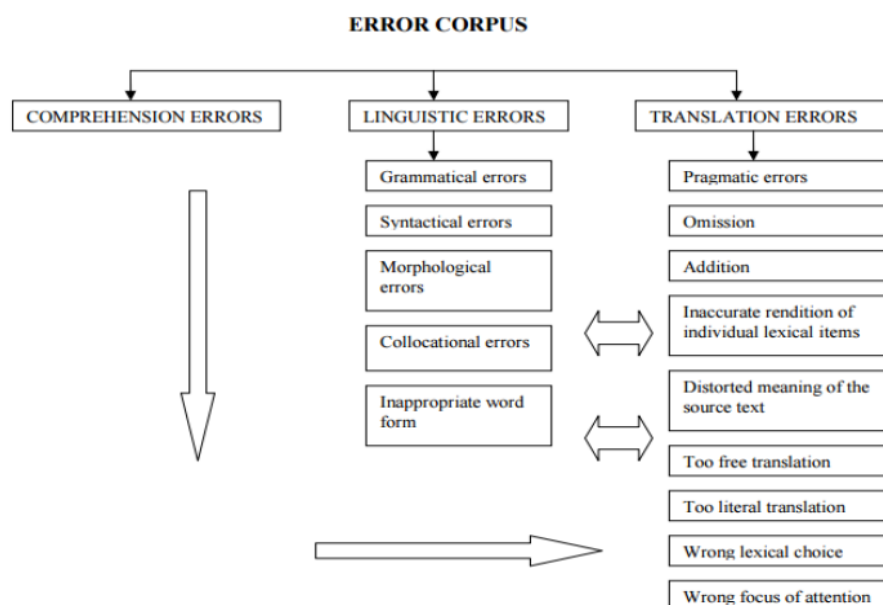


Figure 1. Na Pham's (2005) Error Analysis Model

Translation errors are usually caused by a perceived lack of equivalence between the source and target languages (Baker: 1992). However, knowledgeable, experienced translators of both the source and target languages are able to deal with potential translation errors effectively. Errors can thus be used to gauge the quality of a translation, as well as reveal the thoughts of the translator (Seguinot: 1990). Students generally make fewer linguistic mistakes when they have a clear understanding of the context into which they are translating (Nord, 1997; 74). Translators must do the same; they must first understand the conditions under which they will be translating something. Translators will cling to the source-text if they cannot imagine who is being addressed and for what purpose (Nord, 1997; 74).

When translators fail to achieve their translation goal, the translation is often labelled as "bad translation." Translation errors are frequently connected to one another which indicates that an error has an impact on other errors. This is also true of the solutions to such errors. Just as errors are often interconnected, their solutions equally have an impact on further solutions to other errors. This can be understood as a series of networks or hierarchies in which one problem's solution influences how other problems are addressed (Nord, 1997; 75).

Translators must consider not only how to translate the text accurately, but also the cultural and linguistic context in which the translated text will be used. Translators face a challenging task in the sense that they cannot perform if they do not understand the meaning of the words or phrases they are translating. As a result, learning how to assess translation errors should be incorporated into curricula in order to give students

and teachers useful information about whether students are progressing, and whether teaching methods are working. Participants should be able to see clear evidence that a curriculum's goals and objectives have been met through an assessment process. Quality of education is largely determined by sound assessment (Sawyer, 2004). However, translation theorists use different methods to evaluate the quality of their work.

The objectives of this study are to:(1) evaluate the most frequent error types by literary genre in Arabic to English translations and vice versa, (2) determine probable explanations for the causes of these errors.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:(1) What are the most common errors by literary genre? (2) Is there any relationship between the text types and the errors which occur during the process of translation? (3) Is there a correlation between the types of errors made by participants in each literary genre?

The following hypotheses are tested in this study: (1) There is no statistically significant difference at $\alpha = 0.05$ between genders of the participants and their translation errors; (2) There is no statistically significant difference at $\alpha = 0.05$ between text type and translation errors; (3) There is no statistically significant difference at $\alpha = 0.05$ between directionality and translation errors.

2. Literature Review

There is extensive literature on translation-related error analysis, but this study focuses only on some of those studies that are relevant to the discussion.

Badawi (2008) studied how 43 Saudi students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) translated culturally-bound terms and expressions at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. The data was collected in the form of translation a test and questionnaire. The analysis showed that 86.05% of students failed the test, and their translations were literal. The data showed that students' skill levels were poor in translating cultural expressions. Moreover, the study suggested some educational implications and made recommendations about translation in general and translating culturally-bound expressions in particular. Similarly, Dweik & Abu-Shaqra (2011) examined the mistakes committed by 35 students enrolled in master's programs in translation at three Jordanian universities. They investigated the problems encountered when translating collocations in 45 short sentences from religious texts: the Qur'an, Hadith, and the Bible. The master's students encountered difficulties while translating collocations at the lexical and semantic levels. The study indicated that the students were not aware of culturally-bound collocations and expressions, and noticeable differences between the two cultures.

Zagood & Juma (2012) studied the problems of translating relative clauses from English into Arabic, and vice versa, among fourth-year Libyan students at El-Mergib University. The study explored different types of errors when translating relative clauses and relative pronouns in both Arabic and English. Additionally, the study recommended establishing a new program in which translation courses should be taught separately. Similarly, Shamsan & Attayib (2016) investigated some of the

morpho-syntactic translation errors made by fourth-year students in the English Department (Translation Program) at the University of Science and Technology (UST) in Yemen. In the empirical study, the students were given a test of twenty sentences in English and twenty in Arabic to be translated into both Arabic and English, respectively. The findings showed that the students made significant errors at the grammatical level while translating from Arabic into English. The study, likewise, did not show obvious differences in the translation of agreement, word order, mood, and condition. The study recommended adding a contrastive analysis course and another Arabic language courses to the translation program in UST's Department of English.

Mohammed (2018) examined the linguistics problems students at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia faced when translating Arabic texts into English. The study further focused on the pedagogical implications of these problems. Using a quantitative approach in collecting data, the results revealed that the students made common grammatical and lexical errors. These errors hindered the process of translation from Arabic into English and made the tasks of the instructor more difficult. The study provided recommendations on the admission of students to the English department, the need to improve the syllabus, the adoption of new teaching methods, and the implementation of a set of standards for translation assessment. Jabak (2019) likewise highlighted the problems that Saudi students encountered while translating articles from Arabic into English. A test was given to 25 students in their first semester of the academic year 2019 at the Community College of King Saud University. Results revealed that almost half of the students could not render accurate equivalent translations into English. Based on the different types of errors, the researcher recommended the need for further studies on the main difficulties in translating articles from Arabic into English and vice versa.

Shahata (2020) examined challenges with sentence translation among Arabic-speaking EFL students. Both descriptive and analytical methodologies were used in the study. The research focused on fourth-year students at the College of Education at Omdurman Islamic University in Sudan. The sample consisted of 30 English students from the Education College. The data was collected using a test, and the results were analyzed using the SPSS software. The study focused on EFL students who had difficulty translating. The study found that students possessed little background knowledge of how to translate English to Arabic; they lacked the ability to translate Arabic sentences into English, and struggled with translating English proverbs into Arabic. The study also noted that the students do not take courses on English-speaking cultures, which likely negatively impacted their ability to translate English proverbs into Arabic.

Ariani & Artawa (2022) analyzed grammatical errors that occur in English public sign translations in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, as well as the factors that contribute to inaccuracies in translation. Their study gathered data from five public signs and their

English translations. Van Valin's (1993) theory was used to formulate the first research question. The second question drew on Vinay & Darbelnet's (2000) theory. The findings revealed the presence of errors in the grammatical development of noun phrases, the use of auxiliary verbs, the formation of verbal phrases, spelling, the production of prepositional phrases, and the usage of tenses in the public signage translations. Additionally, the inaccuracies were caused by insufficient translation procedures, including a lack of understanding of grammar in the target language (TL), and the translators' strong preference for the source language's (SL) syntactical grammar. The study showed that any sort of translation inaccuracy could be the result of one language interfering with the other excessively.

The studies mentioned above have primarily focused on the common errors and problems that arise when translating different literary genres. More empirical research is required to determine the most common translation error types related to literary genre, as well as whether there is a relationship between gender, text, and directionality in students' translations, or if it is another psychological factor influencing their translations. In any case, these errors are often overlooked as an important aspect of translator training, which include things like trainee employability, and desirable skills among graduate translators.

3. Research Methodology

An exploratory sequential mixed method design is used in this study. First, qualitative data was gathered and analyzed, followed by quantitative data. This design was used because quantitative data can be used to confirm or validate the qualitative findings of this study.

To investigate the sources of the translation errors, the collected data was compiled and evaluated through PSPP (a software for statistical analysis). Furthermore, this study follows Selinker and Gass (2008)'s qualitative strategy, which combines data collection, error detection and classification, quantification of errors, error cause analysis, and error remediation. The data of translation errors was validated using frequency counts and percentages.

3.1 Sample of the Study

This study employs stratified sampling, in which participants were divided into strata based on gender. After the subgroups were divided, each was randomly sampled using a different probability method. Stratified sampling was used because the sample can be divided into mutually exclusive and exhaustive subgroups with different mean values for the variables under analysis. This method of sampling provides more precise statistical estimates of most forms of measurement (with lower variance). Using a large enough sample from each gender group, and using stratified sampling, provided more precise conclusions.

This empirical study was carried out at Al-Saeed University's Department of English and Translation in Yemen during the academic year 2021-2022. A random sample

group of fourth-year students was chosen for their advanced translation skills in both languages. At that time this study was conducted, the participants had completed multiple translation and interpreting courses and were exposed to a technology-enhanced courses that employ a plethora of Web 2.0 tools and various technology software that aid in the translation process.

The texts that were given to the sample group of student translators were collated from a collection of short stories by Abdul-Wali (1966) titled, “Alard, ya Salma” (“Our Land, Salma”); Alburno (n.d.)” Faltarah” and an article from UN News (2021), “Five million Yemenis are ‘one step away from hunger,’ says UN aid coordinator to Security Council”. In order to serve the purpose of this study, participants were asked to translate texts from Arabic into English and vice versa.

It was determined that the students’ translation sheets contained linguistic, comprehension, and text-specific errors. Using the error taxonomies of Nord (1997) and Na Pham (2005), the different types and distinctions of errors were noted. In this step, the errors that necessitated additional explanation or attention were identified. This process was necessary for analyzing and comprehending the translation errors made by the students.

4.Theoretical Framework

The following sections discuss how translation errors were examined using an integrated approach suggested by Nord (1997) and Na Pham (2005).

4.1 Nord’s (1997) Classification of Translation Errors

Nord (1997) identified four types of translation errors: pragmatic, cultural, linguistic, and text specific. Linguistic translation errors occur when the source text’s meaning and sense are not transferred utilizing target language structures.

Most linguistic translation errors are the result of “deficiencies in the translator’s source-or target-language competence” (Nord 1997:77). According to Nord (1997:78), for students with poor language abilities, translating becomes “an instrument for foreign-language learning, with the focus on linguistic correctness rather than communicative or functional appropriateness.” Thus, it is critical that a person has adequate language proficiency before pursuing a career as a translator.

Cultural translation errors occur as a result of poor decisions when rendering culturally distinctive customs into the target language. Text-specific translation errors, on the other hand, can be linked back to the translation’s suitability for the intended audience (Nord, 1997). Pragmatic translation errors result from a lack of understanding of how to handle ambiguity in the original material. When an inadequate decision is made when translating a source text into the target language in terms of culture, translation problems often arise (Nord, 1997:75).

4.2 Na Pham's (2005) Translation Errors Analysis Model

This study also uses Na Pham's (2005) "Translation Error Analysis Model", which examines three aspects of translation: comprehension and transfer errors. Because this study includes English and Arabic as both SL and TL, the type of translation and comprehension errors often varied. Comprehension errors are caused by a misreading of a word or a misunderstanding of the structure of a sentence in the source text, resulting in the translation being based on a misunderstanding (Na Pham, 2005). Popescu (2013) asserted, "most of the errors in this case [of misreading] are due to misunderstanding of lexis, distorted meaning and to some extent, limited linguistic (morphological) competence" (p. 245).

Transfer errors occur during the translation process and are related to "transfer competence" (Na Pham, 2005: 148). When learners produce a grammatically and semantically correct phrase or sentence, but its application is inappropriate for the communicative setting, this is known as a pragmatic error. Both types of errors refer to the failure to convey the source text's objectives, expectations, or typical implicatures in the target language.

5. Data Analysis

The most frequent translation errors were comprehension errors (483) (59,92 %), followed by linguistic errors (176) (21,82%) and text specific errors (147) (18,24 %), respectively as illustrated in Table (1) and Figure (3):

Table (1) Schematic Category of Error Types and Frequencies

Row Labels	Sum of Value	Sum of Frequency	Sum of Percent	Sum of Cum Percent
CE/incorrect translation of words/expressions	17	18	2,23	81,76
CE/connotative meaning	9	40	4,96	26,8
CE/inappropriate rendition of metaphor	16	29	3,6	79,53
CE/incorrect translation of colloquial expressions	14	103	12,78	68,61
CE/misunderstanding of collocation	10	20	2,48	29,28
CE/misunderstanding of long sentences	12	101	12,53	51,86
CE/misunderstanding of socio-cultural nuances	11	81	10,05	39,33
CE/translating idiomatic Expressions	13	32	3,97	55,83
CE/translating simile into non-simile	15	59	7,32	75,93
LE/incorrect use of cause–effect adverbial clauses	2	15	1,86	8,06
LE/violated subject–verb agreement in no phrases	1	50	6,2	6,2
LE/wrong use of articles	5	15	1,86	15,51
LE/wrong use of negative particles	7	18	2,23	20,84
LE/wrong use of prepositions	4	15	1,86	13,65
LE/wrong use of singular and plural noun	6	25	3,1	18,61
LE/wrong use of tense	8	8	0,99	21,84
LE/wrong use of the indefinite article	3	30	3,72	11,79
TE/coherence problems	18	50	6,2	87,97
TE/cohesion errors	19	39	4,84	92,8
TE/omissions	21	4	0,5	95,29
TE/punctuation	22	35	4,34	99,63
TE/spelling	23	3	0,37	100
TE/transliteration	20	16	1,99	94,79
Total	276	806	99,98	1195,91

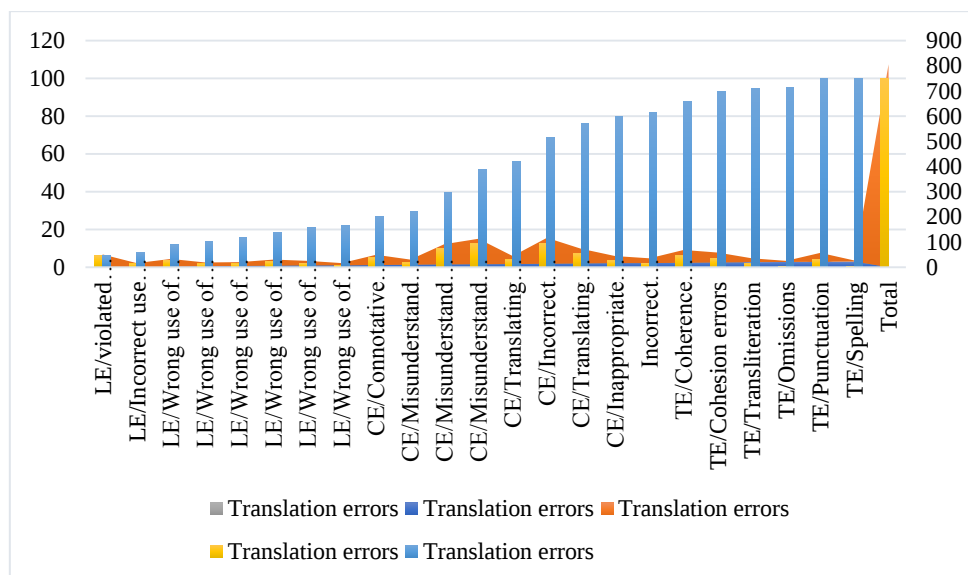


Figure (3): Schematic Category of Errors

An ANOVA test was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant correlation between the translation errors of students and their gender. The Tables (2) and (3) summarize the ANOVA test's results.

5.1. ONEWAY/VARIABLES=ERRORS BY GENDER /STATISTICS=DESCRIPTIVES HOMOGENEITY.

Table (2): Category of Errors by Gender

Descriptives									
						95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Translation errors	Male	486	11,98	5,66	,26	11,47	12,48	1,00	23,00
	Female	320	12,14	5,29	,30	11,56	12,72	1,00	22,00

	<i>Total</i>	806	12,04	5,51	,19	11,66	12,42	1,00	23,00
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Test of Homogeneity of Variances				
	<i>Levene Statistic</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Translation errors	2,45	1	804	,118

ANOVA						
		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Translation errors	<i>Between Groups</i>	5,27	1	5,27	,17	,677
	<i>Within Groups</i>	24478,38	804	30,45		
	<i>Total</i>	24483,65	805			

The data in Table (2) indicates that there is no statistically significant correlation between the gender of participants and translation errors they made. No statistically significant correlation was found between the gender of students and the translation errors at the (0.05) level of significance. The *F*-value was (0.17), indicating no significant relationship at $\alpha=0.05$ since the $p\text{-value}>0.05$ ($p=0.677$). This confirms the null hypothesis (H_0) of ANOVA that shows zero difference between the two groups. In other words, the data in Table (2) answers the first question of the study; demonstrating no statistically significant correlation at $\alpha=0.05$ between the gender of the participants and their translation errors.

Similarly, an ANOVA test was conducted to determine whether a statistically significant correlation exists between the text type (e.g., literary, popular, etc.) and translation errors made by the students. Table (3) shows the results of this ANOVA test.

5.2 ONEWAY/VARIABLES= ERRORS BY TEXT/STATISTICS=DESCRIPTIVES
HOMOGENEITY.

Table (3): Category of Errors by Text

Descriptives									
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Translation errors	<i>Literary</i>	696	12,47	5,30	,20	12,08	12,86	1,00	22,00
	<i>General</i>	110	9,33	6,06	,58	8,18	10,47	4,00	23,00
	<i>Total</i>	806	12,04	5,51	,19	11,66	12,42	1,00	23,00

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Translation errors	10,47	1	804	,001

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Translation errors	<i>Between Groups</i>	938,06	1	938,06	32,03	,000
	<i>Within Groups</i>	23545,58	804	29,29		
	<i>Total</i>	24483,65	805			

As the data in Table (3) indicates, a statistically significant correlation was found between the text type and translation errors at the (0.05) level of significance. The *F*-value was (32.03), and the *p*-value < 0.05 (*p*=0.000) is considered statistically significant. This provides significant evidence against the null hypothesis (*H*₀) of ANOVA, with less than a 5% chance of the correctness of the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis, which can therefore be rejected, states there is no statistically significant correlation between text type and the translation errors they made.

An ANOVA test to determine whether there is a statistically significant relation between the directionality of the text (i.e., Arabic into English or vice versa) was also conducted. The results are shown in Table (4).

5.3 ONEWAY /VARIABLES= ERRORS BY DIRECTIONALITY/STATISTICS=DESCRIPTIVES HOMOGENEITY.

Table (4): Category of Errors by Directionality

Descriptives									
						95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Translation errors	A-E	704	12,58	5,37	,20	12,18	12,98	1,00	22,00
	E-A	102	8,33	5,09	,50	7,33	9,33	4,00	23,00
	Total	806	12,04	5,51	,19	11,66	12,42	1,00	23,00

Test of Homogeneity of Variances				
	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Translation errors	,04	1	804	,847

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Translation errors	Between groups	1605,28	1	1605,28	56,41	,000
	Within groups	22878,37	804	28,46		
	Total	24483,65	805			

As the data in Table 4 shows, there is a relationship between the directionality of the text and translation errors. The *F*-value was (56.41), and the *p*-value < 0.05 (*p*=0.000). The null hypothesis is thus disproved. The alternative hypothesis (*H_a*) shows that at least one group deviates significantly from the dependent variable's overall mean.

6. Conclusion

Of the three dimensions covered in this study (linguistic, comprehension, and translation), comprehensive errors were the most frequent committed by most students. The results also revealed that students performed the best when rendering

lexical items accurately, constructing syntax, and employing English collocations. Translation errors can be traced to inter-lingual and intra-lingual interference or the integration of both, as there is frequent overlap between them.

The findings of this study could be useful to both teachers and students. This study may help teachers understand different translation mistakes made by students as well as the reasons behind them. In turn, this could assist with developing ideal teaching methods and resources, as well as greater focus on instruction in areas where students struggle. The students' errors highlighted the language components that they generally found challenging. This can be used to decide which areas need more focus. Future researchers in general, and students of translation in particular, who want to conduct error analysis, could use this study as a further reference.

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