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Literal Translation

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my parents, for your constant love and support.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, we would like to express all our undeniable and unforgettable thanks to the most graceful and most compassionate the almighty ALLAH that has provided us with lot of blessings that can never be counted.

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Abstract

So many ages had passed over since the first invention of translation and so many kinds, types and methods of it had been created through that time.

One of these methods is literal translation, which is widely known for so much of scholars and translators who are interested in translating literature, religion verses and medicine books and so on the wide field of translation.

Literal translation is the easiest method to use, since it doesn't need so many changes in the sentence shape, and it's just like a mirror but in another language for that sentence.

In this paper we will focus the lights on literal translation and its definitions which is not really various from scholar to another, and also, we will talk about its kinds that turns out it contains more than one, you will see in this paper mostly we'll talk about Arabic - English translation.

The second chapter will be about some problems that we face when we want to translate, firstly with some verbs, As a grammatical problem. Then we will discuss some lexical problem that's focuses on the meaning mostly.

Introduction

Since before history decades translation is the tool to transfer wisdom, and experiences in between nations.

And some nations are vanished from the face of this planet because no one understand their language, so no one carried the torch of their legacy.

Nations like Sumerians, the old Egyptians and the Greek philosophers, how did we get their wisdom?

How did we know about their great idols?

Their gods, their legacy?

Easy! Translation.

Translation, by dictionary definition, consists of changing from one state or form to another, to turn into one's own or another's language. Translation is basically a change of form. When we speak of the form of a language, we are referring to the actual words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, etc., which are spoken or written. These forms are referred to as the surface structure of a language. It is the structural part of language which is actually seen in print or heard in speech. In translation the form of the source language is replaced by the form of the receptor (target) language. (Larson.P.3).

This research paper aims to delve deeper into the concept of literal translation, and to study its benefits and limitations in interlingual communication. By exploring the theoretical foundations and practical applications of literal translation, we seek to highlight its implications for translators, language learners and intercultural communication.

The paper will begin by providing definitions of literal translation and its types. And learn about its uses. Furthermore, Furthermore, we will examine the potential problems of a literal translation.

Chapter 1

1.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation probably would be the first kind of translation that appeared to exist, in the old days it was more useful than now. In our modern life, literal translation, according to a lot of scholars and translators, considered as the worst kind of translation the translator could utilize as a method. We can see its flaws and the problems that it makes.

But let's start with the definition, and just like everything else in the world there are too many definitions for literal translation.

“Literal translation is defined as the process of translating individual words. Translation is as simple as finding the TL term that means the same thing in SL, independent of any variations in syntax, word order, context, or use. Plus, the SL is the center of attention, and the TL's job is to mindlessly mimic it and reflect it back to it in an exacting manner. Therefore, it is popular among novices in particular since it appears to be an uncomplicated, basic method of translation.” (Rasheed.P.14).

So according to the definition, literal translation mostly cares about the word itself not its use in the sentence. Like if we want to translate for example from Arabic to English:

المدرسة	الى	الذهاب	عليّ
school	to	going	On me

As we can see in this example the translation of each word is correct as an individual but if we put it in a sentence, it would be disastrous and the meaning would be broken.

عليّ

Means in English "I have to".

But if we performed literal translation, and focused on individual words, the meaning will be "on me".

Which is weak and useless and it can't be used as I have to.

Another definition which is close and almost similar to the first:

“Literal translation is a translation that attempt to follow the source language form.” (Larson.P.17).

And also:

“This method regards translation to be a translation of individual words. All we have to do is find the equivalent word in Arabic for the English word, regardless of differences in grammar, word order, context or special use. Moreover, the whole concentration is on the source language, whereas the target language should follow, imitate and mirror it blindly, perfectly and precisely, neither more nor less. Thus, it seems an easy, straightforward way of translation.” (Ghazala.P.5).

So as the scholars above are saying, literal translation can be used if the two languages, source and target language, are similar or close in grammars or the shape of sentence.

Let's take Arabic and English language as an example...

Most of Arabic sentences formed like

Verb+ subject+ etc.

قاد محمد السيارة صباحا.

The English language is just as basic as Arabic so most of the sentences are formed as

Subject+ verb+ etc.

He drives the car in the morning.

Although there is a switch in places between verb and subject in the two languages.

But the most of the sentence is similar in grammars and can performed a literal translation on the most of the sentence.

The similarity of English and Arabic language in grammar and form makes them one of the best languages to make literal translation from its texts.

And now if we want to translate from English (SL) to Arabic (TL) by using the two methods of translation, literal and free it would be like this:

Ahmed drives the car in the morning.

احمد يقود السيارة في الصباح.

يقود احمد السيارة صباحا.

Look at the two translations in Arabic, we can point out that the first one is literal because it's just like a mirror and performed the transformation between languages perfectly in grammar and meaning.

And we could look at the free translation in the second sentence it almost similar to the literal. However, the literal here is equal to the free and can be use instead.

As we can see the Arabic and the English languages are good to be used in basic and simple sentences if we want to do a literal translation. Because of the similarity as we said in grammar and form of sentences.

1.2 Kinds of Literal Translation

As we discern in the previous pages, there are various definitions of literal translation,

Therefore, there are different kinds. There are three kinds for literal translation, as "Ghazala" described them:

1.2.1 Word-for-Word Translation:

Each English word is translated into an equivalent word in Arabic which is kept the same as, and in line with that of English.

For example (Ghazala.P.4):

- A. I will travel to Basra tomorrow
انا سوف اسافر الى البصرة غدا
- B. Ahmed wants to marry Layla at the dawn
احمد يريد الى زواج ليلي في الفجر
- C. I spy with my eye a beautiful book
انا اتجسس مع عيني جميل كتاب

As we can see.

We only need the equivalent of the word from the source language in the target language. It can be used, like the first sentence, it gives the right equivalents and in right grammar and it can be understandable.

However, the other two sentences are really weak and they can't be taken as real translations because even if we found the equivalents but it could never be used in the real sentence and gives the real meaning.

1.2.2 One-to-One Translation:

"One-to-one translation" is to Newmark "a broader form of translation, each SL word has a corresponding TL word". It respects collocational meanings in their powerful context. He also adds, "one-to-one translation is more common than

word-for-word translation This method of translation means to translate each SL word or phrase into an identical word or phrase in the TL, with the same number, grammatical class and type of language. That is, a noun is translated into a noun, two nouns into two nouns, one adjective into one adjective, two into two, and so on and so forth. In a similar way, an idiom should be translated into an idiom, a collocation into a collocation, a proverb into a proverb, a metaphor into a metaphor, etc. All these translations are done in context, not out of context, for example (Ghazala.P.6):

SL	TL
a. My neighbors are good.	(جيرانى يكونون طبيين)
b. Sanyo is a well-known trademark.	(سانيو تكون علامة تجارية معروفة جيداً)
c. He is a young man. He is kind-hearted.	(هو يكون رجلاً شاباً. هو يكون طيب القلب)
d. Sara loves reading wholly and heartedly.	(سارة تحب المطالعة كلية ومن كل قلبها)
e. I have blind confidence in you.	(أنا أملك ثقة عمياء بك)
f. Let us shake hands.	(دعنا نتصافح بالأيدي)
g. Show me your back.	(أرني عرض أكتافك)
h. A true friend does nor stab in the back.	(الصديق الحقيقي لا يطعن في الظهر)
i. All that glitters is not gold	(ما كل ما يلمع ذهباً)
j. This mission is a can of worms.	(هذه المهمة تكون حفنة مشاكل)

It is important to point out that such Arabic translations might look too primitive, or unreasonable to expect even from a beginner. The case may be so, but personal practice and experience with the students of translation, especially at early stages, in different Arab Countries, confirm the fact that these translations are frequently come across. Not only this, unfortunately and not surprisingly, some practitioners of translation produce similar versions from time to time.

Therefore, it is perhaps more acceptable and better than word-for-word translation. (Ghazala.P.7).

1.2.3 Direct Translation:

This type of translation is keen on translating meaning as closely, accurately and completely as possible. It can also be called close, or DIRECT translation. It is the translation of meaning in context; it takes into account the TL grammar and word order. Metaphorical and special uses of language are also accounted for in the TL. In this sense, it can be described as the ‘full translation of meaning’.

Indeed, it can be described as the best method of literal translation. It has a different view to literal meaning. Literal meaning is not one single, unchanged direct meaning for a word, but its different meanings in different texts, contexts and combinations with other words. For example, ‘run’ does not always mean (يجري) in all texts and contexts. Therefore, we cannot say that this is the literal meaning of ‘run’. Rather, it is more precisely described as its common or primary meaning. Usually, these two meanings –literal and common- are taken to be one and the same meaning, which is applied to all meanings of the same word. This is not quite acceptable, for ‘run’ is a polysemous word with different meanings in different contexts, each of which is its literal (or real, precise or contextual) meaning in a certain context, for example (Ghazala.P.8-9):

SL	TL
1. "To run in the race"	(يجري/يركض في السباق)
2. "To run a company"	(يدير شركة)
3. "In the long run"	(على المدى البعيد)
4. "To run short of money"	(ينفذ ماله)
5. "To run round"	(يطوف/يقوم بزيارة خاطفة)
6. "To run to fat"	(يميل إلى السمنة)
7. "To run through"	(يتصفح/يمر مرور الكرام)
8. "To run wild"	(يتيه/يسير على هواه)
9. "To run across"	(يصادف)
10. "To run back"	(يعود بذاكرته إلى الوراء)
11. "To run into"	(يلقى مصادفة/يصادف)
12. "To run its course"	(يأخذ مجراه الطبيعي)
13. "To run in"	(ينضد السطور المطبعية/يقحم/يعتقل ويرمي في السجن)
14. "To run on"	(يستمر)

Chapter 2

2.1 Problems of Literal Translation

Literal translation, just like every translation method, it contains lots of problems that's may affect its efficiency and ruin what we are translating. And literal translation reputation is widely known for its errors, mistranslation and problems. We are here going to discuss it.

We mostly talk about Arabic and English language translations. Because it's the easiest way we can figure the problems of this method in our language.

2.1.1 Grammatical Problems

English and Arabic belong to two different and distant language families. Their grammars are sharply different. Several grammatical features of English create variable problems of translation into Arabic. Experiences shows that one of the primary mistakes committed by students of translation is their presupposition that English grammar and Arabic grammar can translate each other in a straightforward way. To confirm that, the problems of translating the most prominent points of English grammar into Arabic are discussed below with some suggested solutions. (Faris.P.5).

2.1.1.1 Translation of Verb "Be"

Literal Translation of 'am, is, are'.

When these verbs are the main and only verbs in the sentence, many students translate them literally into (يكون), which is a poor translation, for example:

1. I am a student. (أنا اكون طالبا)
2. She is kind. (هي تكون طيبة)
3. You are a father. (انت تكون ابا)

The solution, am, is, are, can be omitted altogether, thus 'changing the English verbal sentences into Arabic nominal ones: i.e. into a topic and comment (مبتدأ وخبر)

each, for example:

1. I am a student. (أنا طالب)
2. She is kind. (هي طيبة)
3. You are a father. (انت أب)

Therefore, verb "be" in the present simple is used here to connect as much as equate between two words. It is exactly like saying: $X=Z$, thus:

I = student: طالب = انا

She = kind: طيبة = هي

You = father: اب = انت

that is why it is called an "equative verb".

The same applies to the translation of "am, is, and are" when used as auxiliary verbs to form the present progressive tense and the present passive voice. A good number of students translate them literally.

1- I am leaving now. (أنا اكون اغادر / مغادر الآن)

2. He is eating an apple. (هو يكون يأكل / اكل " تفاحة)

3- We are speaking English. (نحن نكون نتكلم / متكلمين الإنكليزية)

The good versions of these examples drop verb "be" as follows

1- I am leaving now. (انا اغادر الآن / انا مغادر الآن)

2. "He is eating an apple. (هو يأكل تفاحة)

3. "We are speaking English. (نحن نتكلم الانكليزية)

Verb "be" disappears completely in Arabic translation simply because there is no equivalent tense in Arabic. Therefore, the progressive tense or the time of action an adverb like "now" (الآن) is the only way to refer to the time of action. (Faris.P.5-7).

2.1.1.2 Translation of Personal Pronouns

English personal pronouns have a straightforward translation into Arabic. This is correct when they are translated in isolation or translated into a topic followed by a comment in an Arabic nominal sentence, for example:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| - I am tired | انا متعب |
| - She is a nurse | هي ممرضة |
| - They are butches | هم جزارون |

However, in Arabic verbal sentence, they can be omitted, unless emphasized, because there is a letter in the verb which replaces the reference of the pronoun.

The best solution for this is the omission of personal pronoun, when the sentence is verbal in Arabic, the pronoun (which is subject) is deleted because it is included in the verb's reference to it as the subject of the sentence, for example:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. I will contact you later. | سوف اتصل بك فيما بعد |
|------------------------------|----------------------|

The letter (ا) in Arabic, the reference to (I) in English, therefore there is no need to repeat the pronoun by saying (انا سوف اتصل بك لاحقا).

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| 2. She participated in the discussion. | شاركت في المناقشة |
|--|-------------------|

(هي) is dropped because in the last letter (ت) implies a direct reference to it, thus, it is unnecessary to translate it as follow: (هي شاركت في المناقشة) (Faris.P.14-15).

2.1.2 Lexical Problems

The greater number of translation problems for the students are lexical problems. Words are usually given the first importance in translation., most mistakes of the students are word-for-word translations of SL texts, and ignorance of Arabic equivalence. (Faris.P.15).

2.1.2.1 Literal Translation of Meaning (Metaphorical vs. Nonmetaphorical)

The central lexical problem faced and displayed by the students is their direct, literal translation of almost all words. They dedicate themselves to it wholeheartedly and in an unusual way in an all texts and contexts, in regard to all words, phrases and expressions. Although any language is words in isolation, it cannot be understood as such. Words are used to gather in in special combinations, texts and contexts. Furthermore, there are:

(1) grammatical words which have no meaning, but used for a specific grammatical function (such as use of verb 'do' to make questions and negation in English, 'have' to form the present perfect tense, etc.); and lexical words which have meanings and make up language (Baker.P.60).

The relation between language and words is exactly like the relation between the human body and its constituent parts. The body exists and works perfectly only when the parts exist and work perfectly to gather. Likewise, the parts do not, and cannot work in isolation. Each part works in relation to, and in connection with other parts. Yet, the interconnection among words does not always result in a new combination and a different, in direct meaning of them. In fact, words can keep their direct literal meaning, even when they occur with one another. This means that direct literal translation is sometimes possible and acceptable.

The problem for the students is that they think that literal translation is applicable to everything in language. This makes them commit mistakes. The comparison of the following three groups of examples to one another illustrates the point here (Ibid: 61-62):

Group A:

1. Wood float on water. (يطفو الخشب على الماء)
2. Please, Answer my question. (اجب على سؤالي من فضلك)
3. The children broke the window. (كسر الأطفال النافذة)
4. Impossible task. (مهمة مستحيلة)
5. A word of honor. (كلمة شرف)

Group B:

1. Rainy day. (يوم ماطر ايوم اسود)
2. Sweet- tongued. (طري اللسان مخادع)
3. A can of worms. (كلمة ديدان / حفنة مشاكل) مشكلة عويصة
4. Fabrication. (حبك/تلفيق)
5. Ugly Person. (شخص قبيح المنظر/ شخص بشع التصرف)

Group C:

1. A stitch in time saves nine. (درهم وقاية خير من قنطار علاج)
2. Tall order. (مهمة شاقة/ عسيرة)
3. Fat salary. (راتب ضخيم/مجز)
4. Bite the dust. (يخر سريعا)
5. If you were in my shoes / boat." (لو كنت (في) مكاني

By comparing these three groups with one another, we notice that in 'A' a direct translation is quite feasible, in 'C' literal translation is not possible by any means. The following literal translation of the five examples of 'C' into Arabic confirms the point:

1. A stitch in time saves nine. (درزة في وقت توفر تسعا)
2. Tall order. (امر طويل)
3. Fat salary. (راتب سمين)
4. To bite the dust. (يعض التراب)
5. If you were in my shoes/my boat. (لو كنت في حذائي/ قاربي)

All these literal, word-for-word translation are strange and not understandable. Moreover '3' and '5' are funny. More seriously, '5' can be described as a dangerous translation because it is insulting and could put an end a translator's career. Such translations are, therefore, unacceptable.

As regards groups 'B', both literal and non-literal translation are possible, but not as the same time. That is, the types of texts and context are essential in deciding on which translation to choose. For instance, in a sentence describing a day in winter, 'rainy day' has one translation only, for example:

"Today it is sunny, but yesterday was a rainy day ":

Only 'يوم ماطر' is applicable here, whereas 'اسود يوم' is not. On the other hand, only 'يوم اسود' is acceptable in the translation of the English proverb:

" Save for a rainy day": خبي قرشك الأبيض ليومك الأسود/وفر للشدة

Hence, the text and/or the context can be helpful in deciding whether a literal translation is feasible or not, and the possibility or not of the grouping of certain word together. That is, we cannot describe 'امر' as 'طويل' long, or "قصير" (short). Therefore, we conclude that such a translation is wrong, and we have to look for the right one (i.e. مهمة شاقة) (Urdang.P.455).

The same argument applies to 'راتب سمين' as a literal translation of 'fat salary'. Only a person or on animals can be described as 'fat' (سمين) in Arabic, but not a thing or an inanimate word like 'salary' (راتب). However, we can say (مجز/ضخم/راتب).

The discussion of these three groups of examples shows that literal translation is possible in a few cases, where as in many other cases it is not. This means that literal translation is neither rejected completely nor accepted widely. It is not a matter of nothing or everything. The problem for students is that they think that everything in language can be translated literally. This is very serious indeed, because it results in many silly mistakes committed by them.

The best way to overcome this problem is, first and foremost, the warning of the students strongly and permanently against the literal translation of everything, by means of:

1. Giving as many examples as possible, to confirm the impossibility of applying literal translation to everything.
2. Assuring the different nature of English and Arabic in various respects.
3. The necessity for understanding words in their special contexts.
4. Concentrating for some time on fixed, special expressions in English such as proverbs, idioms, phrasal verbs, and many collocations, which count in tens of thousands, and resist literal translation. (Faris.P.18).

Conclusion

At the end of this brief research, we have come to a result that literal translation is one of the most important and beneficial types of translation and it is suitable for use in some fields and sentences as a better translation more than any other types of translation. We have found that it has several kinds and many problems that translators may encounter with this translation method. Among them are grammatical and lexical problems, and many others like in translating verbs or pronouns. We adopted a general method, the purpose of which is to investigate the literal translation in general and what can be learned about it and its flaws.

This research was a brief talk about the literal translation method. It is not enough to talk about this ancient method in a few simple pages. But we hope that this research will be helpful to future researchers in language development.

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