

## Undergraduate translation teaching: a pedagogical perspective

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## Abstract

In institutions across the world, translation training is accorded sacrosanct status in translation studies. Recent developments in translation and technology, combined with the increasingly prominent role of translation in the global marketplace, have given the discipline a renewed significance both academically and culturally. In Palestine, however, translator training has for many years subsisted on limited resources, despite the fact that translation, in most Palestinian universities English departments, has been a requisite course in English language and literature degrees at undergraduate level for the past four decades. Drawing on first-hand experience from teaching undergraduate translation courses at Al-Quds University and An-Najah National University, what this article attempts to investigate, then, is the status of translation teaching at the undergraduate level at English departments in Palestinian universities. To that effect, the paper uses a selective body of authentic translation examples and outlines some important issues which are indispensable to undergraduate translation teaching. The study offers advice and guidelines to university professors and instructors who do not have degrees and/or training in translation and find themselves obliged to teach undergraduate translation courses at their respective English departments.

**Keywords:** translator training; undergraduate translation teaching; translation syllabi and curricula.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The importance of undergraduate translation training

It is an incontrovertible fact that, throughout history, translation has always helped facilitate intercultural communication. The importance of translation cannot be underestimated, particularly with respect to the exponential rise in tourism, the internationalisation of business and trade, and the complexities of international relations and foreign policy in global politics—the latter of which is of particular relevance to Palestine and the Arab world, further attesting to the need for improvement in translator training. This environment necessitates the continued development and improvement of translator training and has led to the creation of both occupational and academic training. However, translation teaching at undergraduate level at English departments in Palestinian universities has been inadequate, often resulting in degrees in translation while neglecting practical application. Consequently, translation programmes in the region have been termed, quite pejoratively, the ‘white elephant’ by numerous academics (Bahumaid, 1995; Atawneh and Alaqra, 2007; Farghal, 2009; Thawabteh, 2009; Gabr, 2001a, 2001b; Attari, 2012; El Karnichi, 2012; Thawabteh and Najjar, 2014; among many others), perhaps because those offered are too limited in scope, addressing predominantly linguistic and cultural matters, yet failing to adopt the sort of progress and development seen in counterpart programmes internationally, for instance: the advancement in, *inter alia*, technological dimensions of translation, translation memory tools, machine translation, use of corpora in translation studies, digital age and translation, globalisation and translation, localisation and translation, audiovisual translation (e.g. subtitling, voiceover, dubbing etc.).

Translation has been of paramount importance in the interaction between cultures. Translation continues to thrive, and this should, ideally, both inspire and necessitate the sort of change and development in Palestine that would allow both the discipline and practice of translation to flourish in a way that is more valuable or advantageous to the culture. Some progress in this respect has been made, including the introduction and development of vocational as well as academic training in the field; yet, the problem remains that translation still fails to attain any real presence or have any impact beyond the cloistered academic fiefdom of our institutions. The abiding irony in all of this of course is that, in this region and most especially in Palestine, the ongoing effects of international policy are all too manifest, and in Palestine, the country remains a conflict area as a consequence of unachieved peace between the Israelis and Palestinians and is thus still a site for concern and probable intervention in the realm of international politics. Since the start of the peace process in 1993, there has been a growing demand for translators in NGOs, international agencies, embassies, consulates etc., and it remains the role of Palestinian universities to accommodate this demand and facilitate its continued development. The political landscape, then, makes translator training imperative, and yet still, inexplicably, it remains inadequate as will be shown later.

Translator training aside, the teaching of translation at the undergraduate level in Palestinian departments of English is insufficient. For instance, it is no surprise that at undergraduate level, translation in the curriculum of these departments is underrepresented and, to many English majors, seems irrelevant—perhaps because the discipline is viewed within an exclusively academic, intellectual or theoretical context, not a social or practical one.

## 1.2. Socialisation of translation

The socialisation of translation is one aspect of the discipline that can be emphasised more in our institutions, most especially because it remains a fact that after graduation, or even while studying for their BA in English Language and Literature, many English majors are exposed to situations that obligate them to practice translation. We usually tell our students about the ubiquity and practicality of translation, as exemplified in the maxim ‘translation is always with you’; in other words, it exists, and in our country in particular must exist, beyond the remit of lectures, exams, and universities. It is a fact that our English majors, while in the BA, are asked, for example, by neighbours in their hometown, by their peers from other specialisations in their university, by their fellow teachers or a school principal (if they are hired after graduation to teach English at schools) and by whoever knows that they are studying English Language and Literature, to help with translation from Arabic into English or vice versa (see also Bahumaid, 1995: 95). Certainly, the students should be conscious that translation competence is different from language competence; they must have the appropriate training to translate. The discursive logic is that a lot of BA graduates of departments of English pursue careers in the private sector and it is evident that most of them usually choose to study English to secure better career opportunities, and this can be properly materialised if those graduates are well trained in undergraduate translation courses (Translation I and sometimes Translation II, which are usually offered to English majors by all Palestinian universities English departments)<sup>1</sup>. In spite of all these realities, which range from the academic, to the social and political, only one compulsory course (Translation I) is given in the curricu-

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- 1 Internet websites for the Palestinian universities:
- Birzeit University, Languages and Translation (last update: 5 December 2014): <[http://www.birzeit.edu/academics/arts/translation/p/prog?prog\\_id=340](http://www.birzeit.edu/academics/arts/translation/p/prog?prog_id=340)>;
  - Bethlehem University, Department of Arabic (last update: 5 December 2014): <<http://bethlehem.edu/programs/art/arabic.shtml>>;
  - Al-Aqsa University (last update: 5 December 2014): <[http://education.up.edu.ps/viewCollege\\_education\\_en-163](http://education.up.edu.ps/viewCollege_education_en-163)>; University College of Applied Sciences (last update: 5 December 2014): <<http://www.alaqsa.edu.ps/site/INNER.ASPX?ParId=1842&PageId=1847>> (in Arabic);
  - Hebron University (last update: 11 March 2015): <<http://www.hebron.edu/index.php/en/department/english-language-department/course-description-english-language-department.html>>;
  - Palestine Ahlyia University (last update: 11 March 2015): <<http://www.paluniv.edu.ps/?p=content&id=accordion2english>>;
  - Al-Quds University (last update: 11 March 2015): <<http://www.alquds.edu/en/faculty-of-arts/de>

lum of most departments of English in Palestine (and, on occasion, one elective (Translation II) is reluctantly offered)—to the detriment of the institutions, the discipline, and of course the students themselves.

### 1.3. What English majors need

In these translation courses (Translation I and II), instructors usually have raw English major students, and a good professor or instructor of translation should know how to shape his/her students, how to motivate them, and how to put them on a right ‘translation’ track for their own future considerations. It is true that our students are studying for a degree in English Language and Literature and not in Translation, but those English majors should be equipped with the fundamentals of translation that would provide a good foundation for, and help them eventually sustain, a future career in the discipline. Graduates of English should not feel that a degree in English Language and Literature is a real burden on them in the sense that they hold a degree in English and they cannot properly translate from English into Arabic or vice versa, especially when they find themselves obliged to carry out certain translations of written or spoken material after graduation. In a sense, the hoary old myth is that a person with a degree in English Language and Literature is inevitably a translator. The irony is that the proper teaching of translation at the undergraduate level for English majors seems indispensable but translation courses are inadequately taught by professors or instructors who do not have degrees in translation or any background about translation studies—a continuing injustice to our undergraduate English majors. Such courses may be better taught by translationists (i.e., qualified translation trainers/professors) who may be able to make their students extract the maximum benefit out of even a ‘one-off course’ (i.e., Translation I), put them on the right track, and go on to help them produce understandable translations of texts of reasonable length in both languages (Arabic and English in our case). This paper, therefore, attempts to highlight some teaching practices and methods, which, the authors believe, are helpful to professors of English who are not translationists and might find themselves obliged to teach undergraduate translation courses to English majors. It should be pointed out, however, that students who study for an English Language and Literature degree should not expect to receive training to become professional translators out of a single or two undergraduate translation courses because the learning outcomes of these degrees are different, but the aim of this paper is to demonstrate how an instructor of translation who

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partment-of-english-language-literature/531-courses-description.html>;

- An-Najah National University (last update: 11 March 2015): <<http://www.najah.edu/node/29738>>;
- Arab American University (last update: 11 March 2015): <<http://www.aauj.edu/?q=node/631>>;
- Al-Quds Open University (last update: 11 March 2015): <<http://www.qou.edu>>;
- Islamic University of Gaza (last update: March 2015): <<http://arts.iugaza.edu.ps/en/Programs/English-Department/Course-Description-of-English-Dep>>.

does not have a degree in translation should run undergraduate translation classes to arm English majors with the fundamentals of translation that can enable them to produce decent translations from English into Arabic and vice versa, and create awareness of the need for those English majors to receive further professional training after graduation if they want to become professional translators.

## 2. Methodology

The data of the study consists of excerpts taken from texts of general interest (i.e., non specialised texts). There are also some examples of the authors' choice. These authentic texts/examples were used by the authors to train English majors on translating from Arabic into English and vice versa. The purpose is to highlight some problems in the treatment of these examples. An attempt has been made to draw students' and instructors' attention to five areas of study which combine both theory and practice (see section 5 below) and are essential to basic translation teaching at undergraduate level. Some of these examples are items in a diagnostic test which the authors usually administer in the first week of classes. Students are given the whole class time (90 minutes) to complete the test and they are usually allowed to use their dictionaries. The test is designed to measure students' competence and performance in a translation class and to make the instructors aware of their students' background in translation practice. The students are in their third year and study for a BA in the English language and literature. They have already been exposed to a number of language, linguistics and literature courses. Most of the examples in the test are linguistics-based as the authors believe that beginner students of translation need more training in this area before introducing them to the pragmatic and communicative aspect of translation teaching.

### 2.1. Aim

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it is an attempt to acquaint instructors of translation at departments of English who do not have a degree in translation with the minimum basics of translation that English majors should be armed with in Translation I; and second, the study demonstrates step-by-step in-class translation teaching. This will be carried out through practical examples and real classroom experiences, supported by the authors' experience of teaching translation at a university level over the past two decades. The paper will also shed light on the *status quo* of undergraduate translation courses in Palestinian universities with a view to ascertaining the exact problems with or deficiencies in these courses over the last four decades, culminating in a suggestion to viable, long-term solutions to deep-rooted problems.

### 2.2. Significance of the study

Although some studies have already been carried out in the Arab world, we can stake a claim that the present study is the first of its kind to examine the status of undergraduate transla-

tion teaching at Palestinian universities English departments. Bahumaid (1995: 96) examined the translation courses offered within the English Language degree programmes in different Arab universities in terms of study plans for a BA degree in English Language and Literature, translation course-description contained in the English curriculum and the translation materials used, but the study excludes Palestinian universities.

### 3. Basic requirements for the translator

As a point of departure, it may be helpful to shed light on the basic requirements for the translator before we look into the status of undergraduate translation teaching in Palestinian universities. Many translation theorists (e.g. Al-Jahiz, 2009; Nida, 1964; Newmark, 1988, 1991) speak of how translational work should satisfy certain basic requirements. Al-Jahiz, a medieval Arab scholar, remarks that the translator should have a full understanding of the subject matter, and in the words of Newmark (1991: 62), “has to be conversant with and responsible for the topic.” The translator should also demonstrate an awareness of current methods of translation; have a previous apprenticeship with an established translator; a sound command of the translator’s working languages, that is, “a satisfactory knowledge of the [SL]” and “thorough mastery of the [TL]” (Nida, 1964: 150-151)—or as Newmark (1991: 63) further demands referring to literary translation: “an appropriate knowledge of at least two languages; and full knowledge of the author of the original work, including his style and idiosyncrasies” (Khouri, 1988: 54, as cited in Al-Mani and Faiq, 2012: 9-10), which also serves as a useful illustration to meet the requirements for the translator.

Perhaps one of the basic requirements for high quality training of translators is translation theory and practice. Throughout history, translation theory and translation practice have struggled for domination. Some theorists highlight prioritising practice over theory. Pym (2005: 3-6) argues that “[t]ranslation theories are abstruse and useless; only professionals know the realities of translation; trainees thus need the professional skills, not the academic theories.” However, Pym (2005: 3-6) also stresses the advantages of prioritising theory over practice:

A lot of theory[s]ing is just there to protect academic fiefdoms. It helps gain institutional power. Every professional guru soon develops specific terms and catchphrases. That kind of power is not a bad thing. With it, changes in the profession can eventually lead to changes in institutional training programme. Without it, we would be back to medieval apprenticeships.

Perhaps, a more practical view is reconciling theory and practice. De Beaugrande (2003: 27) adopts a dialectical model to reconcile theory and practice. In his words,

[t]heory is how things get represented, whereas practice is how things get done. [...] the relation between theory and practice would be dialectical, where a dialectic consists of an interactive cycle between two sides guiding or controlling each other. When the dialectic is working smoothly,

the practice is theory driven, and the theory is practice-driven; the theory predicates and accounts for the practice; and the practice specifies and implements the theory.

A cursory look at the syllabi of undergraduate translation courses offered by Palestinian universities shows that 90% of the courses are practice-oriented. Taking our cue from De Beaugrande, we think that infusing students with some theory-based training, “with a practical value [aimed at] ‘demystifying’ the kind of operations performed by students [in] translation” (Bahumaid, 1995: 99), may be helpful. Correspondingly, Newmark (1991: 129) suggests that students in a translation classroom should have copies of the syllabus and be given “the opportunity of commenting on it;” he also adds that (p.130) “the translation teacher should have, a fortiori, preferably from professional experience, the four professional translator’s skills.”

Having reviewed the translation syllabi of Translation I and Translation II courses in all Palestinian universities English departments, we noticed that theory tends to be entirely neglected. For some departments in which the syllabus is not introduced, the situation is even worse. Our focus on the actual methods used by instructors of translation in these departments shows that most of them have subjugated themselves to the interests of translation practice, quite simply because they belong to totally different disciplines in literature, linguistics, TEFL etc., with the exception of very few who strike a balance between theory and practice.

## 4. Status quo of undergraduate translation teaching

### 4.1. Wrong-footing

The popular myth in academic circles in Palestinian universities is that any language teacher can handle a translation course and that “the mastery of two languages is all the translator needs” (Thawabteh, 2009: 165; see also Nida, 1964). Arguing in the same vein, Amer (2010: 4) laments teaching methods at Gaza universities:

Most of tutors who teach translation at Gaza universities are not qualified enough to teach this module. Lots of them are holders of post graduate degrees in English literature or linguistics from local or external universities. Therefore, any tutor in the departments of English who shows interest in teaching Translation may be assigned the course. There are no requirements whatsoever. Hence, the trainers are at best merely interested rather than specialized in translation.

*Some* translation tutors who come from a linguistics or literature background perpetuate such a myth. Farghal (2000: 39) points out that academic institutes in the Arab World “were caught off-guard in terms of the availability of competent translation trainers. Therefore, the task of translation teaching was often assigned to bilingual academics speciali[s]ing in literature and/or linguistics.” A corollary of this bias towards literature and/or linguistics teachers in Palestinian universities is that students are barely scraping by in “specialised translator-training dealing with professionally-oriented translation” (Thawabteh, 2009: 165).



The justification for this practice might be valid only previously when there were no professors specialised in translation, but now things have changed, albeit gradually, with very few PhD holders in Translation in Palestinian universities (7 in total), and luckily, many MA graduates in Translation mainly from two Palestinian universities offering a master's degree in Translation, namely Al-Quds University and An-Najah National University. More worrying is the fact that most of those literature and linguistics instructors perhaps underestimate the purpose of the sole undergraduate translation I course and a lot of misconceptions prevail as a result. They believe one course in translation for English majors will not benefit students, no matter how much effort is invested in the course. Some are forced to teach this course to complete their teaching load and many others compete to teach it believing it is a kind of change from literature and linguistics courses, or more worryingly, a form of leisure time. For them, it is a matter of bringing to class short extracts and asking their students to delve into these passages and in the last ten minutes of class time, they furnish their students with a model translation. Atawneh and Alaqra (2007: 19) maintain that in "a traditional translation class, the translator trainers usually hand out students a 300-400 word passage to translate, followed by a slew of exhortations with plenty of dos and don'ts." Those translation trainers "neither have sufficient theoretical background in translation studies nor [do] they have the interest and/or motivation to familiari[s]e themselves with translation studies as an adequately-established sub-discipline of applied linguistics" (Farghal, 2000: 39). Farghal (2009) aptly remarks that giving a translation course to linguistics and/or literature people to teach is comparable to asking a layman native speaker of English to teach a language course, much to the detriment of the students.

#### 4.2. Slow on the uptake

Since translation is a high-level skill which requires not only a good command of a SL, but also an intimate knowledge of a TL, student translators are normally slow on the uptake. Students belong to various educational backgrounds, and the teaching process is an aggregate of individual differences. Roughly speaking, some may understand things quickly, or may not, so "the standard of most Arab undergraduate students in both native and foreign languages [...] is entirely unsatisfactory" (Bahumaid, 1995: 97), a point of agreement with Abdel-Fattah (2011: 2), who touches on the problem of training from students' perspective in Palestine:

[M]ost of the students do not have the adequate level of proficiency to carry out translation into English (the foreign language) without making mistakes such as literal and unnatural translations. It takes years to develop sufficient competence in a language to be able to perfect that language, and the amount of instructional time given [...] is far from enough to achieve the necessary command required to translate into a foreign language (English).

In this, it is important that translation trainers "ensure the text is understood linguistically and referentially" (Newmark, 1991: 133). In addition, translation courses are offered for senior students and not for sophomores, as is the case with some Palestinian universities, quite sim-

ply because language competence is likely to benefit the former rather than the latter. It is even more important that translation trainers focus on the practical application of translation skills. An average translation trainer at a Palestinian university still insists that teaching translation studies to students can be more important than teaching translation proper, a serious mistake by novices taking their first steps in the world of translation (see also Bahumaid, 1995: 98). There is a great need for translation practitioners to match the changing needs of translation marketplace, rather than translation theorists who, nevertheless, still have a part to play in translation world (see De Beaugrande, 2003: 27).

### 4.3. Translation curriculum

Unfortunately, course design and development are traditionally assigned to one or two people, usually the head of the department and/or the coordinator of the programme, irrespective of whether they are translation specialists (Gabr, 2001b; see also Farghal, 2009; Newmark, 1991). Translation lessons should be a carefully structured syllabus that covers the most vital aspects of translation. The lessons in the translation syllabus in Palestinian universities are ill-designed. A close look at the syllabi at a Palestinian university shows how poorly-designed it is, comprising language learning advice, translation exercises from Arabic into English or vice versa at sentence level, editorials, newspaper headlines. A syllabus should ideally include more specialised translation concepts. Translation trainers individually take care of everything and all they do is check information about courses available at other institutions. Undoubtedly, designing and developing effective translation programmes is a lengthy and meticulous issue that involves “gradual multi-tiered process, in which each step must be performed in order and at the right time” (Gabr, 2001b: para 2). Newmark (1991: 136) believes that “35% of the success of a course depends on the planning of the curriculum and the choice of the materials.” In Palestinian universities, the problem with translation courses is that they are mainly mere imitations of ‘older’ ones. Translation programme developers do not approach course development and design from scratch and they usually approach the issue with an eye on programmes they graduated from or programmes offered in other prestigious universities. They copy or modify existing translation programmes without paying heed to current market or student needs (Thawabteh and Shehab, 2017). Current undergraduate translation programmes in most Arab World universities seem to be traditional since they are inherited from developers’ past experiences (Attari, 2012, and Gabr, 2001b). The use of technology and electronic media, for example, in the running of these programmes is totally absent (cf. Gabr, 2001b).

Gabr (2001b: para 1) argues that “the first stumbling block that threatens the success of a translation program[me] is an erroneous approach to curriculum development, that is, course design and development. Curriculum development is a dichotomy of flair, or creativity, and systematic thinking,” without which effective training will not be engendered (Gabr, 2001b: para 1). Arguably, such creativity should predominate in Palestinian universities. The transla-

tion curriculum, if such a thing exists at all, exists in few Palestinian universities, with which we take issue for many reasons. Introducing *In the Other Words* by Mona Baker (1992) or *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Application* (2002) by Jeremy Munday to non-fully fledged undergraduate students in a Palestinian university for an introductory translation course is perhaps overambitious. It has to be said, though, that both these authors do include material that would be relevant and accessible to Arab students. The curriculum should, then, comprise components designed to help students in “discourse analysis; they must be culture omniscient, subject specialists, information scientists and technology experts as only then can the task of translation be best fulfilled” (Thawabteh and Shehab, 2017: 165; Najjar, 2008). In this vein, Najjar (2008: 138) claims that “translator training has to be based on solid linguistic background; discourse analysis is a most fertile environment for teaching translation.”

A translation curriculum may also include the use of dictionaries and the multifarious problems students usually encounter when using them (Thawabteh, 2013). Another crucial topic is the internet search which saves trainees a lot of time.

#### **4.4. Teaching translation technology**

Enríquez (2011: 70-71) highlights “the importance of teaching translation students—early on in the curriculum—(a) the diversity of (online) resources available for translation and (b) how to select adequate resources based on different types of problems, or information needs” (see also Austermühl, 2013: 335; El-Sakran, 2002). However, Austermühl (2013: 327) laments that “[m]any translator trainers do not have the professional and/or technological expertise to promptly and properly implement translation technologies into their teaching.” In Palestinian universities, no translation technology is used at undergraduate level, although we are in awe of it. One technology tool might include E-dictionaries or CD-dictionaries that can help undergraduate students in translation tasks as efficiently and quickly as possible. One erroneous pedagogical practice is that a translation teacher prohibits the use of electronic dictionaries in a translation exam on the pretext of using notorious machine translation tools. There are considerable merits, however. It may take a well-trained translation student a second to look up a word in a dictionary. Another advantage is that the use of internet search engines, e.g. Google Image to search for unfamiliar items, say, rhinoceros, might help students to provide the equivalent, independent of any type of dictionary.

### **5. Classroom experience**

In this part of the article, we will review real classroom hands-on experiences with undergraduate students in Translation I classes. Translations by undergraduate students from the two universities (Alquds and An-Najah) are shown. The aim is to show that translation teaching should be systematic and include step-by-step guidance; instructors should build on students’ progressive skills until the goal of such course is achieved. Apparently, students in Translation

I hope, in the end, to be able to produce natural translations of probably non-specialised texts of reasonable length in both languages in question—Arabic and English in our case. In this section, we recall some experiences to provide translator trainers with practices, skills, and perhaps recommended methods of running introductory undergraduate translation classes. While discussing our examples, we will highlight the most important translation matters a translator trainer and/or trainee should familiarise themselves with should they intend to pursue proper advanced training in translation or even a future career in translation.

By and large, students of English who follow their departments' study plans are enrolled on Translation I in their third academic year after they have studied several courses in language, linguistics, and literature. It is no surprise, then, that most of them enroll on this course with no prior experience whatsoever in the field of translation. They intend solely to pass this compulsory translation course, and they bring with them a lot of misconceptions, usually fostered by unqualified translation instructors; they wrongly believe that translation is a complex, circuitous process and for them to be able to carry out *decent* translations would require years of training at advanced stages and levels; moreover, most of them also go so far and say that Translation I course will not benefit them because it is only one course among the required list of literature and linguistics courses they should study for their BA degree in English Language and Literature. The students also argue that the course's goals and intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are usually underestimated by their unqualified instructors and are not met.

Sadly, those selfsame unqualified instructors share their students those same misconceptions; they keep their students unmotivated and all they do is train students on sentence translation predominantly, and sometimes short paragraph translations—something which can be properly materialised in an advanced language course. What is even worse is some instructors' bias towards certain texts for translation; e.g. an instructor whose dissertation is politics-oriented will unreasonably present his students with political texts.

The status quo of translation teaching at the undergraduate level in the Palestinian universities is inadequate and haphazard. It is too complex, laborious, and unrealistic a task to pinpoint all the topics and important skills that should be covered and developed in this introductory translation course. However, there are points which are indispensable to undergraduate translation teaching that all non-specialised instructors of translation in Palestinian universities in particular and in the Arab World in general should be aware of in order to do justice to the undergraduate translation courses they teach. Based on the notions discussed above—namely, translation instructors being unprepared for teaching translation courses, students being slow on the uptake, ill-conceived translation curriculum, and lack of translation technology—English major students who study undergraduate translation courses in their departments should be trained in the following important areas: (1) naturalness in translation; (2) literal translation; (3) proper use of dictionaries; (4) lexical choice; (5) trans-

lation strategies: transliteration and explanation; (6) and the translation of tenses: one of the aspects of grammar deserving attention insofar as the data of the study is concerned.

Again there are a lot of things that can be tackled in introductory undergraduate translation courses like Translation I and Translation II. And we do not claim here that if a tutor appropriately covers the aforementioned areas, s/he would produce professional English major translators. The issue is that to do justice to our English majors, we should arm them with the minimum fundamentals of translation that can help them as graduates having a degree in the English language and literature carry out acceptable translations of texts of a reasonable length between Arabic and English. We want our English majors to be confident enough to embark on translation tasks they may find themselves obliged to do, regardless of the career they pursue after graduation.

In what follows, we will focus on examples pertaining to Arabic into English translation and point out some of the specific challenges involved in this directionality and then the other way round (i.e. English to Arabic).

### **5.1. Arabic into English translation**

Most students feel that translating from their native language into a foreign language is more challenging due to cultural, stylistic, and linguistic issues. Their recurrent problem in this directionality is literal translation and finding an appropriate English equivalent for a word or a phrase in Arabic. Another challenge at this stage is producing coherent English translation; they feel that their translation is full of fragments, less natural and less meaningful because they work into a foreign language.

#### **5.1.1. Naturalness in translation**

In this part we shall be discussing the importance of helping students come up with natural translations in both Arabic and English. Certainly, exhorting students to produce natural translations at the beginning of this learning curve may sound far-fetched, but the point is to exercise caution in bringing about naturally meaningful translations. It is no surprise that instructors may need to spend a whole class explaining to their students what a natural translation means or requires, perhaps something like “[t]ranslating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the [SL] message” (Nida and Taber, 1969: 12). Students would find it difficult to connect the primary/dictionary meaning of the word “natural” with its new application in translation and they may appear to be confused whenever the word is referred to in this particular context. Our students should be trained to produce a fluent, natural translation in English or Arabic. It refers to the fact that students’ English translation should read like English and not an awkward conflation of Arabic and English, often referred to as Arabish (i.e., English with Arabic structures, styles, or intonations present in the TL text). The resulting text should sound as if it were originally written in En-

glish, where the process of translation itself does not intrude upon style or structure. This is one of the most important issues students should be cognisant of when they work on translations from Arabic into English or vice versa. We know this is a difficult translation skill to master in an introductory translation class, but instructors can train students systematically by attempting, first, sentence translation, paragraph translation, and then short texts translation. In sentence translation from Arabic into English, in order to offer natural translation, students should work out some kind of sentence build-up processes where they have to determine their subject and verb and observe subject/verb agreement rules. To illustrate this point further, let us consider this example:

(1) yazdādu hadhihi il-ayyamu rujū'u in-nāsi'ilā iṭ-ṭabībi li'atfahi il-assbāb. (authors' choice<sup>2</sup>)  
[The number of people seeing a doctor for even undisturbed symptom is increasing these days.]

In this sentence, working out the subject/verb relationship would offer a natural accurate translation in English. Most of our students approach this sentence like anyone else who has good knowledge of Arabic and English and not as students of translation who should be responsible for offering an accurate translation of publishable nature. Some of the students' inaccurate translations read as follows:

- A lot of people visit doctors these days for silly reasons (inaccurate)
- These days people who visit doctors for trivial reasons increase (unnatural)

Again instructors should not be discouraged if students cannot come up with an appropriate English rendering of a simple sentence in Arabic. It is just the students' first encounter and experience with translation. They do not have an appreciation of what it means to translate correctly or fluently between languages. As such, tolerance and understanding is needed by instructors. In example 1 above, the key point for producing an accurate natural translation is determining the subject and the verb in the sentence. The subject is not "people" but "the number of people." So any verb to be used in the sentence should be singular and not plural as most of our students thought. Hence the translation of the above sentence could be "The number of people who visit doctors these days for the silliest reasons is increasing."

Example 1 above is given here not to show how this sentence *per se* is translated but rather it is meant to focus students' attention on the importance of determining, as precisely as one needs to, the subject/verb relationship before they write their English translation of a sentence in Arabic. Students should be trained in this translating skill by giving them more advanced and

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2 This utterance is chosen by the authors of the paper.

complex sentences. Their translation should read as English and flow naturally from one point/idea into another. To maintain such translation fluency, students should pay attention to some (problematic) characteristics of Arabic texts which may impede translation fluidity. We have noticed that our students find it difficult to maintain naturalness mainly because of, among other things, the overuse of the Arabic prefixed coordinating conjunction particle *wa* (lit. ‘and’) in Arabic texts. They try to render each *wa* into “and” and hence their translations, more often than not, sound marked. Students should be instructed how to divide long Arabic sentences in paragraphs, which overuse *wa*, into shorter sentences, and not to impose Arabic syntax onto the English translation. They can be taught that in Arabic texts, *wa* can be translated into English by means of a full stop, a semicolon or a comma as long as the overall meaning is not compromised. Students are not supposed to chase every *wa* in the Arabic text as this will certainly render their translation less authentic. To illustrate this point, consider example 2 below:

(2) laqad ‘uṣṭiba al-mutashā’imūna bi ‘amā-l-alwān wa lam yra’aw al-‘ālama illa bi lawnin waḥidin hwa lawnun ‘as-sawād wa lam yra’aw mādatan li’adbihim illa na’iqil būmi wa sawādi il-ghūrāb wa lam yaqūmu fil ḥayati illa al-m’āsī wa lam yassma’u min an-nghamāti illa al-muḥzini minha. (Sharaf, 1980: 150)

[Pessimists became colour-blinded. They never saw the world but through only one colour: black, and they never found any other material for their literature except the hooting of owls and the blackness of ravens. In their life they did not achieve but tragedies, and among the tunes they did not listen to but the sad ones.]

In this short paragraph in Arabic, other things being equal, the coordinating conjunction *wa* is used to connect sentences four times and it was used once to link two nouns. Rendering this linking word five times in English would sound awkward and distort the fluency of the translation. Most of our students think that each *wa* in Arabic must be rendered into “and”; they were amazed to learn that they can have several choices to handle *wa* in their English translation; they can simply delete *wa* as long as this omission does not impede the meaning, or replace it with a full stop or a semicolon as suggested below. Below is a student’s translation which reflects the content of the paragraph but does not run fluently because of the excessive use of “and”.

Pessimists suffer from colour blindness and they do not see the world but in one colour which is black and do not find a theme for their literature but owl’s hooting and the blackness of the raven and they do not appreciate in life but miseries and they only listen to sad tunes.

Students should be taught right from the very beginning that most of the translation tasks they may work on in the future will be used, more often than not, in official/formal settings. Hence, it is imperative we train them to produce translations of a publishable nature (i.e. like the ones they read in books, newspapers, websites etc.). A better rendering of the above text which ensures naturalness could be something like:

Pessimists have become colour-blinded. They never see the world but through only the black colour, and they never find any other material for their literature but the hooting of owls and the blackness of ravens. In their life they do not achieve anything but tragedies, and they only listen to sad tunes.

As can be seen here the linking word *wa* was replaced twice by a full stop in the English translation whereby text texture is communicatively preserved. It is also worth noting that, for securing an authentic translation, the seemingly redundant elements in the Arabic text should be eliminated before translating them into English.

### 5.1.2. Literal translation

Literal translation “occurs when there is an exact structural, lexical, even morphological equivalence between two languages [...] and this is only possible when the two languages are very close to each other” (Vinay and Darbelnet as cited in Molina and Hurtado Albir, 2002: 499-500; see also Hatim and Mason, 1997: 189). The literal translation procedures are: (1) borrowing, whereby a word is taken directly from another language; (2) calque, whereby a foreign word or phrase is translated and incorporated into another language; and (3) literal translation, whereby word for word, clause for clause or sentence for sentence is used. In languages with little linguistic and cultural affinity, e.g. Arabic and English, such a strategy brings about such translations. From a pedagogical angle, students should be taught that in several cases, the meaning present in an Arabic text can be reflected with fewer words in an English translation to avoid redundancy. They should not try to translate each word in an Arabic phrase/sentence when the meaning can be glossed in one word in English. To clarify this point, witness the two examples below:

(3) *yarji'u sababu al-'azmati allatī ya'īshuha ash-shi'ru fi 'aṣrina hadhā 'ila...* (Sharaf, 1980: 146)

[The crisis of poetry these days is due to...]

(4) *al-'adabu al-'arabī ghannyun ghinan tamman fi nāhiyyat il-ḥikma* (Sharaf, 1980: 147)

[Arabic literature is so rich in wisdom.]

When translating these two Arabic sentences, students always think that they should render every single lexical item into English, and hence this blind insistence on translating each item makes their translation less authentic. Let us look at a translation offered by one student:

The reason behind the crisis that poetry lives in this age is that...

Most of our students insisted on translating the word *ya'īshuha* (lit. 'to live') into English and their translation looked less natural because of that. Our students were amazed to learn that the meaning of *ya'īshuha* can be glossed into English translation without translating the word itself into English as can be illustrated by the following suggested translation:



The crisis of poetry these days is due to...

In example 4 above, the student's translation is very inappropriate because the word *ghan-nyyun* (lit. 'rich') is formally rendered twice as follows:

Arabic literature is rich and completely rich in wisdom.

The production of such translations by students can be partly ascribed to the fact that most of them believe that they are supposed to render every single Arabic word into English. They do not know that some words which are used for stylistic purposes in the original Arabic text may become redundant when they are translated into English.

## 5.2. English to Arabic translation

In this directionality, students maintain that they are better off simply because they work into their native language but there are still a lot of problems they have to tackle. Most of the pressing problems at this level are use of dictionaries, lexical choice, improper translation of tenses and giving literal translation in Arabic mainly because of the wrong use of dictionaries, as will be shown below in examples focusing on English to Arabic translation.

### 5.2.1. Proper use of dictionaries

Newmark (1988: 114) argues that "bilingual dictionaries are indispensable, but they normally require checking in at least two TL monolingual dictionaries and sometimes an SL monolingual dictionary, to check the status (i.e. modern currency, frequency, connotations) of the word." Monolingual dictionaries, therefore, turn out to be of great help as Wilkinson (2007: 111) further points out: "a specialised monolingual [TL] corpus can be of great help to the translator in confirming intuitive decisions, in verifying or rejecting decisions based on other tools such as dictionaries, in obtaining information about collocates, and in reinforcing knowledge of normal target language patterns." The use of dictionaries in translation classes is essential. It is really too naïve and short-sighted for a translation teacher to prohibit the use of dictionaries in translation classes (for a similar action by translator trainers, see Farghal, 2009). The importance of using dictionaries is made clear in example 5 below:

(5) Walking or cycling to work instead of driving a car can improve people's feelings of health and happiness. (BBC learning English<sup>3</sup>)

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3 BBC Learn in English: available online at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2014/09/140915\\_witn\\_cycling.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2014/09/140915_witn_cycling.shtml).

The utterance in example 5 above is an extract from the original text of a study by the University of East Anglia in the UK. The item ‘cycling’ seems to be problematic in intercultural communication for almost all students as can be illustrated by the following translation:

al-mashyyu aw rukūbu ad-darajāti lidh-dhahābi badala qiyyādati is-syyārati yazīdu shu’ūra an-nāsi biṣ-ṣiḥati was-sa’ādah.

[walking and riding a bicycle/a motorcycle to work instead of driving the car increases people’s feelings of health and happiness]

Opting for *rukūbu ad-darajāti* (‘riding a bicycle or motorcycle’) provides an idiosyncratic interpretation, i.e. ‘riding motorcycle’, and the student may need to be introduced first to proper use of the dictionary, e.g. *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary* (2002) offers the following definitions:

- 1) If you cycle, you ride a bicycle.
- 2) A cycle is a bicycle.
- 3) A cycle is a motorcycle. (AM)

Definition 3 above should be catalyst to a correct lexical choice as the tone of the passage determines the Britishness embedded in it and intertextually is illustrated elsewhere in the remainder of the text; a further computer-aided translation tool, an internet search, would clarify what cycling looks like in an image of some people cycling to work using a bicycle rather than motorcycle. Translation technology in the classroom for undergraduates seems to be a blessing.

### 5.2.2. Lexical choice

Perhaps it is true to argue that the acme of translation is based on meticulous lexical choice by the translator. Consider for example the English ‘win’, which in Arabic literally means *yrabiḥ* (lit. to ‘win’) and *yfūz* (lit. to ‘win’), which is the appropriate choice in the context below.

(7) Mario Balotelli was the star for Italy as he scored twice in a 2-1 win over Germany in their Euro 2012 semi-final at the Stadion Narodowy in Warsaw. (Eurosport<sup>4</sup>)

The student translator erroneously opted for *yrabiḥ*, that translates ‘win’ as can be shown in the following translation:

kān Maryo Balotillī najimu Iṭālyya ḥaythu sajala hadafayin fil –mubrahti al-lati ‘intahat bi ir-ribiḥi bi hadafayn muqābil hadafin waḥidin ṭimna bṭulati umam Uruba 2012 fī niṣf nihāyi fī istād Narudway fī Warsu.

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4 Eurosport: available online at [www.eurosport.com/football/euro-2012/2012/italy-reach-final\\_sto3324790/story.shtml](http://www.eurosport.com/football/euro-2012/2012/italy-reach-final_sto3324790/story.shtml).

The choice of a synonymous item, i.e. *yraḃih*, for Arabic does not do the trick insofar as the sport register is concerned, but rather a more contextually synonymous collocation, i.e. *fawz* (lit. 'win' noun), should be opted for.

### 5.2.3. The translation of tenses

There are other aspects of grammar that can be considered in an introductory undergraduate translation class, but tenses translation has been emphasised here because it is the most challenging and recurrent problem encountered by beginner students of translation.

English and Arabic are totally different in their tense-aspect systems in terms of both number and meaning. English has twelve tenses, which result from a combination between tense and aspect. Arabic, on the other hand, has only two aspects: the perfect and the imperfect (see Zhiri, 2014). A lot of studies have been conducted on the translation of English tenses into Arabic, particularly by Arab researchers (Bouras, 1999; Al-Fallay, 1999; Sekhri, 2009; Kadhim and Ja'far, 2008; Kechoud, 2010; Mansour, 2012; and Abu Joudeh et al., 2013). The aim of this section is not to examine the intricacies of these issues, but rather to show our students that the translation of tenses can involve formal parameters which have become conventional, but it can also give priority to context over these parameters. In other words, when a tense has a particular weight in the passage and carries the meaning, it is mandatory to keep it intact in Arabic translation. For example, when an English text narrates past events, past tenses should be kept in translation. The golden rule is that we should preserve the prevailing tenses in our translation as long as they are of great importance to the (intended) meaning. Our students can also be told that the translation of tenses is not always that rigid. In some cases, translators can shift a present tense in the passage into past without harming the meaning. Our students usually think that they should blindly stick to tenses present in the SL text and convey them in the TL text. They strive to do so in their translation and in most cases their translations sound marked because of this practice. We will give examples below to show that sometimes a certain tense in the SL is not preserved in the TL for the sake of producing a smooth translation. To illustrate, let us consider this example:

(9) Cubs always manage to obtain a meal from a large carcass if they **are present** when a kill is made, but if they **are waiting** in the bush for their mother's return they may not be so lucky. Only after the lioness has gorged herself is she likely to fetch her cubs. (From *Serengeti, a Kingdom of Predators* by George Schaller<sup>5</sup>)

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5 Schaller George *Serengeti, a Kingdom of Predators*. Available online at <http://www.amazon.com/Serengeti-kingdom-predators-George-Schaller/dp/039447242X>

In the above extract, translating the underlined present tenses into past forms would render the Arabic translation more smoothly. If we insist on one-to-one correspondence here, as our students are usually trained to do, we will have a marked translation which reflects the content of the original but may not be favoured by TL readers. Consider the translation below, where the above underlined present tenses are shifted to the past to suit the fluency of the translation without affecting the meaning of the SL text:

dāiman tatmakn al-ashbālu mina al-ḥwṣuli ‘alā wajbatin min juthati farīsatin kabīratin  
**’idhā kānat mutawajidata** waqta iṣṣṭiyād il-farīsat wa lakkin qad lā takūna maḥzūza **’idh  
intazarat** ‘awdati umiha bayna ash-shjayrāt

Here the use of the past tense in the Arabic translation does not connote past time. Time reference is not an issue here and is not indicative. The state described in the original English text has been preserved in Arabic although past tenses are used. Undoubtedly, the use of past tenses in the Arabic version is meant to smooth the Arabic translation.

The formal rules of translating English perfect tenses mention the use of the Arabic particle *qad* along with the simple past of the verb used in the sentence. However, the formal rule could be sacrificed for the sake of the translation fluency. In some cases, when perfect tenses are used in a passage, rendering them following conventional rules may impede translation fluidity. To illustrate, consider the sentence below taken from the above extract (example 9) and its Arabic translation, which does away with the use of the particle *qad*; the translation uses the present simple form of the verb mainly because the translation of the sentence in context does not tolerate the use of *qad* as it may affect the quality of Arabic translation:

(10) Only after the lioness **has gorged** herself is she likely to fetch her cubs. (From *Serengeti, a Kingdom of Predators* by George Schaller)  
faqaṭ ba’ada ‘an **tushba’** al-labawah nafsaha qad tuḥaḍir ‘ashbālahā

The textural resource observed by the use of the perfect tense in the service of an overall meaning is rendered into something different this time—the present simple form of the verb, i.e., *tushba’*.

### 5.3. Translation strategies: transliteration (formally-based) and explanation (functionally-based)

It goes without saying that in any translation activity, translators, be they fully fledged or amateur, tend to devise a strategy to find workable solutions to ever-lasting translation problems (see Scott-Tennent et al., 2000: 108). Two types of strategies can be distinguished: formally-based and functionally-based. The former comprises of literal translation and transliteration (see Catford, 1965: 66; Nida and Taber, 1969) whilst the latter includes transposition,

translation by paraphrase, modulation, among many others. Pedagogically, students should be trained to employ the right strategy at the right time. Take the following example:

(8) Join one of our New Waves snorkeling adventures to see the spectacular reefs, of the world renowned stingrays that will eat right out of your hand. (Proz.com<sup>6</sup>)

The idiomatic expression ‘eat right out of your hand’ (i.e. ‘completely under one’s control’) has been formally rendered into *al-ladhī sayakul min yadika mubasharatan* (lit. ‘it will directly eat from your hand’). Students’ orientation towards literal translation is likely to diminish with more sufficiently focused training on the use of functional strategies when need be. One final point to mention here before closing this section is that there are other strategies of similar importance students can learn in introductory undergraduate translation classes, but these two strategies, which demonstrate a dichotomy of formal vs. functional translation, are frequently used by students at this level of translation training.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has been concerned with offering tutors of undergraduate translation courses at departments of English general guidelines and advice on how to run their translation classes and benefit English majors. To that effect, five areas for proper translation teaching were emphasised to acquaint instructors of translation who are not specialised in translation and do not have any background about translation studies with the minimum basics of translation that English majors should be equipped with in undergraduate translation courses (mainly Translation I and Translation II). It would be advantageous to include the aforementioned evidence from real classroom experiences, represented in five areas, in the translation curriculum as they constitute the fulcrum of translation training.

Specifically, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) *some* translation tutors coming from a linguistics or literature background seem to be wrong-footed; (2) the fact that student translators are slow on the uptake is clear; (3) translation curriculum seems to be ill-starred; and (4) technology is neglected. All of these may drastically affect the translations of student translators as can be seen in observing as much naturalness in translation as possible; employing literal translation; wrong use of dictionaries; lexical choice; the translation of tenses; and translation strategies, namely transliteration and explanation.

To improve potential student translators’ final products, there may be a need: (1) to dose student translators with more theory of translation to hone their skills in the best way possible,

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6 Proz.com: available online at [http://www.proz.com/kudoz/english\\_to\\_french/marketing\\_market\\_research/1319009-dramatic\\_flight\\_seeing\\_tour.html](http://www.proz.com/kudoz/english_to_french/marketing_market_research/1319009-dramatic_flight_seeing_tour.html).

a point with which Pym (2005: 3-6) agrees; (2) to adopt “rapid technological progress and make [trainees] aware that translation technology can solve an array of translation difficulties” (Thawabteh and Najjar, 2014: 49); and (3) to meticulously design syllabi of undergraduate translation courses offered to English majors at Palestinian universities.

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