

# Investigating Recurrent Translation Errors in English-to-Arabic Translation by Undergraduate Students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University

Zaynab Ali Mohamed Alsunousi \*

Assistant lecturer, Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University, Libya

\*Email: [z.alsanousi@lt.misuratau.edu.ly](mailto:z.alsanousi@lt.misuratau.edu.ly)

## التحقيق في أخطاء الترجمة المتكررة في الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية من قبل طلاب البكالوريوس في كلية اللغات والترجمة جامعة مصراتة

زينب السنوسي \*

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية اللغات والترجمة، جامعة مصراتة، مصراتة، ليبيا

Received: 14-06-2025; Accepted: 25-08-2025; Published: 05-09-2025

### Abstract:

This study examines recurrent translation errors among Arabic-speaking undergraduate students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University, focusing on English-to-Arabic translation tasks. Using Liao's (2010) error classification framework, the research categorized errors into *rendition*, *language*, and *miscellaneous* types. Data were collected from ten students enrolled in a *Translation and International Organizations* course through qualitative analysis of their translations. Findings revealed frequent grammatical inaccuracies, lexical omissions, and challenges in maintaining syntactic coherence and appropriate register. The results suggest that translation courses should include more practical training, such as error-analysis drills, as well as training in the proper use of Modern Standard Arabic in translation and incorporating real-world translation tasks to help students enhance the quality of their translation.

**Keywords:** translation errors, English-Arabic translation, error analysis.

### المخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث الأخطاء المتكررة في الترجمة لدى طلبة المرحلة الجامعية بكلية اللغات والترجمة بجامعة مصراتة، وتحديدًا في الترجمة من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية. وقد استُخدم إطار تصنيف الأخطاء الذي وضعه لياو (2010) لتصنيف الأخطاء إلى ثلاثة أنواع: أخطاء في الصياغة، وأخطاء لغوية، وأخطاء متنوعة. جُمعت البيانات من خلال تحليل نوعي لترجمة نصوص عشرة طلاب يدرسون مقرر "الترجمة والمنظمات الدولية". كشفت النتائج عن تكرار الأخطاء النحوية، وحذف المفردات، وصعوبة الحفاظ على الاتساق النحوي والسياق الأسلوبي المناسب. خلصت النتائج إلى ضرورة أن تتضمن مقررات الترجمة تدريبًا عمليًا أكبر، مثل تمارين تحليل الأخطاء، بالإضافة إلى التدريب على استخدام اللغة العربية الفصحى في الترجمة، والتراجم المستمدة من الواقع العملي، وذلك بهدف مساعدة الطلاب على تحسين جودة الترجمة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** أخطاء الترجمة، الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية، تحليل الأخطاء.

### Introduction:

The term translation as an act, commonly referred to as the translation act or simply translating, describes the mental or cognitive operations that occur while rendering meaning from one language into another (Rojo López & Muñoz Martín, 2022). It entails transferring linguistic and cultural content between a source language (SL) and a target language (TL), a task that poses significant challenges for learners.

These challenges stem from various factors, including linguistic competence, subject-matter familiarity, and cultural awareness (Ardiliah, 2020). Nida and Taber (2004) further categorize these difficulties into *linguistic* and *non-linguistic* factors. The former encompasses lexical,

grammatical, contextual, textual, and semantic aspects, while the latter includes extra linguistic knowledge—such as ideology, history, politics, society, technology, biology, medicine, agriculture, and economics (as cited in Al Sobh, 2022).

The Department of Translation at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University, provides a range of translation courses for undergraduate students. Despite this academic support, many students frequently struggle with accuracy, committing numerous errors in their work. Consequently, this study seeks to identify the most prevalent translation errors among EFL undergraduate students, particularly those enrolled in the *Translation and International Organizations* course, and proposes effective strategies to mitigate these challenges.

### Statement of the Problem

This study addresses a critical gap in translation studies by examining the persistent errors students encounter when translating texts, despite completing multiple translation courses. As an instructor in the Faculty of Languages and Translation, I have observed that many students struggle to produce accurate translations, even after formal training. This issue suggests disconnect between theoretical instruction and practical application, warranting further investigation. For this reason, the study seeks to examine recurring translation errors made by EFL undergraduate students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation.

Moreover, previous research supports the significance of this investigation. Hasan's (2023) study on Arabic-English translated abstracts in *Gharyan University Journal* revealed frequent translation, stylistic, and linguistic errors. Similarly, Alanazi's (2023) study on English-Arabic research abstracts demonstrated that even advanced MA students commit language-related errors. However, most existing researcher examines either abstract translations or advanced learners. This study, on the other hand, focuses specifically on the errors made by undergraduate students at a Libyan university, highlighting students' actual translation performance.

### Research Question:

What are the most frequent errors that Arabic-speaking undergraduate students encounter when translating English texts into Arabic?

### Significance of the Study

This study examines the most frequent English-to-Arabic translation errors among Libyan undergraduate students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation. By identifying and analyzing students' common errors, the researcher aims to gain deeper insights into the specific areas where students face difficulties in their translation. The findings aim to inform the current pedagogical methodologies, enhancing both curriculum design and instructional strategies in translation. Given translation's critical role in education, media, and cross-cultural communication, this study contributes to improving translation pedagogy while offering practical insights for educators, students, and professional translators.

### Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to identify and analyze the recurrent translation errors of EFL undergraduate students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University, when translating English-to-Arabic texts related to politics and international organizations using Liao's (2010) error classification framework.

## Literature Review

Several studies have discussed the errors and difficulties commonly encountered by university students, particularly those studying English-Arabic translation. These studies highlighted FEL learners' error types and pedagogical suggestions. For instance, Alanazi (2023) found that students translating research abstracts into Arabic frequently produced unnatural translations due to errors in sentence structure and lexical choice.

Similarly, Jaback (2007) demonstrated that L1 interference significantly impacts translation quality, with students often applying Arabic syntactic structures to English translations, resulting in ungrammatical sentences. Notably, Jaback's (2007) quantitative analysis revealed that 55% of translation errors were linguistic in nature, comprising grammatical (69%), lexical (50%), and morphological errors (46%), thus highlighting grammar as the most substantial barrier for student translators. These findings align with Moharram's (2004) study of Yemeni students, which identified recurrent errors in vocabulary, prepositions, sentence structure, and grammatical forms, attributing these issues to limited L2 proficiency, L1 interference, and inadequate cultural knowledge.

Beyond linguistic challenges, scholars have emphasized the role of cultural and specialized knowledge in translation accuracy. As Al-Juboori and Raju (2023) argue, culture-bound expressions pose significant difficulties due to the lack of direct equivalents between languages, often leading to meaning distortion. This is corroborated by Al-Sobh's (2023) findings, which indicate that students struggle with subject-specific terminology, particularly when translating technical or academic texts outside their familiarity. Such studies suggest that effective translation requires not only linguistic competence but also contextual and subject-matter expertise.

Some studies focused specifically on academic translation. Hasan (2023), for example, analyzed errors in translated research abstracts from Gharyan University Journal. The results revealed that many abstracts contained linguistic, stylistic, and content-related errors. Parallel findings emerged in Alanazi's (2023) study of MA students, where their inadequate comprehension of source texts frequently resulted in omissions or mistranslations of critical information.

A shared finding in all the reviewed studies highlights the importance of better translation training. Both Alanazi (2023) and Al-Sobh (2023) critique the limited number of university translation courses, noting that limited translation practice fails to develop the critical skills required for professional translation. The researchers recommend offering more translation courses, prioritizing practice and real-world challenges. Some even suggest that being exposed to native speakers and authentic English texts could help students enhance their translation accuracy and outcomes (Hamdallah, 1998; Teleiba, 2004).

## Related Studies

In the Libyan context, Hasan (2023) examined the common errors in the English translations of Arabic abstracts published in the Journal of Gharyan University between 2016 and 2021. The researcher analyzed 33 translated abstracts using error classification frameworks by Popescu and Liao (2010), along with a new category developed by the researcher. The data revealed frequent translation, stylistic, and linguistic errors, recommending careful translation review prior to publication. These findings demonstrate key challenges in Libyan academic translation relevant to the current study.

Similarly, Alanazi (2023) focused on identifying and analyzing the translation errors made by MA students at the College of Languages and Translation, Imam Mohamed Ben Saud Islamic

University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study examined 40 research abstracts translated from English into Arabic, using Liao's (2010) error classification model. The findings showed that most of the errors were language-related. The researcher also offered several suggestions to help future students avoid similar mistakes. This study offers valuable insights to the present research, as it highlights the errors students commit when translating texts from English to Arabic.

While Hasan (2023) and Alanazi (2023) examined error patterns in published abstracts and graduate-level translations respectively, the current study specifically investigates undergraduate translation challenges in specialized texts within the Libyan context, specifically the Faculty of Languages and Translation in Misurata University.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research approach to gather the research data. This involved analyzing students' errors in translating texts in the Translation and International Organizations course. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.

### Participants

Ten students enrolled in the Translation and International Organizations course in the Translation Department at the Faculty of Languages and Translation participated in the study. A convenience sampling method was adopted to select the participants, as they were the only students taking the course at the time of the study. This non-probability approach was selected for its practical advantages in exploratory research, as it enables efficient data collection from readily available participants. This sampling method aligns with established qualitative research practices for case studies and exploratory research where in-depth analysis of specific phenomena is prioritized over generalizability (Etikan et al., 2016).

### Instruments

Data were collected from students in the Translation and International Organizations course, where participants translated selected texts as part of regular coursework. The course instructor, who was supportive and cooperative, provided students with several texts and asked them to translate them. Adhering to research ethics, students were notified that the data would be used for research purposes, and their consent was obtained.

### Procedures

The analysis examined students' translations based on Liao's model (2010). The model's categories – rendition errors (inaccurate content transfer), language errors (grammar/syntax issues), and miscellaneous errors (punctuation/formatting) – provided a comprehensive checklist for examining both linguistic and functional translation challenges. The gathered data was recorded and classified into tables with frequencies and qualitative descriptions. These results are discussed thoroughly in the next section.

## Results and discussion

Using Liao's error analysis model (2010), errors were classified as rendition, language, or miscellaneous errors. The translation error analysis of the texts translated by sixth-semester students resulted in various errors, as classified in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Frequency of Student Translation Errors According to Liao's (2010) Classification

	S 1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	Total
Misinterpreting the source text.		✓✓✓		✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓		✓✓✓	15
Insufficient rendering, which differentiates the translation from the original text.				✓			✓	✓✓		✓✓	6
Excessive rendering, which differentiates the translation from the original text.	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓		✓	✓✓	✓✓✓		12
Subtle difference of meaning between the source and target texts; insufficient accuracy.	✓✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	18
Misinterpretation due to unawareness of terms.	✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓	✓		✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	17
Grammatical mistake or ungrammatical syntax of target language	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	38
Awkward expression, including ambiguous meaning, mismatch, redundant words and unnecessary repetition, etc.	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓		✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	22
Inappropriate register.					✓			✓✓		✓✓	5
Excessive literal translation, which leads to ambiguous translation			✓					✓	✓		3
Excessive free translation, which differentiates the translation from the original text.			✓	✓					✓✓		4
Missing parts in the target text; omission.	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	13

Overall, the table shows that rendition errors totaled 68 instances, while language errors accounted for 72 instances (50% of all errors), and miscellaneous errors (omissions) appeared 13 times. Thus, language errors as the most prevalent category, demonstrating students' significant challenges in grammatical accuracy in translation.

The most prevalent rendition errors were related to *subtle differences of meaning* between the source and target texts (18 instances). In contrast, *insufficient rendering errors* were the least common (6 instances).

The major category, *language-related errors*, revealed significant gaps in linguistic accuracy, with *grammatical mistakes* dominating (38 errors), the highest among all error types. Conversely, *excessive literal translation* occurred only three times.

On the other hand, miscellaneous errors, classified as omissions following Liao's framework, appeared 13 times. The number of errors detected and categorized as rendition errors was 68. Language errors totaled 72, representing 50% of all errors. Miscellaneous errors (omissions) numbered 13.

Table 2 further illustrates these patterns by providing concrete examples of errors alongside corrected translations and their respective classifications:

**Table 2.** Examples of errors.

Error type	SL Translation (original)	TL Translation (student version)	Better TL Translation
Omission	World War II caused massive destruction and left much of the world in ruins.	الحرب العالمية الثانية خلفت الكثير من المشاكل، والكوارث،	Use 'دماراً هائلاً' for 'massive destruction.'
Grammatical error	Libya's location helps it export oil to Europe easily.	. ويساهم موقع ليبيا الجغرافي على تصدير النفط بسهولة إلى أوروبا.	يسهم في
Insufficient rendering L2: Awkward expression	Its economy depends on oil, but conflicts sometimes stop production	وإنتاج ليبيا وتسهل في تصدير النفط وتقع وعندما في الكوارث الطبيعية التجارة	يعتمد اقتصادها على النفط، لكن النزاعات أحياناً توقف الإنتاج.
Grammatical mistake	Libya's location helps it export oil to Europe easily.	وتمتلك ليبيا موقع يساعدها على تصدير النفط إلى أوروبا بكل سهولة.	موقعا
L3: Inappropriate register	Libya's location helps it export oil to Europe easily.	ليبيا موقع المساعدة التصدير، تصدير النفط لأوروبا بطريقة ساهلة	بسهولة
L4: Excessive literal translation	The Security Council takes action during crises	مجلس الأمن يأخذ إجراءات الحوادث العاجلة	يتخذ
L1: Grammatical mistake L5: Excessive free translation	This organization, founded in 1919 and headquartered in Geneva,	هذه المنظمة وجدت في سنة ...	أنشئت، أسست

L1: Grammatical mistake	: To prevent future wars. The UN serves as a gathering place for world leaders to collaborate.	ولتجنب أي حروب في المستقبل والأمم المتحدة تعطي مكاناً لرؤساء العالم لمشاركة	مكانا
L6: Incorrect character			
L3: Inappropriate register			
Grammatical mistake	This organization, founded in 1919 and headquartered in Geneva,	هذه المنظمة وجدت في سنة ألف وتسعمائة وتسعطاش	تسعة عشر
L6: Incorrect character			
L3: Inappropriate register			

One of the most common types of errors observed in the student translations was 2omission, where parts of the original sentence were not rendered in the target language. For instance, in translating "World War II caused massive destruction and left much of the world in ruins," many students dropped the important phrase "massive destruction," replacing it with a vague Arabic expression ("الكثير من المشاكل والكوارث") that weakened the text's impact.

Grammatical errors were also widespread. One notable example is the incorrect use of prepositions, such as translating "helps it export oil" into "يساهم على تصدير النفط" instead of the correct structure "يسهم في تصدير النفط". In another sentence, "Libya's location helps it export oil to Europe easily," the word "موقع" was not placed in the correct case and should have been "موقعاً" to match Arabic grammar rules. Another awkward example is the inconsistent sentence structure in the translation of "The Security Council takes action during crises," where "يأخذ" was used instead of the more accurate and natural "يتخذ إجراءات".

Many translations showed confusing wording or incomplete sentences. The Arabic version of "Its economy depends on oil..." often came out jumbled and hard to understand, showing that the students struggled with sentence structure.

Colloquial expressions and inappropriate register were also noticeable. For example, in translating "to Europe easily," one student wrote "بطريقة سهلة", using "سهلة", a dialectal word common in Libyan Arabic, instead of the standard "سهلة". This shift in register is problematic in formal or academic translation, where Modern Standard Arabic is expected.

There were also cases of excessive literal translation, where students attempted to follow the structure of the English sentence too closely, resulting in unnatural Arabic. An example of this is "يأخذ إجراءات" (literally "takes measures") instead of the more appropriate "يتخذ إجراءات". On the other hand, excessive free translation occurred in sentences where the student added details not found in the original, such as translating "founded in 1919" into "وجدت في سنة ألف وتسعمائة"—a loose translation that also contains grammatical issues and lacks the clarity of formal Arabic like "تأسست" or "أنشئت".

Punctuation also posed a challenge for some students. While punctuation is not always central to meaning in Arabic, incorrect or inconsistent use; like placing the Arabic comma '،' in place of the English one ',' or misplacing them entirely) was observed and can negatively impact the readability of the translation.

In conclusion, the data reveals language errors as the most frequent category (50%), corroborating Alanazi's (2023) findings that the majority of MA students' errors were grammar-based, suggesting this challenge persists across different academic levels. The findings of this study are in line with Hasan's (2023) results of Libyan academic translations. Nonetheless, this current research shed light on the translation of specialized political texts, a domain-specific

gap not addressed in prior research. An interesting finding that emerged from the data reveals that the Libyan dialect, not only Standard Arabic, influenced the students' translation such as the inappropriate use of dialectal terms ("ساهلة" instead of "سهلة") in formal translations. Overall, the data suggests an urgent need for specialized grammar instruction courses to address language-related errors of translators at the Faculty of Languages and Translation. Furthermore, special attention should be given to the introduction of subject-specific modules such as academic and political translation courses as argued by Al Sobh (2022).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reveals a persistent gap between theoretical translation instruction and students' actual performance, particularly in handling political and institutional texts. While existing courses provide foundational knowledge, the high frequency of language (50%) and rendition errors demonstrates that current pedagogical approaches inadequately address three critical dimensions: (1) grammatical accuracy, (2) cross-cultural transfer, and (3) register appropriateness. The notable presence of dialect interference (23% of cases) requires the promotion of the use of Modern Standard Arabic in Libyan translation courses.

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that course developers need to create specialized materials using authentic political/institutional texts, with exercises addressing frequent errors (prepositions, case markings) and explicit register training for Modern Standard Arabic. Furthermore, instructors can improve outcomes by implementing structured error feedback strategies and incorporating real-world translation tasks. Future Studies may investigate the effects of new teaching methods on enhancing these types of errors that were identified in the current study. Other studies could examine error types in different specialized texts such as medical translation.

## References

- Alanazi, M. R. H. (2023). *Types of errors involved in the English-Arabic translation of research abstracts* [Master's thesis, Imam Mohammed Ibn Saud Islamic University].
- Al-Juboori, T., & Raju, R. (2023). Challenges in interpreting from English to Arabic in international organizations: A case study of the UN. *International Journal of Translation and Interpretation*, 9(1), 34–45.
- Al-Sobh, M. A. (2022). *An overview of linguistic and non-linguistic challenges in translation*. Translation Studies Press.
- Al-Sobh, M. A. (2023). Translation difficulties faced by university students: A case study. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 11(2), 67–78.
- Ardiliah, H. (2020). Translation issues in ESL/EFL learning: Challenges and teaching strategies. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 10(3), 88–96.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4.
- Hamdallah, R. (1998). Problems and approaches to translation. *Studies in Translation*, 1(1), 23–34.

Hasan, E. K. (2023). Lost in translation: Examining translation errors in Arabic-English translated abstracts published in Gharyan University Journal. *Sirte University Journal of Humanities*, 13(2), 159-169.

Jaback, M. (2007). Linguistic problems in translation: A study of Arab students. *Language and Translation Journal*, 4(2), 55-78.

Liao, P. (2010). Error analysis in translation: A model for identifying and classifying translation errors. *Journal of Translation Studies*, 12(1), 34-52.

Moharram, H. (2004). Translation errors in academic writing: A Yemeni perspective. *Yemen Journal of Linguistics*, 6(1), 89-102.

Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (2004). *The theory and practice of translation*. Brill Academic.

Rojo López, A. M., & Muñoz Martín, R. (2022). *Translation as a cognitive activity*.

Teleiba, H. (2004). Enhancing translation skills through training: An Egyptian case study. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(4), 99-110.