

# The Influence of Neutral Gender Words on Translating Job Titles from English Language into Arabic Language

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## Abstract

This paper aims at investigating the influence of neutral gender words on translating job titles from English language into Arabic Language. This qualitative research includes 20 postgraduate students doing their M.A in Applied Linguistics at the Department of English Language and Literature at Mu'tah University for the academic year 2015/2016. The sample of the study was selected randomly. The researcher used two research instruments; checklist and interview. The findings of this research showed that neutral gender words influence the process of translation in which translators face difficulties when translating them. That is, they encounter difficult problem concluding their meanings unless used in a context, text or followed by a pronoun. This research recommends that translators should consider such words' category and be aware of their usage. Also, this study recommends that further future research be conducted in this area to overcome problems in English as a foreign translation, particularly in a Jordanian context.

**Keywords:** Neutral Gender Words, Job Titles, Translation, Postgraduate.

## 1. Introduction

There are many languages in the world and English is one of these languages. English is considered as an international language. In Jordan the official language is the Modern Standard Arabic and English is undoubtedly an undeclared second language. However, not everyone in Jordan speaks English language. Still, many Jordanians can understand a good amount of English language that they hear or read. Besides many road signs and markets' names are bilingual (Overpeck, 2013). In the very commencement, one should remember not to forget that any language should have a speaker and a listener to activate the communicative approach between the addressor and the addressee. In other words, the two languages must be stimulated since they symbolize, give and get unless one makes known what he or she has in mind to the listener responds appropriately, they live in a lull silence and become as different as chalk and cheese. English, in particular, occupies the top place among languages in the world. No one can deny that English is the cradle of technology, science and inventions. English language is a source language that is used widely across the world (Overpeck, 2013).

Translation is considered to be the highest common division among nations in the world. In a sense, it is the spider cocoon which gathers but not disperses people in the globe to understand each others and swap cultures amongst them. Translators whether from English to Arabic language or the other way around must be highly qualified, keen and cautious when translating into other languages. Translation nowadays hammers legal, economical, industrial, political, religious areas and other ones to be considered in this respect. Any mistakenly translated document may drive nations to the abyss (Al-Nakhalah, 2013).

Translation from one language to another is badly needed to make a balanced meaning in the societies' knowledge and cultures. It assesses how logical relationships are organized and mapped onto syntactic systems of a language. One should confirm that there is a strong relationship between words and their categories in translation. English is taught in Jordan as a foreign language as well as undeclared second language where linguists and translators are very much concerned with improving the field and profession of translation (Khanfar, 2013). More and above, translation serves as a cross-cultural bilingual communication vehicle amongst people. The activity has developed because of the rising international trade, increased migration, globalization, recognition of linguistic minorities and the expansion of mass media and technology. Translation is understood as a transfer process from a foreign language or a second language to the mother tongue. Besides, it is the gateway for understanding others and their civilizations. In the long run, translation creates understanding amongst people which contributes much to give nations a good push forward to form peaceful educated, cultured, literate and advanced societies (Khanfar, 2013).

This advances without saying and it is not a disputable matter that the whole divine transcripts stressed the paramount importance of females and the vivid role they play in all societies. Precisely and definitely the word "woman" clearly illustrates this importance. When casting a glance at the word "woman", we recognize that it is: wheel of movement to establish nations. More likely than non; "man" are the core issue of life. In a sense, men are part of life and women are the other part. Consequently, "superiority and inferiority" that indicate "sex discrimination" is born. On the basis of this, translators still do their best and try their hardest to bridge the gap and cement the bonds if there are differences among sexes. Some translators fall into global mistakes when using pronouns because of biological, psychological, social misunderstanding to "gender" overestimating one gender and underestimating the other (Al-Sohbani and Muthanna, 2011; Sheikhabaee, 2012).

Some linguists categorize nouns into "gender classes" on the basis of morphological or phonological features which others believe that grammatical gender system does not have connection with sex category. Use of masculine and feminine aspect in language dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Even translators find it difficult when translating from the source language into the target language on the basis of grammar. Some assume that men are more dominator and aggressive than women, whereas women are passive and talk more than they do (Pauwels, 2003). Briefly, gender is now viewed as a fluctuating variable over time which could be placed within or between societies and cultures. When using the word "honey", for example, it may indicate the two sexes. Again, firefighter, flight attendant, teacher, engineer do not make any differentiation between the two sexes. Thomas Jefferson did not make any kind of distinction in declaring that "all Men are created equally". Anyhow, some personal titles indicate "femininity" and "masculinity" clearly like: Mr. for men and Mrs. and Miss. for women (Overpeck, 2013). Consequently, the current paper aims at investigating the influence of neutral gender words on translating job titles from English language into Arabic language.

### 3. Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the process of translation from English into Arabic language to figure out factors that impact the process of converting meaning from one language to another within a certain historical, cultural, environmental and translators' tendencies. Al-Nakhalah (2013) conducted a study to investigate the difficulties and problems faced by English language students of Al-Quds Open University in legal terms/documents from Arabic language to English language and from English language to Arabic language. The findings of the study indicated that the participants faced various difficulties in the process of translating legal documents, terms from English to Arabic languages and from Arabic into English languages. It was also observed that some difficulties were related to the gender of the participants.

Masoud Mahmoodzadeh and Sheikbahaee (2012) conducted a study to investigate the errors made by Iranian EFL learners at University Isfahan, Iran. The translation task aimed at identifying the interlingual preposition errors caused by the process of transfer between the target language (English) and the source language (Persian). Their sample consists of 53 adults EFL learners at intermediate level. The findings showed that Iranian EFL learners faced errors related to the wrong and redundant use of prepositions. More frequently as compared with errors related to deletion of prepositions in second language while translating from Persian language into English language. Al-Sohbani and Muthanna (2011) conducted a study to investigate the current major challenges of Arabic-English language translation and vice versa amongst English language Department Students, Faculty of Arts, Ibb University in Yemen. The results of study indicated that lexical knowledge insufficiency; inadequate knowledge and practice of grammar; inadequate cultural backgrounds; and inappropriate teaching atmosphere and methodology are the main problems.

Dweik and Abu Shakra (2011) conducted a study about the most serious problems that translators face when rendering cultural collocations in three religious texts namely, the Holy Quran, the Hadith and the Bible. It was postulated that collocations present a major hurdle for M.A students majoring in translation particularly when translating collocations in religious texts. The results of the study revealed firstly that translators encountered difficulties in lexical and semantic collocations. Secondly, that translators of religious texts should be deeply aware of the nature of lexical and metaphoric collocations. They also should realize the disparities between Arabic concepts and beliefs and Western ones, and should always avoid literal translation by taking the context into consideration.

Halahla's (2010) studied the problems that face translators during their translation of Islamic Religious texts. The findings of the research showed that, this problem can be better understood focusing on the associated meaning of a word and its accurate or nearest meaning existing in target language. In this case, English language lacks the equivalents. Hence, it forces translators to interpreting rather than translating and risking or making compromise with the original spirit or beauty of the original text or even the accuracy of this translation. This creates a kind of misunderstanding and raising post-translation issues over post-translation issues over authenticity of the translation work.

### 4. Statement of the Problem

In Jordan, English language is used both at tertiary and lower education levels. Scholars in the field of translation state that English language learners encounter many problems in translation (Dweik and Abu Shakra, 2011). They point out that the causes of these problems differ according to context. English language learners find it difficult to provide the right meaning of neutral gender words when translating a piece of information from English into Arabic or the other way around, particularly translating neutral gender words to indicate job titles or professions from English language into Arabic language. In connection, this study attempts to investigate the influence of neutral gender words on translating job titles from Arabic into English language by M.A applied linguistic students at Mu'tah University.

## 5. Research Objectives

This study intends to achieve the following research objectives:

- i. To examine the effect of neutral gender words on translating job titles from English language to Arabic language.
- ii. To analyze how understanding neutral gender words helps in developing the translation process.

## 6. Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

**Q1:** To what extent do neutral gender words affect translating job titles from English language to Arabic language?

**Q2:** To what extent does understanding neutral gender words help in developing the translation process?

## 7. Methods

The researcher selected 100 neutral gender words found in English language textbooks as the most common ones that indicate different job titles in English language provided to 10 M.A Applied Linguistic students at the Department of English Language and Literature at Mu'tah University in Jordan for the academic year 2015 /2016. The researcher selected the words randomly. The researcher used two research instruments including a checklist and interview. The checklist comprises 100 sentences including 100 neutral gender words that indicate different professions. The interview was used to achieve the translators' perceptions about the translation of neutral gender words. Then, the researcher encouraged the translators to translate the words given in the checklist as used in 100 different sentences and provide their meaning or the job titles that they refer to. Based on this, the researcher analysed each neutral gender word according to the assigned meaning of the job titles as concluded in the process of the translation. In relevance, the researcher analysed the interviews by looking at themes that emerge. The interviews were conducted to 10 translators selected randomly.

## 8. Discussion and Findings

As far as the discussion of the findings of this research is concerned, 100 neutral gender words were given to 10 M.A Applied Linguistics students /translators at the Department of English Language and Literature for translation. The research was conducted to find out the influence of neutral gender words on translating job titles from English language into Arabic language. Figure.1 below displays the percentage of neutral gender words' translation by 10 M.A Applied linguistic students based on four main criteria, respectively; neutral words translated as male gender professions, neutral words translated as female gender professions, inadequate translation provided and no translation provided .

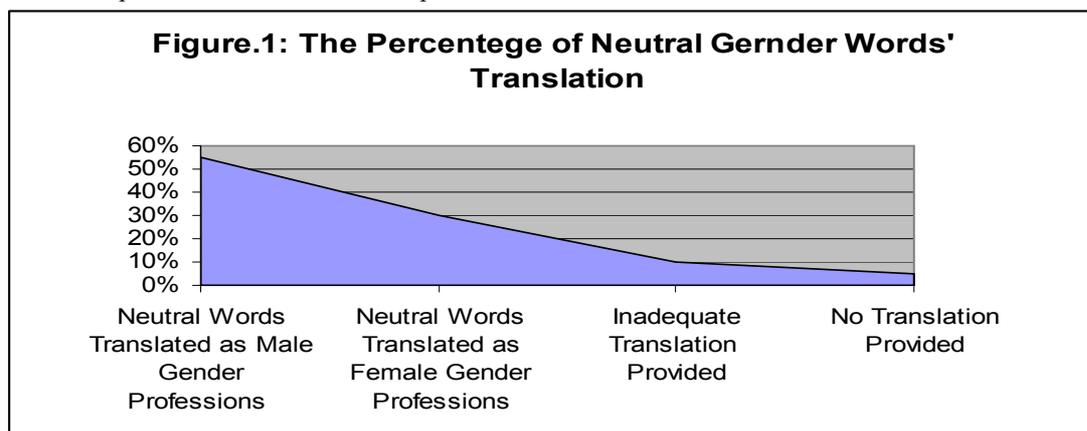


Figure.1 above shows that 55% of the neutral gender words are translated as male gender professions. This may be related to different reasons and difficulties that some of the translators posed in their interview. For instance, when one of the translator was asked about the problems he encountered in translating words such as "doctor", "senator", "lawyer", " pilot" and "officer", he stated that: " I have translated these words as male gender professions because of the fact that I am a male and felt myself in these professions". That is, some of the translator felt very bias in their translation because of the their gender being very subjective. When another translator was interviewed he pointed out that " I translated some of the neutral gender words as male gender professions due to their neutrality, where I felt a kind of confused which is which !!. I mean my lack of knowledge and awareness about the case of these words 'gender in English as a foreign language made me think of them as relevant to my gender not other genders, very openly". This reveals that, another reason behind the translation of some neutral gender words as male gender professions was their lack of knowledge an awareness

of the gender status of these words in English as a foreign language or culture in one hand.

On the other hand, Figure.1 also presents that 30% of the neutral gender words such as "nurse", "model", "secretary", "housekeeper" and "wedding planner" were translated as female gender professions. When some of the translators were asked about the reasons behind their translation to these words as female gender professions, one of them demonstrated that " There are neutral gender words such as "nurse", "model", "secretary", "housekeeper" and "wedding planner" that have feminine nature more than other words. I guess, being a secretary is very feminine profession compared to others in which they require a lot of physical strength". This translator relates her translation to some neutral gender words as female gender profession due to the physical strength that some jobs or professions require. That is, there are some professions need from you to be physically well-built to experience them an other may not. For her as a female translator, she views the translation of these words as feminine fair enough for her gender as female. Also, another female translator states that " As a translator , I find the translation of these words as different and difficult task because of the lack of awareness of the cultural context of the language itself. What I mean is that, as a user or translator of English as a foreign language, I lack the experience of living the culture of these words in their original context to be able to translate them appropriately". This means that understanding the culture of the use of these neutral gender in English language cultural setting is very important and helpful for most of the translators of foreign languages.

Similarly, one of the translators points out that "I translated some neutral words as female gender professions, because English as a foreign language is a kind of male gender bias, and I felt it is unfair for us as females to translate these words as male gender professions". This indicates that the translation of some neutral words as female gender is an issue of objectivity and subjectivity for some translators. That is, some of the translators felt very personal in their translation without being authentic as professional translators. This signals that there a sense of linguistic discrimination amongst translators of being bias about their own genders.

Furthermore, Figure.1 shows that 10% of neutral gender words are provided inadequate translation. This includes words such as "traveller", "decorator", "inventor", "plumber" and "optician". When one of the translator was asked about the difficulties they face in translating such words, one of them stated that " I have no idea about the meaning of these words in which they are new to me. This made provide different meanings. I have to say, I do not know them". This translator states that being unaware of the neutral words' meaning made things difficult for him to translate. Finally, Figure.1 also presents that 5% of the translators provided no translation or answer for most of the words. One of the translator concluded that " English is very perplexing language where you find a lot of linguistic cases of no explanation; this is seen in translation where translating a word in one context is different from others. Very simple, I had no translation for these words". This provides that the differences in cultural contexts of some neutral gender words made it very difficult for the translator to conclude no answers for most of the words given for translation. Based on the discussions of the findings, it is concluded that most of the difficulties and reasons that influence the translation of neutral gender words from English as a foreign language into Arabic language are; 1). the subjectivity and objectivity of the translator, 2). lack of knowledge of neutral gender words' meaning, 3). differences and variation of English language cultural contexts and 4). Linguistic discrimination between genders (males and females).

## 9. Conclusion

In this study, the researcher has investigated the major challenges that face Jordanian M.A Applied Linguistics translators when translating neutral gender words as job titles from Arabic language into English language and vice versa. The qualitative and quantitative analyses helped in classifying those issues which several translators face while translating from SL to TL. The results show that there is a significant influence of neutral gender words translation on job titles that may result in hindering the process of translation, if the translators do not possess the knowledge of these words' meaning. That is, knowing the meaning of these words and the professions or job title they stand for is very helpful for most translators in English -Arabic English language translation.

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