

# Linguistic And Cultural Differences Between English and Arabic Languages and Their Impact on The Translation Process

**Tariq Elhadary**

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences,  
Istanbul Nisantasi University, Istanbul, Turkey.

\* Correspondence: tariq.elhadary@nisantasi.edu.tr

## **Abstract**

Translation is a complex process that involves transferring meaning from one language to another while considering the linguistic and cultural nuances of both source and target languages. This study examines the linguistic and cultural differences between English and Arabic and their profound influence on the translation process. The study explores various aspects of these differences, including grammar, vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, religious and legal terminology, as well as worldview and cultural norms. English and Arabic exhibit distinct grammatical structures and rules, requiring translators to navigate different sentence constructions and word orders. Moreover, both languages possess unique vocabularies and idiomatic expressions that demand translators to have a deep understanding of cultural context to find suitable equivalents or convey meaning effectively. Cultural references play a vital role in translation, as Arabic and English-speaking cultures have diverse historical, religious, and social backgrounds. Translators must possess cultural sensitivity and knowledge to ensure accurate conveyance of references and allusions. Additionally, religious and legal terminology poses a challenge in translation, as Arabic has a rich vocabulary specific to Islamic terms and legal terminology. The study employs textual analysis as a research method to examine, interpret and delve into the content, themes, and underlying patterns within the selected texts. Understanding the impact of linguistic and cultural disparities between English and Arabic languages is crucial for producing accurate and meaningful translations.

**Keywords:** Translation, Arabic and English Languages, Culture and Cultural differences, stylistics, terminology,

## **Introduction**

The linguistic and cultural differences between the English and Arabic languages have a significant impact on the translation process. These differences stem from variations in grammar, vocabulary, syntax, idiomatic expressions, cultural norms, and worldview, (Ali & Al-Rushaidi, 2017). Understanding and navigating these disparities is essential for accurate and effective translation. English and Arabic have different sentence structures and grammatical rules. Arabic is a Semitic language with a complex system of roots, patterns, and declensions, while English relies on subject-verb-object word order, (Akki & Larouz, 2021). Translators must be skilled in restructuring sentences and adjusting word order to convey the intended meaning accurately. Translators must possess a deep understanding of both languages and cultures, along with strong interpretative and communicative skills. By recognizing these differences and employing appropriate translation strategies, the challenges posed by linguistic and cultural gaps can be overcome, leading to successful cross-cultural communication, (Al Madhoun & Elyan, 2020). Both languages possess unique vocabularies and idiomatic expressions that may not have direct equivalents. Translators must have a deep understanding of cultural nuances and context to find suitable equivalents or convey the intended meaning using alternative phrases or explanations. Arabic and English-speaking cultures have distinct historical, religious, and social

backgrounds, resulting in divergent cultural references and symbols. Translators need to be culturally sensitive and knowledgeable to ensure that the target audience comprehends references and allusions correctly, (Al Madhoun & Elyan, 2020). Translators must be aware of these differences to effectively convey messages and avoid misinterpretation or offense. Literal word-for-word translations often fail to capture intended meaning or cultural nuances, emphasizing the need for translators to make informed choices, considering both linguistic and cultural aspects, (Almijrab, 2020). Arabic has a rich vocabulary related to Islamic terms and legal terminology. Translating religious texts or legal documents requires expertise in Islamic and legal systems to ensure accurate and culturally appropriate translations.

Arabic and English cultures have different worldviews and cultural norms, which affect language usage, (Andrist, et. al, 2015). Translators must be aware of these differences to convey messages effectively and avoid misinterpretation or offense. Adequate expertise in these domains is necessary to guarantee accurate and culturally appropriate translations, (Al-Masri, 2009). Furthermore, differences in worldview and cultural norms affect language usage, resulting in distinct approaches to communication.

The impact of these linguistic and cultural disparities is that literal word-for-word translations often fail to capture the intended meaning or convey the cultural nuances accurately. Translators must make careful choices, considering both linguistic and cultural aspects, to produce translations that are faithful to the source material while being accessible and meaningful to the target audience, (Santos & Suleiman, 1993). This requires a deep understanding of both languages and cultures, as well as strong interpretative and communicative skills.

### Methodology

Textual analysis is a research method used to examine and interpret written or spoken texts to understand their meaning, themes, and underlying patterns. It involves a systematic and rigorous examination of textual data, such as books, articles, interviews, speeches, social media posts, or any form of written or verbal communication. Textual analysis can be applied across various disciplines, including literature, linguistics, communication studies, media studies, sociology, and anthropology, (Krippendorff, 2018). Textual analysis allows researchers to uncover insights into the language, rhetoric, and ideologies embedded within texts. By critically examining the textual data, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of social, cultural, political, or historical phenomena and generate valuable insights for further research or practical applications. By applying systematic and rigorous analysis techniques, the study aims to uncover meaningful insights, identify recurring patterns or themes, and interpret the significance of the textual data.

### Stylistics

The central concept in the field of stylistics is style. Style can be observed in various domains such as architecture, painting, clothing, behavior, and work, among others. In its broadest sense, style refers to a distinct characteristic of human activities that emerges from deliberate choices made within established norms, determining a particular mode or manner of engagement. Style serves as an indicator of the individual's social role, their affiliation with or aspiration towards a specific social group, and their unique personal traits and psychological condition. Variations in language style can be seen as manifestations of various factors, including the context in which communication takes place, the dynamics between the author and reader, and the backgrounds of the individuals involved. Psycholinguists, such as Semino and Culpeper (2002) and Enkvist (1985), have extensively examined the impact of these factors. Additionally, linguistic style encompasses the prescriptive grammar that aligns with the aesthetic qualities of a text, a topic investigated by computational linguists like Lakoff (1979) and Thurmair (1990). In this paper, our focus is specifically on the study of stylistics within the realm of translation. Stylistically expressive elements in a text can be recognized at the level of individual words (lexical), through the organization of sentences (syntactic), and by examining the characteristics of the underlying meaning being conveyed (semantic), (Verma & Srinivasan, 2019).

Stylistics, a field of study within linguistics, explores the complete range of expressive resources found in a particular language. It is a relatively recent discipline in linguistics. The term "stylistics" was initially recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1882, defining it as the study of stylistic features and the science of literary style. Nevertheless,

the earliest contemplations on style can be traced back to ancient times. Ancient rhetoric and poetics, which are seen as precursors to stylistics, regarded style as a distinct mode of expression, the appropriate embellishment of thought, (Zhukovska, 2010).

### Arabic stylistics

Arabic stylistics explores the unique features and characteristics of the Arabic language. It investigates elements such as morphology, syntax, semantics, phonetics, and phonology to analyze how Arabic texts are structured and how meaning is conveyed, (Abdul-Raof, 2001). Some key aspects of Arabic stylistics include: Morphology: The study of word formation and inflection in Arabic, including the use of roots, prefixes, and suffixes to create words. Syntax: Examining the sentence structure, word order, and grammatical relationships within Arabic sentences. Semantics: Analyzing the meaning and interpretation of words, phrases, and sentences in Arabic, including aspects such as connotations, figurative language, and rhetorical devices. Phonetics and Phonology: Investigating the sounds and pronunciation of Arabic, including the study of phonemes, intonation patterns, and accents. Arabic and English stylistics refer to the study of the linguistic and stylistic features specific to the Arabic and English languages, respectively. Stylistics examines how language is used in different contexts, focusing on the choices made by speakers or writers to convey meaning, create effects, and engage with their audience. Transferring Arabic stylistics into English can pose several challenges due to the inherent differences between the two languages, (Mohammed Farghal, 2022). Here are some key challenges: Linguistic Structure: Arabic and English have distinct linguistic structures. Arabic is a Semitic language with a different word order, complex morphology, and a rich system of root-based word formation, (Mehawesh, 2013). Transferring these unique features into English can be challenging as English follows a different word order and has a simpler morphology. Cultural Context: Arabic stylistics often relies on cultural references, historical contexts, and religious allusions that may not have direct equivalents in English, (Dweik & Khaleel, 2017). Transferring these cultural nuances can be difficult, as they may require explanations or adaptations to be effectively conveyed to an English-speaking audience. Idiomatic Expressions and Proverbs: Arabic is rich in idiomatic expressions and proverbs that carry cultural and contextual meanings. Translating these expressions into English while preserving their intended sense and impact can be a complex task, as direct translation may result in loss of meaning or sound unnatural in English, (Mustafa, 2010). Figurative Language: Arabic employs various types of figurative language, including metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and metonymy. Transferring these figurative devices into English requires careful consideration, as literal translation may not capture the intended effect or convey the same cultural connotations. Phonetics and Sounds: Arabic and English have different phonetic systems, with Arabic including unique phonemes and sounds that do not exist in English. Transferring the phonetic aspects of Arabic stylistics, such as rhymes, rhythms, and sound patterns, into English can be challenging, as the two languages have different phonetic constraints and prosodic patterns, (Nofal, 2012). Writing Systems: Arabic uses a different script and directionality (right-to-left) compared to English (left-to-right). Translating Arabic texts into English requires not only transferring the linguistic aspects but also adapting the writing system and directionality, which can impact the visual and aesthetic aspects of the stylistic elements. To overcome these challenges, translators and researchers need to employ strategies such as adaptation, cultural explanation, creative rendering, and finding equivalent stylistic devices or expressions in English that effectively convey the intended meaning, tone, and impact of the original Arabic texts, (Baker, 2018). It often requires a deep understanding of both languages, cultures, and stylistic conventions to successfully transfer Arabic stylistics into English.

### English Stylistics

English stylistics focuses on the linguistic and stylistic features of the English language. It examines how English texts are constructed and how meaning is conveyed through various linguistic choices. Key areas of English stylistics include: Lexical Choices: Analyzing the selection and use of specific words, idioms, metaphors, and other figures of speech in English texts. Sentence Structure: Examining the syntax and sentence patterns used in English, including variations in word order, sentence length, and types of clauses. Register and Discourse Analysis: Investigating the

variations in language use based on different contexts, such as formal, informal, academic, or technical writing. Rhetoric and Stylistic Devices: Exploring rhetorical devices, such as repetition, alliteration, irony, and parallelism, employed to create emphasis, persuasion, or aesthetic effects in English texts. The study of Arabic and English stylistics provides valuable insights into the unique linguistic features, stylistic choices, and cultural nuances of these languages. It enables scholars and researchers to analyze and appreciate the richness and diversity of expression within Arabic and English texts, contributing to fields such as literature, linguistics, translation studies, and language teaching.

### Translation Challenges

The translator encounters a challenge when dealing with certain texts, namely, how to interpret words that have no equivalent in a particular culture or setting, (Alwazna, 2014). For instance, European culture has terms like "boyfriend" and "girlfriend" that are nonexistent in Arab culture. Similarly, foods like porridge and attire like dinner jackets are not familiar in Arab culture. Conversely, within the Arab setting, there are certain foods like mallow and licorice, and clothing items such as turbans and robes, as well as legal and social procedures like khula, which are not found in foreign environments. Additionally, the Islamic faith utilizes terms like "iddah" and "mohalil" that have no direct translation in English.

The issue of untranslatability arises due to the dissimilarities between the source language and the language of translation. To overcome this hurdle, a common approach is to employ transliteration, which involves rendering the word in the target language based on its pronunciation in the source language, (Awwad, 1990). For example, words like "iddat" and "mohalel" are transliterated and explained within parentheses, such as: Iddat (the period following a divorce or the death of a spouse during which a woman is prohibited from remarriage according to Islamic law). Nevertheless, it has become apparent that this method is not always effective, as it demands that the translator possess an in-depth understanding of the cultural context associated with the source language. The translation may end up being wholly or partly inaccurate, especially when the text deals with topics that are beyond the translator's area of expertise, (Dweik & Khaleel, 2017b).

اقْتَرَبَتِ السَّاعَةُ وَانْشَقَّ الْقَمَرُ (سورة القمر - الآية "1")

Literally translated as:

"The Hour has drawn near and the moon has been cleft asunder"

أَتَى أَمْرُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَسْتَعْجِلُوهُ (سورة النحل - الآية "1")

Literally translated as:

"The event ordained by Allah has come to pass, so seek not to hasten it"

Due to the absence of this rhetorical color in the English language, (Deeb, 2005) when translating such verses, the translator must choose a word that indicates the occurrence of the event in the future and use a word of emphasis such as "certainly." Therefore, the translation of the first verse becomes as follows:

"The Hour will certainly draw near and the moon will cleave asunder"

"The event ordained by Allah will certainly come to pass, so seek not to hasten it"

The Arabic language has a practice of emphasizing the masculine gender over the feminine, to the extent that it is sometimes referred to as the "he-language". However, this approach may not be acceptable in English, (Assaqaf, 2019) where the feminist movement has prompted the development of various techniques to address the issue of gender discrimination, such as using gender-neutral pronouns like "he/she" or "his/her", or replacing gender-specific terms like "postman" with "postal worker". As a result, the translator must consider these factors when translating to ensure that their work is in line with contemporary English language trends, (Dawood, 2004).

There are additional linguistic differences between Arabic and English, including:

The use of the singular form to refer to the plural in English, for instance:

Poultry disease control

Student affairs

This practice does not exist in Arabic, where the singular and plural forms are distinct. Accordingly, the accurate translations of the aforementioned examples in Arabic would be:

"Poultry diseases control" instead of "poultry disease"

"Students affairs" instead of "student affairs"

English uses the pronoun "it," which has no equivalent in Arabic. When translating, "it" is either rendered in an impersonal form or replaced by the name of the object. For instance,

يعتقد أن                      It is believed

من المشكوك فيه            It is doubted

It is important to avoid ambiguity in interpreting the meaning of a sentence, particularly with regards to the following differences between Arabic and English:

English employs the definite article "the" with certain nouns, such as "The Nile" or "The Alps," but not with words that denote sciences, colors, and games, such as "physics," "red," and "tennis." Conversely, Arabic uses the definite article with all such nouns, without any distinction.

In English, the subject's gender is usually indicated by the pronoun in a sentence, such as:

The doctor lost his hat

The doctor lost her hat

However, when the pronoun referring to the subject is absent, as in the sentence:

The doctor went to the hospital

the meaning can be unclear or ambiguous.

The translator needs to be mindful of the gender of the subject in English sentences, especially when the subject pronoun is absent. To resolve this ambiguity, the translator has to look for other clues in the text indicating the gender of the subject, which could be located far from the sentence in question, making the translation task more challenging. In contrast, Arabic language differentiates the gender of the subject through masculine and feminine markers, (Bahumaid, 2010).

Sometimes, a phrase in English may be translated into Arabic by negation using an excessive negation instrument like "what," not because it is intended as a negation, but to add more eloquence to the phrase. For example, the phrase "if I visit you, I honor you" could be translated into Arabic as "if I don't visit you, what honor do I have?" However, when translating from Arabic to English, this phrase would be rendered as an affirmation because the negation instrument would be redundant.

The translation process is influenced not only by linguistic factors but also by environmental and cultural factors. Words may have different connotations in different languages, which can affect the translation, (Abdelaal, 2020). For example, the moon is associated with romantic beauty in Arab culture, while in English or French culture, it may represent foolishness or lack of innocence. Thus, when translating a phrase such as "a girl is like the moon in her beauty," it is better to translate the intended meaning of the metaphor rather than the metaphor itself, (Husni & Newman, 2015). Similarly, when translating a saying like "Zaid's food may be a poison to Amr," it is unnecessary to mention the names Zaid and Amr, as they may not be familiar to the foreign reader. Instead, the translator should convey the general meaning in an understandable form to the foreign reader, such as "One man's meat is another man's poison."

Similarly, when translating the proverb "Whoever shortens his hand and extends his tongue," it is incorrect to use literal expressions such as "shortening one's hand" or "extending one's tongue" in the translation, as these expressions may not be culturally relevant or understood in another language. Instead, the translator should use an equivalent expression that conveys the same meaning, (Abulhassan, 2014) such as "barking dogs seldom bite," which is more widely understood and accepted.

In addition to translating similes, metaphors, and idioms, translators may also need to provide additional explanations or context to convey cultural and environmental dimensions that underlie certain words, even if they have a corresponding term in the target language, (Hatim & Mason, 2005). For instance, when translating the word "dowry" to another language, the translator may need to include a parenthetical explanation of the concept, particularly in

cultures where the dowry is paid by the wife and not the husband. Similarly, translating the word "uncle" into English requires more specificity to accurately convey the intended meaning without ambiguity, such as using the term "paternal uncle" instead of just "uncle." If the specific term in the source language refers to the maternal uncle, the translator should use that term to precisely indicate the relationship.

The translation process in scientific fields can also be impacted by cultural differences. In such cases, the translator may come across local expressions that the reader from a different culture may not comprehend or that are scientifically unfeasible or unacceptable in their general concept, (Kashoob, 1995). For instance, in Arabic literature and references, the term "eradication of insects" is used, which has a literal equivalent in English. However, this translation might appear incorrect to a specialized reader who considers it unrealistic since it is scientifically impossible to entirely "eliminate" insects. Instead, using a different term like "control" in this context would be more acceptable and accurate as per foreign literature and references.

The consequences of literal translation can have severe effects, especially in legal and judicial contexts, (El-Farahaty, 2016). An example is given of an Arab citizen who appeared in an American court on charges of participating in subversive operations. During the prosecution, the citizen became agitated and called in Arabic for God to "ruin" the house of the unjust prosecutor. The interpreter translated the phrase literally as "damage", which reinforced the judge's impression that the accused was violent and involved in vandalism. The judge issued a judgment based on this impression, along with other legal evidence. Had the interpreter conveyed the same phrase in a way that was known to the judge, such as "oh, you fool" or "God, you're such an idiot", the outcome might have been different. This supports the idea that translation, whether written or immediate, should not always be literal. It should be adapted to suit other cultures and norms to be more acceptable and avoid negative consequences. The challenges related to cross-cultural misunderstandings during interpretation create uncertainty for interpreters, making it difficult to determine whether misunderstandings stem from cultural differences or individual characteristics. It raises the question of whether it falls within the interpreter's responsibility to notify courts and tribunals about possible cross-cultural misunderstandings, (Hale, 2014).

When translating into Arabic, there are phrases that require the translator to take action and not stick to a literal translation, in order to be more acceptable to the Arab reader or listener. This is evident in some translated films where profanity is replaced with softer words like "villain", "fool" and "trivial" to maintain an appropriate level of events. The concept of adaptation and substitution also applies to some scientific texts that may contain scientifically correct expressions but are not acceptable, (Baker, 2018) to the general taste of the Arab reader. For example, the phrase "This invention provides a method for treating cancer in warm-blooded animals such as man and other vertebrates" may require adaptation to be more acceptable. Although the phrase is scientifically correct, it is not culturally acceptable to mention humans in the context of animals in Arab customs and traditions. Therefore, when translating into Arabic, the translator should replace the word "animals" with a more suitable word such as "beings" or adjust the sentence structure so that "man" appears as the subject rather than an additive. For instance, the phrase "humans and vertebrates" would be more appropriate than "animals like humans and other vertebrates". In summary, it is essential to consider linguistic and cultural aspects in communication and translation to avoid confusion, misunderstandings, and potential negative consequences, (Qassem & Vijayasarithi, 2015).

In essence, linguistic and cultural factors play a vital role in communication and the transfer of information and ideas between different contexts. It is crucial for individuals involved in translation, writing, and speaking to recognize and understand these factors to avoid errors or confusion, (Qassem, 2014). Failing to do so can result in reader or listener dissatisfaction and rejection of the conveyed material, and in some cases, it can even lead to unforeseen consequences.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this academic study sheds light on the linguistic and cultural differences between English and Arabic languages and their significant impact on the translation process. The findings underscore the complexity and challenges inherent in translating between these two languages, highlighting the need for translators to possess a deep understanding of both linguistic structures and cultural nuances. The study emphasizes that grammar, vocabulary,



idiomatic expressions, cultural references, religious and legal terminology, as well as worldview and cultural norms, are crucial aspects to consider during translation. The divergent sentence structures and grammatical rules between English and Arabic necessitate skillful manipulation of sentence constructions and word order to ensure accurate and faithful translations. Additionally, the unique vocabularies and idiomatic expressions in each language require translators to be well-versed in cultural context to choose suitable equivalents that convey the intended meaning effectively. Cultural references play a pivotal role in translation, as they reflect the historical, religious, and social backgrounds of Arabic and English-speaking cultures. Translators must possess cultural sensitivity and knowledge to accurately convey references and allusions, thereby fostering cross-cultural understanding. Moreover, the study highlights the challenges posed by religious and legal terminology, which demand specialized expertise to ensure accurate and culturally appropriate translations. The study also emphasizes that differences in worldview and cultural norms influence language usage, requiring translators to navigate these disparities to convey messages accurately and avoid misinterpretation or offense. Literal word-for-word translations are often insufficient to capture the intended meaning and cultural nuances, underscoring the importance of informed choices by translators, considering both linguistic and cultural aspects. In Summary, this study underscores the significance of linguistic and cultural factors in the translation process between English and Arabic. It highlights the need for translators to possess a comprehensive understanding of both languages and cultures, along with strong interpretative and communicative skills. By acknowledging and addressing these differences, translators can bridge the linguistic and cultural gaps, facilitating successful cross-cultural communication and ensuring accurate and meaningful translations. Further research in this area can contribute to refining translation methodologies and enhancing intercultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

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