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THE TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH MIDDLES INTO ARABIC

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ABSTRACT

Despite the considerable research carried out in the field of translation, several aspects of syntactic and semantic interaction targeting translators remain a largely uncharted area. The present study aims to examine two interrelated issues: the translators' performances in translating middles in passive and active constructions and the strategies that translators employ to use the Arabic equivalents for English middles in both constructions. The study consists of two tests, 10 passive sentences and 10 active sentences. The study reveals significant differences in the performances of subjects based on the type of construction and the translation strategies employed.

KEYWORDS: Active, adjectival, middles, nominalisation, passive.

1. INTRODUCTION

When dealing with translation, researchers aspire for the best in having beneficial solutions for controversial translation issues, and there is always a desire to achieve more. One of these challenging issues is translating English middles into Arabic since this type of construction has no equivalent in Arabic. Within the context of translating, equivalence is viewed as a dynamic parameter that constitutes an interaction between semantic and syntactic transformations from the source language to the target language.

From a syntactic perspective, it is worth mentioning here that English and Arabic differ in having a middle construction in English, which does not exist in Arabic. Alexiadou and Doron (2012: 3-5) make a distinction between passive and middle verbs, where they argue that middle verbs have no overtly expressed controller. Moreover, middle verbs allow an implied controller, whereas passive verbs require one. In contrast, Dixon and Aikhenvald (2000) review middle construction as a process that reduces the number of arguments, named the valency-reducing process. In syntax, a verb's valency is the number of subject and object arguments it can take, and these arguments have a close relation to the verb (Kroeger 2005: 70).

According to Kaufmann (2007), middle verbs are resultative in the sense that they describe and denote status resulting from a change of state. This change is caused by a controller, though no attention is paid to either the controller or the change of state. The core is the result of the change.

Despite the number of studies on the translation of passive constructions in Arabic, few of them have dealt with middles. One of these studies that has a similar focus to the present study is that of Baker (1996), in his study he examined the translation of middles into Arabic equivalence by providing Arabic forms (Form V, Form VII, and Form VIII) that are derived from trilateral root of verbs in order to have equivalent translation of middle verbs (p.44-45). Another study on translating passive and middle constructions into Arabic is that of Khafaji (1996). It focuses on strategies that translators use during the task of translation, i.e., Arabic nominalised constructions with the infinitive, e.g., verbs *tamma* and *jara*;, and Arabic nominalised constructions with the passive participle, preceded by a form of (*ka:na*), or stands on its own (p.32-33).

In contrast, the present study examines translating English middles into Arabic in two constructions, namely passive and active, based on different strategies that are used by translators.

Moreover, the present study uses the term middle construction to refer to what Baker (1996) called pseudo-intransitive construction and Khafaji (1996) called pseudo-passive, since this term is the appropriate term for such a type of verb.

1.1. Aims of the study

Motivated by Farghal and Al-Shorafat (1996), the current study aims to investigate how far the translation of some English middle verbs is manageable or is considered correct in Arabic. Moreover, it examines whether translators are successful in their translation of such verbs within passive and active constructions by using different strategies in order to find the appropriate translation equivalents.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The study was based on data elicited from a sample of 25 participants, who were classified into two major groups; the first group comprised 20 Jordanian MA translation students (in their second year) at the University of Jordan, enrolling in their first semester. They were asked to translate 20 sentences in English into Arabic in their free time (time was not limited). The second group consisted of five Jordanian translation professors who had been teaching translation in the Department of English; four at Mu'tah University and one at Al-Isra University. They were asked to translate 20 sentences in English into Arabic in their free time (no time restrictions on performing the task).

2.2. Data collection instrument

A task was designed and divided into two sections: the first part (test 1) was designed in the form of 10 English sentences to test how the participants translate the chosen 10 present middle verbs in passive construction. The second part (test 2) was designed in the form of 10 English sentences to test how the participants translate the chosen 10 present middle verbs in active construction. The researcher selects the verbs according to two criteria as follows:

1. All chosen verbs were present middle verbs.
2. All chosen verbs were used in the same way in both languages (English and Arabic).

To examine the validity of the chosen verbs, they were given to two syntax professors in the Department of English at the University of Jordan to provide the researcher with feedback regarding the suitability of the verbs and the sentences in the tests. Besides, the researchers asked 10 native speakers of

English who learnt Arabic in the Language Centre to check the acceptability of the sentences in the English language. The number of instructor participants (n = 5) was determined by the limited availability of qualified instructors who met the study's inclusion criteria, especially their specialization in translation and experience teaching relevant linguistic structures. Accordingly, the study adopted purposive expert sampling, where depth of expertise and professional insight were prioritized over a larger sample size.

2.3. Corpus

The corpus of data consisted of 20 sentences in English: 10 passive sentences and 10 active sentences. The sentences were carefully chosen, testing the translation of present middle verbs in both passive and active constructions.

The 10 passive sentences (test 1) and 10 active sentences (test 2) consisted of: 10 Present middle verbs, namely (1) tear, (2) fill, (3) disclose, (4) cook, (5) sell, (6) spread, (7) mix, (8) wash, (9) lock, and (10) translate.

2.4. Hypotheses

The paper set out to validate the following set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There are significant differences in the performance of participants on the two tests. That is, the first test will be easier to translate than the other.

Hypothesis 2: There are significant differences across the frequencies and percentages of the two groups. It may be the case that one group will outperform and find the task easier compared to the other group.

2.5. Procedures

The participants were given the task, and the researcher elaborated the way participants should fill in the two tests; they were asked to write the possible translation they might think equivalent for each in the Arabic language.

3. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

This quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data was based on the two syntactic constructions, i.e., passive and active, that the research used to classify the results of the two tests. More specifically, the data were classified based on the translation strategies that participants used during the task. In both tests, participants used four strategies, namely (1) nominalisation, (2) adjectives, (3) passives, and (4) actives. Whereas participants

translated the adverbs used in the sentences in different ways and the study classified their translation into five major categories, namely (1) prepositional phrase (PP) with *cala:*, (2) PP with *bi*, (3) PP with *bishakl*, (4) adverbs, and (5) derived *masdar* (present participle) from the verb predicator with adjectives. Frequencies and percentages were calculated on the basis of the results obtained from two tests in the task.

4. RESULTS

The results of this study show that both groups employ different strategies during their translations in two tests. Four strategies were used in test 1 as follows:

- Passives into nominalisation,
- Passives into adjectival,
- Passives into present or past passives, and
- Passives into present or past actives.

Regarding test 2, participants used four strategies as follows:

- Middles into nominalisation,
- Middles into adjectival,
- Middles into present or past passives, and
- Middles into present or past actives.

The four tables below relate to the validity of the two hypotheses set by the study. Tables 1+2 indicate the frequencies and percentages of each strategy in each test for both groups, for the students and for the professors, respectively. Tables 3+4, in turn, indicate the frequencies and percentages of five ways used by participants during their translation of adverbs in both tests.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of each strategy in test 1 for both groups of subjects.

Strategy	Students	Instructors
	No. %	No. %
Nominalization	23 11.5%	0 0%
Adjectives	14 7%	0 0%
Present passives	42 21%	50 100%
Past passives	84 42%	0 0%
Present actives	11 5.5%	0 0%
Past actives	21 10.5%	0 0%
No answer	5 2.5%	0 0%
Total No. of renderings	200 100%	50 100%

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of each strategy in test 2 for both groups of subjects.

Strategy	Students	Instructors
	No. %	No. %
Nominalization	18 9%	0 0%
Adjectives	11 5.5%	0 0%
Present passives	81 40.5%	10 20%
Past passives	30 15%	0 0%
Present actives	32 16%	40 80%
Past actives	17 8.5%	0 0%
No answer	11 5.5%	0 0%
Total No. of renderings	200 100%	50 100%

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of each way in translating adverbs in test 1 for both groups of subjects.

	Student	Instructor
	s No. %	s No. %
PP (with cala:)	13 6.5%	4 8%
PP (with bi)	118 59%	19 38%
PP (with bishakl)	19 9.5%	9 18%
Adverbs	41 20.5%	14 28%
Maṣḍar (present participle) with an adjective	2 1%	4 8%
No answer	7 3.5%	0 0%
Total No. of renderings	200 100%	50 100%

Table 4: Frequency and percentage of each way in translating adverbs in test 2 for both groups of subjects.

	Students	Instructors
	No. %	No. %
PP (with cala:)	11 5.5%	4 8%
PP (with bi)	123 61.5%	14 28%
PP (with bishakl)	15 7.5%	12 24%
Adverb	37 18.5%	12 24%
Maṣḍar (present participle) with an adjective	1 0.5%	8 16%
No answer	13 6.5%	0 0%
Total No. of renderings	200 100%	50 100%

4.1. Analysis and discussion

Table 1 shows that translating English present passives into (present, past) passives in Arabic is the most frequent strategy, viz. 100%, 21%, and 42% of both groups' renderings featured this strategy. It is noted that instructors used only this strategy regarding the first test, whereas students found it to be the most frequent strategy, i.e., present passive (21%), and past passive (42%) in comparison with other strategies. The lowest frequency is that of translating English passives into Arabic present actives.

Regarding Table 2, translating English middle

verbs into present passives in Arabic is the most frequent strategy, viz. 40.5% among students, whereas among instructors, translating them into present actives is the most frequent one, viz. 80%. The lowest frequency is that of translating English middle verbs into adjectives. The results shown in Tables 1+2 strongly verify our hypotheses regarding the ease of one test over another since the first test examined translating English passive sentences into their counterparts in Arabic, while the second test examined translating English active middle verbs (agent-less subjects) into their counterparts in Arabic. In addition, the results support the second

hypothesis, which argues that the performance of both groups is significantly different; one group outperformed the other. The following discussion sheds light on each of these strategies in two tests, giving examples and explanations.

1. The four used strategies (test 1)
2. Passives into nominalisation

Nominalisation is one of the strategies for translating English passives into Arabic, viz., and 11.5% among students only. Formally, this strategy features a derived noun from the matrix verb or a pleonastic verb plus the verbal noun. To make the discussion more concrete, consider the following examples below:

1. The cup is filled smoothly.

Possible translation: *tammattacbi?at?alka?sbisala:sah.*

1. The soup is mixed smoothly.

Possible translation: *min ?sahlkhaltu?alhasa:?*

As is evident, *tamma* is a pleonastic passive verb where it is used with a derived noun (*masdar*) from the matrix verb *cabba?a* as a possible translation for its passive counterpart. As illustrated in (2), the *masdar* (*khaltu*) is only used to translate a passive verb (is mixed).

1. Passives into adjectival

The translation of English passives into Arabic adjectival was used in frequency of 7% among students only. The following examples in (3) and (4) below are illustrative:

1. The door is locked tightly.

Possible translation: *?alba:bumuhkam?al?ighlaq.*

1. The texts are translated well.

Possible translation: *?anusu:smutarjamahbishakiljaayid.*

It should be noted that English passive verbs are subject to adjectivalisation in Arabic, which means that Arabic translations are verb-less in this sense.

1. Passives into passives

The translation of English passives into Arabic passives came first in frequency in both groups; this strategy was used in two different ways, one of which translates English present passives into present Arabic passives, with the frequency of 21%, 100% among students and instructors, respectively. In contrast, 42% of students translate English present passives into past Arabic passives. The following examples in (5), (6), and (7) below are illustrative:

1. The trousers are washed easily.

Possible translation: *tughsalu?albanati:lubisuhu:latin.*

1. The contract is torn quickly.

Possible translation:

yumazzaqu?alcaqdubisurcatin.

1. The beef is cooked well.

Possible translation: *tubikha?allahmujaayidan.*

By way of illustration, observe the possible translations in (5) and (6) where subjects used present passive, whereas in (7), past passive (*tubikha*) is used, although the tense is present in English.

1. Passives into actives

The frequency of translating English passives into Arabic actives came in two forms, where the first is Arabic present active, while the other is Arabic past active. This strategy was only used among students with a frequency of 5.5% for present actives and 10.5% for past actives. The following examples in (8) and (9) below are illustrative:

1. The news is spread fast.

Possible translation: *tantashiru?al?akhba:rubisurcatin.*

1. The cup is filled smoothly.

Possible translation: *?imtala?a?alku:bubisala:satin.*

1. The four used strategies (test 2)

According to Lekakou (2005), middle constructions feature an internal argument (patient, theme) in syntactic subject position. Furthermore, the external argument (the agent) is syntactically suppressed. In English, middle verbs can be used in active and passive constructions, where in active construction the meaning is closer to the passive. However, in Arabic, middle construction is not used, so in order to translate such types of verbs, different strategies are used to get the equivalent meaning, e.g., using different forms derived from the trilateral root of verbs (FormV: *tafacala*, FormVII: *infacala*, Form VIII: *iftacala*), using the Arabic passive. The subsequent subsections are provided to explain the strategies used in translating such verbs in active construction.

1. Middles into nominalisation

The translation of middle verbs in active construction into Arabic actives came in frequency, viz. 9% among students only. The examples in (10) and (11) below are illustrative:

1. The shirt washes easily

Possible translation: *camaliyyatughasli?alqami:ssahlatun.*

1. The novel translates well.

Possible translation: *tari:qatutarjamati?arriwa:yatijayyidatun.*

Syntactically, the Arabic translations above are verb-less; that is, subjects tend to use nominalisation in order to translate such types of verbs in active

construction.

1. Middles into adjectival

Adjectival proven to be the lowest frequent strategy (5.5%) among students. Consider the following examples:

1. The window locks tightly.

Possible translation: $\text{?anna:fidhamughlaqahbi?ihka:m}$.

1. The novel translates well.

Possible translation: $\text{?arriwa:yahmutarjamahbishakljayyid}$.

As is evident, *mughlaqah* and *mutarjamah* are derived from the matrix verbs to describe the processes of closing and translating in (12) and (13).

1. Middles into passives

This strategy turned out to be the most useful strategy for translating middle constructions into Arabic, viz., 40.5% for present passives, and 30% for past passives among students. However, professors used this strategy with only 20% for present passives, arguing that two verbs, i.e., *sell* and *translate*, have no actives in their Arabic counterparts. By way of illustration, consider (14), (15), (16), and (17) below:

1. Colours mix smoothly.

Possible translation: $\text{muzijat?al?alwa:nubisala:satin}$.

1. The shirt washes easily.

Possible translation: $\text{yughsalu?alqami:subisuhu:latin}$.

1. Toyota cars sell widely.

Possible translation: $\text{tuba:cusayya:ra:tutuyu:ta:cala:nahwiniwasic}$.

1. The novel translates well.

Possible translation: $\text{tutarjamu?arriwa:yatujayyidan}$.

As can be seen in (14), translating the present middle verb (*mix*) in Arabic is its past passive counterpart (*muzijat*), while in (15) the present middle verb (*wash*) is translated into its present passive counterpart in Arabic (*yughsalu*). Regarding (16) and (17), all instructors translate the two verbs (*sell* and *translate*) into their Arabic passive counterparts *tuba:cu* and *tutarjamu*, respectively.

1. Middles into actives

This strategy was found to be the most frequent strategy for translating middles among instructors, viz. 80% of the renderings involved present active construction. Among students, 16% of renderings represent translation of middles into Arabic present actives, while 8.5% represents Arabic past actives. The examples (18), (19), (20), and (21) below are illustrative:

1. The book tears quickly.

Possible translation: $\text{yatamazzaqu?alkita:bubisurcatin}$.

1. The secret discloses quickly.

Possible translation: $\text{yankashifu?assirrusarican}$.

1. The glass fills with water smoothly.

Possible translation: $\text{yamtali?u?alka?subilma:?ibishaklinsalis}$.

1. The news spreads fast.

Possible translation: $\text{?intasharat?al?akhba:rubisurcatin}$.

Syntactically, the Arabic translations of the sentences above show that in Arabic grammar, using different forms of trilateral root verbs can substitute such English verbs in Arabic in active construction. More specifically, *yatamazzaqu*, *yankashifu*, and *yamtali?ucan* function as middles in Arabic since their meanings are closer to passives.

1. Ways of translating English adverbs (test 1)

It is highly important here to refer to the ways that both groups tend to use in translating adverbs that are used in passive sentences. As can be seen from Table 3, PP (with *bi*) 'by', e.g., *bisala:sah*, *bisurca*, *bi?ihka:m* was the most frequent way in translating adverbs, viz. 59% among students and 38% among instructors. As the results showed, it was used more by students than by instructors. Translating the adverbs with their Arabic counterparts was the second way that both groups used during the task, comprising 28% among professors and 20.5% among students. PP (with *bishakl*), e.g., *bishakljayyid*, *bishaklmuhkam*, and *bishaklwa:sic*, came third, scoring 18% among professors and 9.5% among students of renderings; it was used more by professors than by students. As a fourth way that subjects use to translate adverbs is PP (with *Cala:*), e.g., *cala:nahwinwa:sic*, and *cala:nita:qinwa:sic*. Again, it is used more by professors than by students: 8% vs. 6.5%, respectively. Finally, *Masdar* (present participle) with adjective, e.g., *tarjamatanbali:ghah*, *?intisharansari:can*, *mazjansalisan*, and *?imtila:?nsalisan* was used, accounting 8% for professors and 1% for students.

1. Ways of translating English adverbs (test 2)

Under this section, the study refers to the ways that both groups tend to use when translating adverbs that are used in active sentences. As can be seen from Table 4, PP (with *bi*) 'by', e.g., *bisala:sah*, *bisurca*, *bi?ihka:m* was the most frequent way in translating adverbs, viz. 61.5% among students and 28% among instructors. As the results showed, it was used more by students than by instructors. Translating the adverbs with their Arabic counterparts was the second way that both groups

used during the task, comprising 24% among professors and 18.5% among students. PP (with bishakl), e.g., bishakljayyid, bishaklmuhkam, and bishaklwa:sic, came third, scoring 24% among professors, and 7.5% among students of renderings; it was used more by professors than by students. As a fourth way that students use to translate adverbs is PP (with Cala:), e.g., cala: nahwinwa:sic, and cala: nita:qinwa:sic, accounting 5.5%. While professors use Masdar (present participle) with an adjective, e.g., tarjamatanbali:ghah, ?intisharansari:can, mazjansalisan, and ?imtila: ?nsalisan, accounting 16%. Finally, students use Masdar (present participle) with an adjective only once, in contrast to the least frequent way among professors, which is PP (with cala:), accounting 8%.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the treatments of middle verbs in two syntactic constructions, namely (1) passive construction, and (2) active construction, in an attempt to reach syntactic and semantic parameters that govern the translator's decisions during the translation task. It has been proven that translators use different strategies and ways to reach Arabic equivalents for English middles in passive and active constructions.

Significantly, the paper points clearly to the difference in the strategies used between professors

and students. Referring to the second hypothesis stated in this study, there are significant differences across the frequencies and percentages of the two groups. It may be the case that one group will outperform and find the task easier compared to the other group. This hypothesis is particularly borne out by the significant difference in the employment of passives in test 1: it accounted 100% for professors' vs. 21% present passives and 42% past passives for students. Further, in test 2, there is another significant difference in the employment of actives: it accounted for 80% for professors vs. 16% present actives and 8.5% past actives for students. It can be deduced that translation professors give much more attention to achieving the semantic and syntactic equivalences than translation students, who are concerned only with semantic equivalence.

Finally, the present study offers implications for translation departments. In particular, translation professors should pay attention to the English middle construction in translation courses. They should point out that the Arabic language has only two constructions, namely (1) active construction, and (2) passive construction, but not middle construction. Most importantly, students should be sensitised to the appropriate types of translation equivalences of middle constructions.

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