

Some Implications of Contrastive Lexicology for Bilingual Lexicography and Teaching Translation (With Special Reference to English-Arabic)

Abstract

The present article deals with the most important pedagogical question concerning translation. The question has to do with what to teach future translators. The importance of teaching the linguistic aspect of translation, mainly contrastive lexicology, before practice will be emphasized. In fact, the fundamental linguistic insight of our article lies in the importance we need to give to teaching lexical items, what they mean, how they are used in different linguistic and situational contexts in order to find their appropriate equivalents at the intralingual and especially the interlingual level. Observations concerning bilingual dictionaries, as the kind of contrastive information that can be added, are pointed out. Future bilingual dictionaries (English – Arabic and Arabic –English) should be able to capture the problematic features of translation in order to become a more valuable resource rather than just a checking device.

This paper touches on the implications of contrastive lexicology for teaching translation as well as bilingual lexicography, more particularly English-Arabic dictionaries. Language teaching is needed and should be stressed in any translation programme. Students should develop insights into the languages they are translating from and into. Translation is complicated and requires an awareness of the problems that could be encountered in that process. In fact, investigating the structure of English words and how they are translated into Arabic allows us to identify the similarities and differences and understand how translators overcome the semantic gaps between English and Arabic.

Contrastive lexicology is useful in the sense that it heightens our awareness of similarities and differences between English and Arabic and of the significance of any choice made by the translator in a given context. In what follows we would like to show the importance that a contrastive lexico-semantic study may have for the training of future translators and also the compilation of dictionaries as the lexical entries are words.

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1. Implications of contrastive lexicology for teaching translation

The teaching of translation is often carried out in an extremely unsystematic way. What is actually offered is quite arbitrary and depends almost entirely on personal initiatives on the part of teachers. The teacher simply gives his students a passage to translate. We cannot, however, dream of translating this way. It is not helpful, as Baker (1992:2) argues:

to expect a student to appreciate translation decisions made at the level of text without a reasonable understanding of how the lower levels, the individual words and grammatical structures, control and shape the overall meaning of the text.

- Then, translation is a skill of its own right not to be taken for granted. It is unreasonable for a teacher to expect it automatically of his students. Yet, this is precisely what many teachers do. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958:25) put it clearly:

Quant au traducteur de profession, il doit connaître toutes les nuances de la langue étrangère et posséder toutes les ressources de sa langue maternelle. Autant dire que la grammaire et le vocabulaire ne doivent avoir aucun secret pour lui.

It follows that the translator's knowledge of language should not be limited or trivial, but deep and accurate. Language, of course, does not only consist of grammar and words. However, the teacher should begin by ensuring that his students master the basic language unit which – we believe – is the word. Students

ملخص

تتطرق الباحثة في هذا المقال إلى أهم سؤال بيداغوجي يتعلق بالترجمة ألا وهو: ماذا نعلم طلبية الترجمة خاصة في المراحل الأولى من التدريس، ويركز المقال على أهمية تدريس الجانب اللغوي للترجمة إضافة إلى الجانب التطبيقي إذ يجب على الأستاذ مثلاً أن يعطي أهمية للمفردات اللغوية ومعناها وكيفية استعمالها في مختلف السياقات اللغوية والظرفية في "اللغة المصدر" من أجل إيجاد نظائرها المناسبة في "اللغة الهدف". ومن خلال هذه المقارنة المفرداتية يتمكن الطالب من فهم الفروقات بين لغته الأم واللغة الأجنبية وبواسطة تمارين مختلفة يتعرض الأستاذ إلى مختلف الحلول التي تتمثل في طرائق الترجمة. وتعد الترجمة على مستوى الكلمة خطوة أساسية في تدريس الترجمة قبل المرور إلى مستويات أعلى كالنص مثلاً. كما يلقي المقال الضوء على مشكلة القاموس الإنجليزي العربي و تقدم الباحث اقتراحات تساعد في جعل القاموس ثنائي اللغة مورداً هاماً للمترجم وليس فقط أداة للتأكد من معنى المفردات بدون تحديد السياقات التي يمكن أن تظهر فيها في اللغتين المصدر و الهدف.

often ask ‘how do we say (a word in their native language) in English?’ The teacher, it should be said, has a greater flexibility in the design of the course but we would all agree that teaching tends to be step-by-step in nature **starting from simple to complex. As the course develops, the teacher can move to contexts larger than words and single sentences. Therefore, initial translation drills should be simple starting from the word as a unit. It is important to tell students that there is a great deal to be learned about individual lexical items in one language and their equivalents in another language. What is important for a teacher is not to count how many lexical items his students know but to concentrate on how well his students understand the meanings of lexical items before finding their appropriate equivalents in another language, i.e., before translating. Therefore, the teacher should help students understand the linguistic aspect of translation.**

In fact, linguistics must be viewed as an important course in the training of translation students. Linguistics is important in the sense that it helps students develop insights into the nature of language. For example, the polysemic nature of words is fundamental. A glance at a monolingual dictionary will show students that nearly every word in English has more than just one meaning. Students are not always aware of the range of meanings a word can have. We suppose that this is mainly due to the way they have been taught when they first learnt English: on one side of the page is the word in English and on the other side a single word in the student’s language. Students generally use such vocabulary lists which do not only suggest that a word has one meaning but that it has an exact translational equivalent.

- Moreover, words and their equivalents are learnt without any reference to any context in which they might be used. The result is that students might suppose that they would encounter all the words in their lists in very similar contexts and situations as their equivalents. When translating, students would extend the use of one lexical item to all the situations which are similar to those of the source language.

Then we should provide students with examples which show how word meanings change across contexts. The second step is to show them how the lexical choice – when translating – is sensitive to both linguistic and situational contexts in the target language just as it is in the source language.

Let us consider the following sentences:

- (a) The runner tried to break the world record.**
- (b) Why did you break his face ?**
- (c) The manager’s policy broke the bank.**

The above sentences can be translated as follows:

- (a) حاول العداء تحطيم الرقم القياسي العالمي**

(b) لماذا هُشمت وجهه ؟

(c) دمرت سياسة المدير البنك

Break and كسر do have the same core or primary meaning, i.e., the first meaning to be thought of by the majority of the speakers of a language if presented with the word in isolation. For example, The boy broke the window is translated in Arabic as كسر الولد النافذة . In the three above examples, break is translated into synonyms of كسر : هشم , حطم , and دمر. If we consider other meanings of break, the translations will allow other meanings in Arabic and so other verbs would be used. For example, Some people break the law: يخترق بعض الناس القانون and the list is longer than what might be expected.

- The latter examples and others do not only show how far the extended or peripheral meanings of a polysemous word may be from its core meaning, but they also demonstrate that in translating polysemy one is not just operating at word level because as Mitchell (1975:107) puts it: “a linguistic item or class of items is meaningful not because of inherent properties of its own but because of the contrastive or differential relationships it develops with other items or classes.” If we consider the classes to which the word **sound** belongs:

(d) Your suggestion sounds reasonable.

(e) It is a sound basis.

(f) Muslims have sound beliefs.

(g) That sound between the two seats is quite narrow.

Sound has different meanings depending on whether it is used as a verb, an adjective or as a noun. Moreover, the same word used as an adjective has different meanings as in translations (e) and (f) below:

(d) يبدو اقتراحك معقولاً

(e) انه اساس صلب

(f) عند المسلمين معتقدات راسخة

(g) ذاك البرزخ ضيق جدا

Again, this clearly shows the importance of context which can be decisive in guessing the more likely meaning of a polysemous word by looking at the preceding and following words. Hence, in translating polysemy, the linguistic context and a good dictionary are quite useful and necessary.

- It should be noted though that the idea of a word-for-word translation is not completely false; two words with the same core meaning in English and Arabic can extend their meanings similarly in some contexts. In this case, a literal translation is quite acceptable and correct, though such cases are rather rare. In fact, the problem with literal translation is as Lefevre (1992:53) explains: “Word for word translations do not find mercy in our eyes, not because they are against the law of translation but simply because two languages are never identical in their vocabulary.” It follows that the lack of a straightforward correspondence between the lexical items of English and

Arabic should be emphasized through, for instance, translation drills being a direct application of the theoretical part such as the module of linguistics, and more particularly contrastive linguistics in which contrastive lexicology plays an important part.

- To sum up, as a first step the teacher should draw the students' attention to the importance of placing a word in its context. Mounin (1963:45) explains that "rien dans la langue n'existe de manière indépendante." The linguistic and situational contexts in which the word appears are important sources of information. The teacher can even encourage his students to make intelligent guesses about word meaning from the context, in addition to pragmatic clues such as inference. Performatives are good illustrations of inference. For instance, Don't do it might be interpreted and so translated as a warning, a command, a request or a piece of advice all depending on the situational or extra-linguistic context in which it is used.

Once students have realized that the meaning of a lexical item is determined by the conditions of its occurrence in different linguistic and situational contexts, they can be asked how they could translate it into their language. The teacher can make a list of the equivalents or possible correspondents with which his students first equate the given word. Alternatively, the teacher himself can offer an equivalent word followed by a number of possible synonyms, one of which only fits. Actually, selecting the appropriate equivalent among a range of possible equivalents poses serious problems for students, especially when confronted with the choice of synonyms.

- The common definition of synonymy is the sameness, or the similarity of meaning between two or more words. Ghazala (2002) proposes the following division: absolute synonyms which are perfectly identical in meaning, and near synonyms which are similar to one another in meaning. It can be argued, however, that absolute synonyms do not exist in languages or are quite rare, to say the least. In fact, a language does not use more than one word to describe the same thing as Ghazala (ibid.:89) again specifies: "when two or more words are used to describe the same thing, there must be a difference of some kind between them." Translators should be aware of even the slightest difference in meaning between words which are said to be synonyms and the equivalent of each synonym so that they can achieve the maximum degree of precision in translation.

For example, **bothered** and **furious** are translated respectively as: **هو متغص** and **هو مغتاظ**. **Angry** is the central meaning of both these words but these two synonyms are different in that a bothered person can control himself whereas a furious person does not and loses his senses. The

synonyms of angry can be divided into three main levels of meaning: angry, a little angry (**nervous, worried, disturbed, discomforted, inconvenient, displeased, discontented, annoyed**) and very angry (**impatient, agitated, enraged, furious, wrathed**). The point is of major importance to translators in the sense that even the subtlest difference is worth considering and examining since it may be crucial to the context.

- Many other differentiating features related to the context can be mentioned. The first is that synonyms do not have the same **collocational range**. In English, for example, we say **to start the car** and not **to begin** or **commence the car**. In Arabic, for example, the three verbs: رأى, شاهد and نظر, which are synonyms, are not interchangeable in all the contexts in which one or the other may be used. The teacher can ask students to translate the following sentences into Arabic:

(h) We saw in the last chapter some of the risks inherent in these policies.

(i) Fifty thousand people saw the match.

(j) See page 133.

After listening to the students' answers, the teacher can give the correct translations:

(h) رأينا في الفصل الأخير بعضاً من المخاطر المتضمنة في هذه السياسات.

(i) شاهد خمسون ألف متفرج المباراة.

(j) أنظر صفحة 133.

The teacher can point out, for example, to the fact that رأى cannot be used in the imperative and so one of its synonyms نظر is used instead. Another synonym of رأى, which is شاهد, is used when what we see is a match (مباراة /مقابلة). This would allow students to understand that the translator's choice of equivalent words needs to be judged on the context of the sentence.

- The students' attention should also be drawn to the situational features which may determine the choice of one lexical item instead of another, though the linguistic context may allow both. For example, in the English sentence: **See if all the doors are locked before you leave**, the verb **see** appears in the imperative as in sentence (j) above. But the word which best renders the meaning of **see** in a situation where the purpose of the sentence in the mind of the speaker is to check that the doors are locked, is the Arabic verb **تأكد** rather than **نظر**. The English sentence translates in Arabic as:

تأكد من أن كل الأبواب مغلقة قبل أن تنصرف

- The teacher should also bring collocations to the students' attention. Lewis (2000:13) argues that "giving students collocations of words newly or

previously met will widen their understanding of what those words mean and, more importantly, how they are used.” Undoubtedly, when translating, the collocational feature of a word and its equivalent should be identified. For example, the Arabic dictionary’s equivalent of **deliver** collocates with a number of nouns which for each one Arabic uses a different verb. Baker (1992) gives the following translations:

Deliver a letter: يسلم خطابا

Deliver a speech: يلقي خطبة

Deliver news: ينقل أخبارا

Deliver a blow: يوجه ضربة

Deliver a verdict: يصدر حكما

Deliver a baby: يولد امرأة

The word **deliver** is to be understood in the light of its collocates which really constitute important contextual clues in interpreting the meaning of the word and then translating it. Knowing the company a word keeps is quite important when translating and thus students must be aware of the set of collocates which are compatible with the equivalent of a given word in the target language.

- Collocations may involve different ways of portraying an event. The Arabic equivalent collocation to the English **Law and order** is القانون و التقاليد (law and convention /tradition). Each collocation is a reflection of the high respect accorded to the concept of **tradition** by the Arabs and to the concept of **order** by the English speakers. It follows, then, that what is important for the speakers of one language is not necessarily so for the speakers of another language. The difference between the Arabs and the English in this case has been expressed lexically. Future translators should be aware of the existence of such gaps to avoid making all sorts of mistakes.

- **It should also be pointed out that every language maps out the world of reality into semantic fields. However, the inner division within the semantic fields often differs from one language to another. As far as translation is concerned, it would be very interesting to map out the semantic fields in order to find the similarities and overcome the differences. For example, the semantic field of travel is divided differently in English and Arabic. English makes distinctions according to purpose, distance covered and means of transportation as follows:**

1. Trip: General word for traveling, for pleasure, study or business, shorter than a journey.

2. **Journey:** Greater distance, longer time, traveling by means of transportation.

3. **Outing:** Short, not very far, not alone, for pleasure or entertainment.

4. **Hike:** On foot, in nature, for pleasure.

5. **Voyage:** rather long, by sea or in space.

6. **Cruise:** By boat, stopping at various places, for pleasure especially as a holiday.

7. **Tour:** Organized in groups.

Now, let's see if the words belonging to the English semantic field of **travel** have Arabic equivalents with the same elements of meaning as the English words. Baalbaki in Al-Mawrid English-Arabic dictionary (2001) gives the following Arabic equivalents:

1. **Trip:** رحلة

2. **Journey:** رحلة and سفر

3. **Outing:** نزهة

4. **Hike:** نزهة طويلة سيراً على الأقدام

5. **Voyage:** رحلة بحرية أو جوية أو فضائية

6. **Cruise:** رحلة للمتعة

7. **Tour:** رحلة ، زيارة (لمتحف أو موقع أثري، الخ) ، جولة

From the above translations it appears that some English words do not have an exact equivalent. It seems that there is a need to add information such as the means of transportation in (4) and (5), the purpose in (6) and the distance covered in (4). It can also be noted that the same word رحلة is used in (1), (5) and (6). It also appears in addition to other words in (2) and (7). The dictionary does not, however, specify how the choice of one lexical item is made except in (7). The word زيارة rather than رحلة seems to be preferred when it co-occurs with words such as متحف (museum) or موقع أثري (archaeological site). In other words, as Lewis (2000:13) puts it, “ it is the collocational fields of the two words which reveal the difference of meaning, or rather more precisely, the difference between the ways the words are used.”

Students should be introduced to differences in the semantic field across languages to understand that, as Mounin (1963:44-45) posits:

les éléments de la réalité du langage dans une langue donnée ne reviennent jamais tout à fait sous la même forme dans une autre langue, et ne sont pas, non plus, une copie directe de la réalité. Ils sont, au contraire, la réalisation linguistique et conceptuelle de la réalité qui procède d'une matrice structurelle unique mais définie, qui continuellement

compare et oppose, relie et distingue les données de la réalité.

- So far we have been emphasizing the teaching of the theoretical aspect of translation. In teaching translation a balance between theory and practice should be kept although it can lean on practice. The latter should be most strongly emphasized in the training of prospective translators to meet the market needs.

Translators must constantly make choices in each unit of translation, so as to decide which of them is the most appropriate. This leads to the search for the most suitable procedure or technique to the requirement of what is being translated. One might argue that when translating at the lexico-semantic level bilingual dictionaries can be of much help to students. It is true that the learner should be given practice in using the dictionary. However, many of the translation challenges cannot be dealt with relying exclusively on dictionaries. Belloc (quoted in Redouane, 1996:9) argues that:

[...] if you are fairly certain from your experience that a particular meaning is intended do not fear to give that meaning although the dictionary has it not; for remember that all dictionaries are made by translators and that every translator is, like yourself, an imperfect being.

It is the translator's job to search for solutions and defend a particular approach to translating a specific word. This is not, of course, to completely overlook the importance of dictionaries. Students are supposed to consult dictionaries when they have difficult words. But not everything is found in bilingual dictionaries as we shall see in the second section of the article. It is important to help students develop their own ability to translate independently of dictionaries by training them in the use of different procedures.

- The teacher has to develop, for instance, the students' paraphrasing skill which is essential when a particular word does not have an exact equivalent. Other procedures such as **modulation** and **transposition** should be taught in an explicit way. For instance, we consider **to become penniless** and أفلس a case of **transposition** in which the verb أفلس is expressed by a phrase in English. **He was blown away** and ذهب أدراج الرياح is a case of **modulation** in which the situation is described from a different viewpoint. While English indicates the means (blown), Arabic indicates the result first (ذهب), then the means (أدراج الرياح). **Modulation** may also involve a change from part to whole, e.g., **Envoyer un mot** and **To send a line**. In Modulation, the symbol of comparison may change, e.g., **He earns an honest dollar** and **Il gagne honnêtement sa vie** or **As cunning as a snake** and أحذر من ذئب. Also one part

may be substituted for another, for instance, **He cleared his throat** and **Il s'éclaircit la voix**.

These procedures and others can be adopted when a literal translation is not possible. Explaining the translation procedures would also reinforce the students' theoretical background. The translational procedures can be inferred from bilingual corpora to understand the constraints and motivations that influence the act of translating. It would enable them to examine the shifts which are the result of the choices imposed by the language.

We conclude saying that our approach to translation would certainly be more enjoyable and stimulating for students than the consideration of a whole passage; at least at the first stages of teaching translation.

- To end this section and as a reflection, we recommend the introduction of translation as an independent major in the departments of foreign languages. Translation as a teaching method has been banished and considered rather disreputable for a long time, but there are several reasons for paying attention to translation. Generally speaking, language learners use their language as a resource. Instead of denying this fact, one should rather exploit it. As we saw earlier, comparing two languages (English and Arabic) enables learners to understand the functioning of one language in relation to another. It develops the students' insight into the nature of English, as a result of the confrontation between the foreign language and the students' native language or first language (Arabic) while searching for equivalence.

Lewis (1997:65) argues that "Translation is a form of consciousness-raising." It follows that translation can be used to devise a variety of classroom activities aimed at enhancing the students' understanding and awareness of certain features of the target language. Hence, it can be a means for improving foreign language competence. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) even consider translation as an acquisition procedure (un Procédé d'acquisition). We end up with a statement by the authors (op.cit. p.25), who recognize the importance of translation in the sense that "Elle permet d'éclairer certains phénomènes qui sans elle resteraient ignorés. A ce titre, elle est une discipline auxiliaire de la linguistique."

2 Implications for bilingual lexicography

To begin with, lexicography is a discipline concerned with dictionary making or compilation of dictionaries. Dictionaries, particularly the bilingual ones, are immensely valuable tools for translators. Yet, the bilingual dictionaries currently available are of limited use as they contain a list of possible equivalents without further specification. About English-Arabic and Arabic-English dictionaries, Harouni (1999:129) notes that: "[...] the dictionary user will have a lot of difficulties in selecting the appropriate lexical

item which he needs in his encoding or decoding linguistic performance since the dictionary does not provide any contextual clues, linguistic and pragmatic, as a facilitating device.”

- Indeed, selection is the essence of the dictionary user’s problem. For example, Al-Mawrid English-Arabic dictionary (2001) lists the following words and phrases under the English verb smell :

تفوح منه رائحة كذا (5) , يكون أو يصبح كريه الرائحة (4) , يستشم (3) , يكتشف (2) , يشم (1)

Such a dictionary entry does not represent the Arabic equivalents of the polysemous word smell adequately. It does not contain examples of how and where to use such equivalents of the verb smell especially (4) and (5), which are rather explicative.

Moreover, possible Arabic collocates are not made accessible to the users in the dictionary. Zgusta (1976:314) explains that “the equivalent should be a real lexical unit of the target language which occurs in real sentences.” As demonstrated earlier, we cannot talk about the meaning of a word apart from context. Much of meaning is determined by context and the choice of any lexical equivalent is determined by the context. The interdependence of words; words and grammar; words and situational features is not to be denied and ignored. The dictionary should be responsive to changes in word meaning in different contexts: linguistic and situational.

- Another remark concerning dictionaries is as Lewis (1997:209) puts it; “the dictionary suggests synonymy; which may be helpful if you want to decode but positively misleads anyone who is seeking *le mot juste* for productive use.” In fact, essential differences between words with similar meaning and between words and their equivalents are lost in dictionaries. Moreover, it seems that in concrete situations, there is much uncertainty over which word constitutes a good equivalent. This is mainly due to the various pragmatic interpretations placed on words by the users of the language. Dictionaries do not include enough linguistic data, such as the collocational distribution of a word and its possible correspondents, let alone the pragmatic information. A last point worth mentioning has to do with the grammatical classes of the language.

- The lexicographer must decide which classes will be considered equivalent. This would be easy if the classes were similar in both languages. However, this is not always the case. The English class of verbs cannot be always considered equivalent with the Arabic class of verbs. The shifts which result from the nature of the target language should be reflected in bilingual dictionaries. For example, in the sentence He came with a letter to me, the preposition with can be interchangeable with an adverb in Arabic

جاء حاملًا رسالة لي . An adjective, for instance, can be translated into a verb in Arabic: An interminable way, طريق لا ينتهي . We conclude saying that the bilingual dictionary should be extended to include more information about the lexical units.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we do not say that the approaches to teaching translation and to bilingual lexicography suggested in this article are the only possible ones. We do believe, however, that vocabulary teaching should be stressed in translation programmes. Students should first know the language they are going to translate from or into. Such a theory-oriented course can be taught either as a separate course or as part of a practical course. A practical course can also include the different procedures and techniques illustrated in this paper.

As far as English-Arabic bilingual dictionaries are concerned, it seems that the entries do not adequately identify the differences between the possible equivalents of a given word causing thus considerable mistakes and difficulties on the part of the dictionary users. Future dictionaries should make it easy for their users to select the appropriate equivalent by specifying the contexts in which one equivalent or another can be used.

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