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# Identification of Translation Difficulties: Annaba University MA Translation Students in Focus

الوقوف على صعوبات الترجمة لدى طلبة الماستر بقسم الترجمة في جامعة باجي مختار - عنابة

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#### **Abstract:**

Most scholars agree that translation is an arduous task in which learners, frequently, face serious difficulties when translating. Translation studies have provided a fresh perspective on translation and translation competence more than a mere linguistic ability that could help students overcome their translation defficulties, as they ignore the relationship between the constituents of the translation competence in terms of subject, text, language, transfer, and culture. Therefore, this research adopts a descriptive approach wherein 25 MA students enrolled at the Translation Department at Annaba University participated. A survey was administered via google form to grant a well-grounded inference. The findings revealed that students encounter obstacles in text, subject, transfer, language, and culture.

**Keywords:**Language Competence; Transfer; Translation; Translation Competence; Translation Difficulties.

#### ملخص:

يواجه طلبة الترجمة صعوبات أثناء الفعل الترجمي باعتبار الترجمة نشاط معقد باتفاق معظم منظريها. استحدثت دراسات الترجمة منظورا جديدا للترجمة حيث لم تعد كفاءة الترجمة تقتصر على كفاءة اللغة فقط بل تستوجب تظافر كفاءات أخرى ككفاءة النص والموضوع والنقل وكفاءة الثقافة، ثما يساعد الطلبة على تجاوز الصعوبات التي تعترضهم. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط بعض الضوء على الصعوبات التي تعترض الطلبة أثناء الترجمة. تتبنى هذه الدراسة المنهج الوصفي حيث تلقى 25 طالب ماستر من قسم الترجمة بجامعة باجي مختار – عنابة استبيانا إلكترونيا. أظهرت النتائج أن الطلبة يعانون من صعوبات متباينة على مستوى الكفاءات المذكورة آنفا وخاصة على مستوى كفاءة الثقافة.

كلمات مفتاحية: النقل، الترجمة، كفاءة اللغة، كفاءة الترجمة، صعوبات الترجمة.

#### 1. Introduction

Translation was the only refuge for peoples to communicate, and translators played the role of mediators to bridge the gap between peoples of different cultures and languages. Their responsibility went beyond linguistic mediation. The translator was supposed to make a good deal between the parties involved despite their linguistic and cultural differences. In the past, translation was either literal or free. However, nowadays, to succeed in their mission translators, should possess a set of competencies to allow their translations to be more than just converting a message from one language to another. A good mastery of these competencies enables a translator to translate adequately inorder to cope with the present-day speedy growth of science, technology, economics, culture, and politics..

Students' translations in the Department of Translation at the University of Annaba seem inappropriate. They seem to face difficulties when translating from English into Arabic, as they might rely more on the linguistic competencies at the expense of the other competencies. In effect, researchers as (Nida & Taber, (1969); Pym, 1992; or Neubert, - (2000) highlighted the interrelatedness of the different competencies constituting translation; the lack, of which makes students still struggle to translate appropriately. In this regard, the study attempts to identify the common problems students of translation of our concern face when fulfilling the translation task. Accordingly, an answer to the following question could allow see clearly into the problem.

What are the main difficulties encountered by MA translation students at Badji Mokhtar University?

Translation students at the University of Annaba, classroom shows, face problems with translation; they seem to have deficiencies in the text, language, subject, transfer, and culture.

## 2. Literature Review

Translation is a cognitive procedure, a social, cross-linguistic, and cross-cultural practice in which any translation theory must embrace these facets (House, 2015). With the introduction of Translation Studies in the 20th Century, translation, as a skill (Zou, 2015), began to gain popularity. The notion of translation competence has been well thought of in training future translators .

Translation competence is a complex vision addressed by researchers in Translation Studies (Nida & Taber, 1969; Bell, 1991; & Hurtado, 1996; Pacte, 2000; Pym, 2003 & Ezpeleta, 2005). In effect, the concept of translation competence that was neither agreed upon nor clearly defined is challenging as it has several varieties that researchers refer to as translation competence (Vienne, 2000), translational knowledge (Pym, 1992), or translational competence (Neubert, 2000), or even translational skill (Zou, 2015). Beeby (2000) claimed that performance is the only way to evaluate a translator's competency because it is an abstract term.

According to Nida and Taber (1969), translation competencies in translation consist in recreating the most natural translation of the text from the source language into the

target language in terms of meaning and style. Moreover, Bell (1991) defined translation competence as the translation knowledge and skills the translator must possess. Hurtado-Albir (1996) depicted it as the ability to know how to translate. Wills (1982) said that translation competence calls for an interlingual super competence which is based on comprehensive knowledge respecting the source and the target languages. Additionally, translation competence underlies a system of knowledge and skills needed to be able to translate (PACTE, 2003).

The phenomena of translation competences are diversified, combining several interrelated sub-competencies that interact depending on a given translation task (Ezpeleta, 2005). Accordingly, the five parameters that shape translation competence are (1) language competence, (2) textual competence, (3) subject competence, (4) cultural competence, and (5) transfer competence (Ressurrecció et al., 2008).

## 2.1 Textual competence

Textual competence is the knowledge of regularities and conventions of texts, genres, and types. It is crucial to distinguish texts and translating narrative texts differs from translating argumentative texts for both types of texts' structures are different from one another. Furthermore, word selection in translating a letter differs from translating an advertisement. Still, distinguishing texts, identifying the form, and selecting words are not sufficient when dealing with text translation, but they must be sustained by knowledge of the convention of the texts.

Possessing this competence is essential for the translator. Newmark (1988) stated that a "text as word and vice versa should be reminded that word is something translated, of course, because there is nothing else to translate" (p73). Moreover, Ressurrecció et al. (2008) declared that text genre could be a valuable educational aid in planning and carrying out specialized translation teaching.

#### 2.2 Language competence

Language competence is considered as the basic competence a translator must possess. Without mastering languages, one cannot translate any text from a source to a target language. Indeed, according to Jakobson (qtd in Munday, 2008), the translator is demanded to have a good understanding of language aspects of both the source language and the target language. The translator is asked to master all the ranks of the target language: Lexical, phrasal, clausal, and discourse. Newmark (1988) suggested that all translations are based implicitly on a theory of language.

#### 2.3 Subject competence

Venuti (2004) mentioned that the various kinds of text variety are partly not confined to one language or culture, but the habits of textualization, the patterns of language, and structure often differ from one another to a considerable extent. Accordingly, Melby (2007) stated that the subject matter could vary even when the audience, text type, and purpose are constant. Along with being linguistically

proficient, the translator must also be familiar with the translated document's subject matter as well (Melby, 2007).

Sometimes in translating some texts in a particular discipline, the translator may deal with some untranslatable words that cannot be substituted in the target language, for which this kind of difficulty must be anticipated by having subject competence (Bassnett, 2002).

## 2.4 Transfer competence

The capacity to convey a message from a source language to a target language is known as transfer competence. The translator is supposed to convey words and imagery in the text to meet the target reader's desire. According to Schäffner and Adab (2000), transfer competence is the ability to produce target texts that satisfy the requirements of the translation task. Moreover, Pym (1992) stated that the relationship between transfer and translation is based on three axes: transferring, translating, and the translated. However, transfer competence differs from bilingual competence (PACTE, 2003).

Transfer competence includes the techniques and procedures that make it possible to translate a text from one language to another. This competence is temporary in nature and subordinate to the other competencies as it is triggered off by the nature of the text (Schäffner & Adab, 2000). In this regard, understanding the translation process, which involves proficient reading skills in the source language, deverbalization abilities, and reformulation abilities in the target language, is another way to describe transfer competence.

#### 2.5 Cultural competence

Cross-cultural translation and cultural proficiency have become trendy terms in translation, wherein the notion took a center stage with the cultural turn in Translation Studies during the 1980's (Snell-Hornby, 2006). Sapir (1994) referred to this definition widely so as culture is that complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. Bassnett (2014) stated that the translator could not treat the text in isolation from the culture.

The translators have changed in becoming intercultural mediators possessing linguistic and cultural capacities in both the source and target languages (Nida, 2001). The texts are perceived as the result of a society's beliefs and practices, as some idioms from the source language could not even exist in the target language or have entirely different meanings (Snell-Hornby, 1988).

#### 3 Methods and Materials

## 3.1 The Choice of the Method

This small-scaled study focuses on determining the obstacles that translation students might encounter when translating. From this perspective, the study follows

the descriptive research design as this approach attempts to determine the state of the phenomenon under examination (Singh, 2006). In this regard, this study highlights the translation deficiencies. Nevertheless, descriptive researches include surveys, questionnaires, and closed interviews (Singh, 2006). The questionnaire(Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). collects quantitative data about the participants, gathering general views about a group This research examines the data through questionnaires only.

The questionnaire was administered through *Google Form* coping with technological advancement, in which Thiruvengada Mani and Radhakrishnan (2013) claim that online questionnaires proved their efficiency in obtaining data from the target group, saving time and energy. The questionnaire includes two sections: (a) personal information and (b) translation competencies.

The first part seeks to find data about the participants' level in languages proficiency and in translation. The second part contains 5 subsections related to the language, text, subject, culture, and transfer. Each subsection includes statements according to the Likert scale to determine the learners' problems in translation. All quantitative results are analysed considering the descriptive statistics through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Program (SPSS Statistics).

### 3.2 The Sample Population

The sample population consists of 25 Master students from the Translation Department at the University of Annaba sampled randomly. According to Taherdoost (2020) simple random sampling that offers appropriate data for the overall aim of the investigation in which all correspondents were included.

The questionnaire reached 30 students, but only 25 responded. The analysis of the questionnaire shows that of all the respondents (N=30), (64%) vary between 20 and 22 years-old, (24%) range between 23 and 25 years old; (4%) of them are aged between 26 and 28 years-old; (4%) of them are less than 20 years-old, others' ages , and another (4%) are more than 28.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The results revealed that learners' level in Arabic, English, and translation vary. Of all the respondents, (40%) are good in Arabic; (32%) are good in translation; (36%) possess good abilities in English; (32%) have an average level; (28%) are excellent (Mean=1,40, Sd.=0,331); (24%) of them express an average level, (4%) of the participants have poor abilities in Arabic; another (24%) are excellent (Mean=1,341, Sd.=0,463); (20%) possess an average level; (16%) are excellent (Mean=1,732, SD.=0,512); (12%) have fair competencies in translation. Concerning the English language, (8%) of the learners have poor skills; another (8%) of them have fair level; another (8%) of the learners have poor skills; still another (8%) have fair capacities.

Table 1 illustrates the aforementioned results regarding the learners' level in Arabic, English, and translation.

Table 1: Learners' Level in Arabic, English, and Translation

	Indicator	Percentage	Mean	Sd.
	Poor	4%		
	Fair	8%		
Level in Arabic	Average	32%	1,732	0,512
	Good	40%		
	Excellent	16%		
Level in English	Poor	8%		
	Fair	8%		
	Average	24%	1,341	0,463
	Good	36%		
	Excellent	24%		
	Poor	8%		
	Fair	12%		
Level in Translation	Average	20%	1,140	0,331
	Good	32%		
	Excellent	28%		

The problems learners have at the level of text competence is that they cannot differentiate between text genres (Mean= 1,732); are incapable to render letters from/to Arabic (Mean= 1,816), nor they cannot translate letters from/into English also (Mean= 1,673). Additionally,they are not able to convert advertisements from/into Arabic (Mean= 2,280), nor from/into English (Mean= 1,702). Moreover, they showed deficiencies in translating novels from/to Arabic (Mean= 1,974), nor from/into English (Mean= 1,923). Table 2 below depicts the results of learners' deficiencies in the text competence.

**Table 2: Deficiencies in the Text Competence** 

	Indicator	Percentage	Mean	Sd.
	1	4%		
1. I can distinguish different text genres.	2	8%		
	3	8%	1,732	0,512
	4	40%		
	5	32%		
	1	4%		
2. I can translate letters	2	4%		
	3	32%	1,816	0,506
from/to Arabic.	4	40%		
	5	20%		
	1	8%		
3.				
4.	2	8%	1 672	0.472
5. I can translate letters	3	32%	1,673	0,472
from/to English.	4	40%		
	5	12%		

6.	1	0					
7.	2	8%					
8.	3	40%	2 200	0.507			
9. I can translate			2,280	0,507			
advertisements from/to	4	44%					
Arabic.	5	8%					
	1	4%					
10. I can translate advertisements from/to English.	2	8%					
	3	36%	1,702	0,387			
	4	36%					
	5	16%					
	1	4%					
11. I can translate novels	2	16%					
from/to Arabic.	3	32%	1,974	0,645			
Hometo Arabic.	4	44%					
	5	4%					
	1	4%					
12. I can translate novels	2	16%					
from/to English.	3	36%	1,923	0,445			
from/to English.	4	40%					
	5	4%					

The results show that the difficulties at the level of language competence differ according to the participants . They have problems at the sentence level, that is they cannot write different sentence structures correctly (Mean= 1,897). They cannot make subject and verb agreements appropriately (Mean= 1,378); and they have problems with tenses (Mean= 1,140), spelling (Mean= 1,685), vocabulary (Mean= 1,144), punctuation (Mean= 1,341), and capitalization (Mean= 1,224). This is for the surface feature, and more deeply, students show weaknesses with coherence as they cannot organize their ideas logically (Mean= 1,048), and they look at the text as one mass: introduction, body, and conclusion (Mean= 1,547). Table 3 explains the problems related to language competence.

Regarding the learners' deficiencies in grammar, Mathieu (2003) states that the grammatical problems in translating a text became problematic because most translators try to adjust the source text's grammatical structure to the target text's grammatical structure and it does not work and this affects the source text's meaning/ messages when translated. Such a problem causes in studnts the inability to convey the correct message from the source language to the target language.

**Table 3: Deficiencies in the Language Competence** 

	Indicator	Percentage	Mean	Sd.
	1	8%		
1 I can write different	2	8%		
1. I can write different	3	8%	1,897	0,625
sentence structures correctly	4	44%		
	5	32%		
2. I can use correct	1	12%	1,378	0,683

	ı		1	1
subject-verb agreement.	2	12%	1	
	3	12%	1	
	4	40%	_	
	5	24%		
	1	12%		
	2	12%		
3. I can use correct tense.	3	16%	1,140	0,526
	4	36%		
	5	24%		
	1	12%		
4 I can revite connect	2	12%		
4. I can write correct	3	8%	1,685	0,732
spelling forms.	4	44%		
	5	28%		
	1	8%		
5 T	2	4%		
5. I can use appropriate	3	32%	2,144	0,792
vocabulary.	4	48%		
	5	8%	]	
	1	8%		
· •	2	16%		
6. I can use punctuation	3	20%	1,341	0,748
signs correctly.	4	40%		,
	5	16%		
	1	12%		
	2	20%		
7. I can use correct	3	8%	1,224	0,522
capitalization.	4	32%	] ^	,
	5	36%		
	1	12%		
	2	12%	1	
8. I can organize my ideas	3	28%	1,048	0,271
logically	4	32%	1 1	
	5	16%	1	
	1	16%		
9. I can refer to the	2	16%	1	
introduction, body, and	3	20%	0,547	0,286
conclusion.	4	20%	","	3,233
	5	28%	1	
	J	<b>4</b> 0 /0	1	1

The table shows that learners have difficulties with subject competence and cannot master the scientific register (Mean= 1,483). They also encounter problems with the literary genre (Mean= 1,549); they are not able to deal with untranslatable words (Mean= 1,816); nor they are capable of mastering word choices as seen in their translated academic essays. On the latter issue, Han (2008) noted that the word-choice or lexical ambiguity creates the possibility of multiple meanings that the selected words used by the source language sometimes are not based on the context. Table 4 describes the results found related to learners' problems at the level of the subject competence.

**Table 4: Deficiencies in the Subject Competence** 

	Indicator	Percentage	Mean	Sd.	
	1	8%			
1. I can master scientific register.	2	20%			
	3	40%	1,483	0,653	
	4	24%			
	5	8%			
2 I can magten literary	1	4%			
	2	8%	1,549		
2. I can master literary register.	3	52%		0,351	
register.	4	36%			
	5	0			
	1	8%			
2 I con manage	2	16%			
3. I can manage untranslatable words.	3	44%	1,816	0,747	
	4	28%			
	5	4%			

These findings reveal that learners cannot transmit messages from the source language to the target language communicatively (Mean= 1,440), in which they lack transfer competencies. Besides, they cannot decide if they should translate words that are irrelevant to the reader or not (Mean= 1,140). Table 5 shows the major problems students of translation have concerning transfer competence.

**Table 5: Deficiencies in the Transfer Competence** 

	Indicator	Percentage	Mean	Sd.
1. I can transmit messages from the source language to the target language communicatively.	1	8%		
	2	12%		
	3	32%	1,440	0,337
	4	36%		
	5	12%		
	1	12%		
2. I can decide whether or	2	12%		
not to translate words that may be irrelevant to the reader	3	24%	1,140	0,526
	4	36%		
	5	16%		

The results show that learners are unfamiliar with Arabic idiomatic expressions (Mean= 1,414) and the English ones (Mean= 1,549). In addition, they lack cultural background about the text (Mean= 1,897). Likewise, they ignore the text when they translate (Mean= 1,095) and do not focus on the reader (Mean= 1,140). Based on the results, learners cannot identify idiomatic expressions and textual meanings. As Sukamana (2000) stated, the students had difficulties translating idioms because they lacked knowledge about the target culture and

sometimes ignored its importance. Table 6 displays the challenges the respondents have with cultural competence.

**Table 6: Deficiencies in the Culture Competence** 

	Indicator	Percentage	Mean	Sd.
	1	8%		
1. I am familiar with	2	16%	1,414	
1. I am familiar with idiomatic expressions in Arabic.	3	24%		0,683
idiomatic expressions in Arabic.	4	40%		
	5	12%		
2 I am familian with	1	8%		
2. I am familiar with idiomatic expressions in English.	2	16%		
	3	28%	1,549	0,584
	4	40%		
	5	8%		
3. When translating, I have	1	8%		
	2	8%	1,897	
cultural background about the	3	44%		0,625
text.	4	32%		
	5	8%		
	1	12%		
4. When translating, I	2	12%		
4. When translating, I focus on the text.	3	20%	1,095	0,573
Tocus on the text.	4	36%		
	5	20%		
	1	8%		
5. When translating, I	2	20%		
<b>6</b> )	3	20%	1,140	0,596
focus on the reader.	4	36%		
	5	16%		

This study aims at identifying the type of challenges students of translation have regarding the sub-competencies included in the translation competence. It can be seen from the findings that the learners lack the necessary competencies to translate appropriately and that translation problems occur when the translators fail to address the intended meaning of the source language in the target language. According to the results, the learners have significant grammar, vocabulary, register, and culture problems.

#### 5. Conclusion

Translation is one of the most challenging subjects for learners. This research attempted to identify some difficulties students of translation encounter when performing the translation task. Accordingly, learners of translation have inadequate knowledge of some registers, text genres, linguistic properties, and cultural aspects of

the source and target languages. They also lack knowledge of the differences between the source language and the target language regarding specific lexical categories as idioms.

Translation learners have particular grammar, vocabulary choice, cohesion, and coherence deficiencies. This research has focused only on determining learners' difficulties in translation, further research may investigate the reasons behind these obstacles, and attempt to solve them.

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## 7. Appendix

# Learners' questionnaire

Dear students,

This questionnaire is intended for MA students of Translation in an attempt to identify the problems they may face when translating. You are required to tick the box corresponding to your viewpoint . All the information will remain anonymous. Thank you We will be grateful for your collaboration.

I. Learners' consent to participate					
Tick the box if you accept taking the survey  II. Personal information					
1. Indicate your level in the Arabic language a. Poor	e. Exc	celle	nt		
2. Indicate your level in the English language a. Poor  b. Fair c. Average d. Good	_ ] e. Exc	elle	nt		
3. Indicate your Translation a. Poor	] e. Exc	celle	nt		
III. Translation Competencies					
Choose the appropriate number in which $1 \rightarrow$ strongly $3 \rightarrow$ undecided, $4 \rightarrow$ agree, and $5 \rightarrow$ strongly agree. 1. The Language	disagree	e, 2-	$\rightarrow$	dis	agree,
<ul> <li>a. I can write different sentence structures correctly.</li> <li>b. I can use correct subject-verb agreement.</li> <li>c. I can use correct tense.</li> <li>d. I can write correct spelling forms.</li> <li>e. I can use appropriate vocabulary.</li> <li>f. I can use punctuation signs correctly.</li> <li>g. I can use correct capitalization.</li> <li>h. I can organize my ideas logically</li> <li>i. I can refer to the introduction, body, and conclusion.</li> </ul>	1 1 1 1	2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2	3 3 3 3 3	4 4 4 4 4	5 5 5 5 5
<ul> <li>a. I can distinguish different text genres.</li> <li>b. I can translate letters from/to Arabic.</li> <li>c. I can translate letters from/to English.</li> <li>d. I can translate advertisements from/to Arabic.</li> <li>e. I can translate advertisements from/to English.</li> <li>f. I can translate novels from/to Arabic.</li> <li>g. I can translate novels from/to English.</li> </ul>	1 1 1	2 2 2 2 2	3 3 3	4 4 4 4	5
<ul><li>3. The Subject</li><li>a. I can master scientific register.</li><li>b. I can master literary register</li></ul>	1 1		3	4	5 5

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c.	I can manage untranslatable words.	1	2	3	4	5
4.The	Culture					
a.	I am familiar with idiomatic expressions in Arabic.	1	2	3	4	5
	I am familiar with idiomatic expressions in English.	1	2	3	4	5
c.	When translating, I have cultural background about the text.	1	2	3	4	5
d.	When translating, I focus on the text.	1	2	3	4	5
	When translating, I focus on the reader.				4	
5.The	Transfer					
a.	I can transmit messages from the source language to the target language communicatively.	1	2	3	4	5
b.	I can decide whether or not to translate words that may be irrelevant to the reader.	1	2	3	4	5