

English-Arabic Translation of Semantic Anomalies in Some Selectional Preferences

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Abstract

The present paper scrutinizes the anomalies in some selectional preferences with reference to English-Arabic translation. It is essential to remark that most of professional writers deliberately activate the anomalies by means of selectional preferences to avoid creating a sort of boredom on the part of the text recipient during readability of the text. So, the present paper aims at investigating the anomalous selectional preferences in Arabic through which translators can render the source texts, in English, into Arabic. The paper also hypothesizes that most of translators miss the realizations of anomalies in some selectional preferences in English. As a result, great loss in translation occurs during the process of translation. The paper also verified that the validity of these hypotheses by means of the analysis of the texts under discussion.

Keywords: Preferences, Translation, Selectional, Semantic, Anomaly.

Introduction

It goes undeniable that the realizations of anomalies in English are not the same as that of Arabic because the huge differences between the two systems. Consequently, it is not straightforward to judge the Arabic anomalous constructions by the norms of the English ones as translators attempt to render any text from English into Arabic and vice versa. In addition, many texts may require great attention to detect anomalies to arrive at the level of informativity which the text producer injects with the text. In doing so, translators have to manipulate the source text to render it acceptably into the target one. Furthermore, writers tend to make wide use of the tools in Arabic through which these anomalies can be rendered properly. Here, the main task of the translator is to filter the anomalies carefully so as to spot the intended message beneath each selectional preference.

1. The Concept of Anomaly

A term from GK meaning 'without name' or 'without control' which covers all types of semantic incompatibility or contradiction. It relies by contrast on the principle of the normal conceptual classification of the features of the globe around us. However, anomaly is exercised, in many situations, and it is often hard to distinguish it from some FIGURES OF SPEECH, such as METAPHOR, or IDIOMS. "She has green ears", for example, may make better sense on Mars; whereas "She has green fingers" is perfectly acceptable in a garden. The term 'anomaly' can also be taken as a count noun (i.e. anomalies) to refer to what are known as 'rule-violating' devices to yield pragma-stylistic aesthetics. Anomaly is exploited for its attention-arresting possibilities in the naming practices. Consider the following illustrative example:

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I have a frog in my throat. (Wales, 2014: 263; Siefring, 2004:117).

2. Selectional Preferences

There are certain constraints on specific word combinations. These constraints are referred to as SELECTIONAL PREFERENCES (RESTRICTIONS). The sentences from (a) to (e) all seem quite anomalous, not really acceptable except as a kind of joke, because they violate selectional restrictions.

a. #John drank his sandwich and took a big bite out of his coffee.

b. #Susan folded/ perforated/ caramelized her reputation.

c. #Your exam results are sleeping.

d. # My feet Are Smiling (used as a title)

e. "They 've a temper, some of them – particularly verbs: they 're the proudest..." [Humpty Dumpty, in Through the Looking Glass]

These violations of the said selectional restrictions lead to dissonance rather than contradiction. Chomsky (1965:95) proposed that selectional restrictions were triggered by syntactic properties of words, but McCawly, Lakoff and other authors have argued that they derive from word meanings. If they were purely syntactic, they should hold even in contexts from (a) to (f). The fact that these sentences are acceptable suggests that the constraints are semantic rather than syntactic in nature.

a. John died/passed away/ kicked the bucket.

b. My prize rose bush died/ #passed away/# kicked the bucket.

c. When we 're feeling under the weather, most of us welcome a big/#huge hug.

d. He is (dark) raving mad/#crazy.

e. dirty/# unclean joke

f. unclean / #dirty spirit

Analysis

Violations of a collocational restriction are felt to be odd or unnatural, but they can typically be repaired by replacing one of the words with a synonym, suggesting that collocational restrictions are not, strictly speaking, due to lexical meaning per se (Kroeger, 2018:123-4).

3.Semantic Connectivity

Semantic connectivity is postulated as one of the essential characteristics of language, being the decisive procedure to achieve the comprehension phase for receptors. Meaning as the potential part of the semantic structure is highly touched with our thoughts, concepts, actions, attitudes, and behaviours in specific situations (Campbell et al, 2003:1).

4.Semantic Clash

The severity of a clash can be roughly estimated by examining the minimal change required to cure it. This enables us to put a little flesh on the three main notions which can be listed as follows:

4.1. Inappropriateness

Inappropriateness is a type of semantic clash which can be cured by substitution of one of the xenonyms by a propositional synonym:

The geranium passed away. (inappropriateness)

The geranium died. (normal: "died" is a propositional synonym of "pass away").

4.2. Paradox

Paradox is a more serious type of semantic clash which can be cured by substituting one of the xenonyms by an incompatible or immediate superordinate:

The cat barked. (paradox)

The dog barked. (normal: "dog" is an incompatible of "cat")

The animal barked. (normal: animal is a superordinate of "cat")

The cat emitted a noise. (normal: "emit a noise" is a superordinate of "cat")

4.3. Incongruity

Incongruity is an incurable semantic clash. Consider the following:

Powdered thrills (? finely divided experiences) (Cruse, 2000:227).

Incongruity can be realized in the humorous discourses. "Incongruity is usually defined as a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke (Ritchie, 2004:48). In other words, humour arising from disjointed, ill-suited pairings of ideas or situations or presentations of ideas or situations that are divergent from habitual customs from the bases of incongruity (Ritchie, 2004:48).

5. Syntactic-Semantic Vagueness

Sentences may contain vagueness. Syntactic vagueness may be in the surface structure of a sentence: words can cluster together in different possible constructions. Syntactic vagueness may also be in the deep structure: one sequence of words may have more than one interpretation, generally because the rules of sentence construction allow ellipsis, the deletion of what is 'understood'. Take the following examples of surface vagueness in the constructions which include the coordinators 'and' and 'or' as follows:

John and Mary or Pat will go.

[John] and [Marry or Pat], [John and Mary] or [Pat];

We 'll have bacon or sausage and eggs.

[bacon] or [sausage and eggs], [bacon or sausage] and [eggs]

(Kreidler, 2002:169).

6. Anomalies in Arabic Collocational Preferences

The selectional preference in the noun phrase implies a sort of anomaly on the part of some text recipients. This kind of love is a reference to Udhra tribe whom love in an honest way. Thus, it is far better for some translators to look for a certain equivalent which implies a somewhat sort of anomaly in English to transplant such selectional preference in the source text. So, the noun phrase can be transplanted into English into "platonic love".

(And their hearts absorbed (the worship of) the calf). (Al-Hilali and Khan, 1989:18).

On closer inspection, one can notice that there is a great deal of semantic anomaly in the Aya above. The anomalous lexical items are and . All in all, the anomaly lies in the fact that the usage of the lexical item is confined to the liquids, but the lexical item "العجل" which does not represent any kind of liquid (Al-Sabooni, 1981, Vol.1. 80).

(..., they will come from every deep and distant (wide) mountain highway (to perform Hajj)). (Al-Hilali and Khan, 1989:446)

Analysis

The above-mentioned Aya conveys special conceptual template. It is also of great significance to point out that the lexical item in Arabic is usually attributed by the adjective (/ far) if only the remoteness is intended. In addition, the main purpose behind the usage of the lexical item is to imply two meanings at the same time, i.e. "far" and "deep". It is also clearly known that the routes are really dug through the mountains in Mecca; therefore, they are far and deep. Thus, the lexical item can include two meanings in such Quranic discourse whereas the lexical item "" can only convey its main meaning, i.e. remoteness (Al-Samura'a'i,2022, A Lecture on the YouTube).

Proposed Rendering

deep and far route

(So he [Sulaiman (Solomon)] smiled, amused at her speech) (Al-Hilali and Khan, 1989:506)

Linguistically-speaking, in Arabic, the lexical item is different from the lexical item . Etymologically-speaking, the lexical item enjoys positive as well as negative connotations. More precisely, if one gets happy, s/he can smile happily, and also if one gets angry, s/he can smile angrily.

In Arabic, the interrogative markers and can be utilized differently. In general, as for (mun), it is employed with animate things while (ma) is utilized with inanimate ones. Furthermore, the syntactic rule is violated with (ma) and is used with animate things, it will convey the sense of insult to the addressee.

If the writer intends to insult the other, he may use the construction above. It is sometimes helpful to distinguish selectional restrictions from collocational restrictions. Collocational restrictions are conventionalized patterns of combining two or more words. To illustrate more, compare the following:

The first example above is a question about "Who is Muhammed?" If one knows which one is Muhammed, s/he can utilize such an interrogative form. Moreover, if one knows Muhammed, but s/he intends to ask his feature, he could use such interrogative form, i.e. ma mohammed.? Thus, the translations of the examples above could be, respectively, as follows:

Who is Muhammed?

Which is the feature of Muhammed? (Abdulghani,2010:319).

ST (1)

(1) The cat barked.

Analysis

It is quite evident that the text above is anomalous. So, one can note that the lexical item "cat" is in profound anomaly with the lexical item "barked" since the node "barked" is restricted to be employed with the "dogs". The anomaly can be cured if the lexical item "cat" is replaced with "animal" as follows:

The animal barked (normal).

Here, the challenging task is not to remove the dissonance, but to convey the essence of the dissonance into the target language, i.e. Arabic in order to be more faithful as much as possible. Consequently, one must try to find out possible interpretation of the whole text so as to be grasped in a sensible manner.

Proposed Rendering

ST (2)

A: We went on falling upwards.

B: Did you really? (Cruse, 2000: 21).

Analysis

Undoubtedly, the lexical item "falling" is in profound anomaly with the lexical item "upwards" because they both denote two totally opposite directions. In some cases, such a text can be utilized in the pure scientific fields such as engineering and something like that. Furthermore, one may come across such a text to show a sort of pride when the text producer employs such a text. It seems that the writer intends to deliver a message that he, even if, falls, he falls towards the height and it is impossible for him to surrender by all means.

Proposed Rendering

ST (3)

? The Ruritanian ambassador delivered a jolly strong protest concerning the recent violation of his country's sovereignty.

Analysis

Anomaly and (In)formality both are realized clearly in the above example. In one sense, every word in a sentence interacts semantically with every other word, and also with words in neighbouring sentences. But we must distinguish between a type of interaction which is precisely regulated by the syntactic structure of the sentence, and a more diffuse type of interaction, not dependent on syntax, but merely on discourse propinquity.

It is worth noting that the above-mentioned sentence exemplifies lexical dissonance (i.e. a semantic clash, involving two or more lexical items in the same sentence (or discourse)). In the text above, one lexical item clashes in respect of register with the prevailing character established by the majority of lexical items in the sentence. In other words, the item "jolly", being informal, clashes with the formality established by such items as "ambassador", "deliver", "concerning", "violation" and "sovereignty". Notice that none of the items with which the dissonant word clashes most sharply have any direct grammatical relation to it. Furthermore, in neither case is there any clash between the dissonant word and its closest syntactic companion; thus, "jolly" and "strong" go perfectly happily together:

Gosh! This coffee's jolly strong, Samantha!

In a nutshell, if the ST is rendered literally, the intentional anomaly will be lost, though it is somewhat appropriate rendering. Consider the following literal rendering:

Proposed Rendering

ST (4)

? Johnny, darling, wouldn't you like some additional butter on your toast?

Analysis

The text above exemplifies semantic anomaly (i.e. a semantic clash, involving two or more lexical items in the same sentence "or discourse"). In the above-mentioned text, one lexical item clashes in respect of register with the prevailing character established by the majority of lexical items in the sentence. In text (4) the technical-sounding "additional" is dissonant with the prevailing informality established by such items as "Johnny" and "darling". Notice that none of the items with which the dissonant word clashes most sharply have any direct grammatical relation to it. furthermore, in neither case is there any clash between the anomalous word and its closest syntactic companion; thus, "additional" and "butter" go perfectly together:

Gosh! This coffee's jolly strong, Samantha!

Additional butter in the diet would probably prove beneficial (Cruse,2000:100-1).

Proposed Rendering

ST (5)

Your misfortune is better than mine. (Cruse, 2000:62)

Analysis

Notice that substitution of "not as bad as" for "better than" removes the anomaly, i.e. the semantic anomaly. But the key point here is not to remove the semantic anomaly since each item is activated intentionally. In other words, the writer violates the maxim of relation so as to move the readership in one way or another. It is also evident that the lexical item "misfortune" implies negative connotations whereas the lexical item "better" signals positive connotations.

Proposed Rendering

ST (6)

The balloon rose ever lower.

Analysis

It is clearly contradictory to utilize the lexical item "ever" which signals the sense of "height" with its closest node "lower" which refers to the sense of "lowering". In such case, Cruse (2000:46) points out that there is a sense of ill-matched meanings clashing, giving rise to paradox, contradiction. Consequently, there is an urgent need to look for figurative reading. There is no doubt that the interpretability will be varied to a certain extent.

Proposed Rendering

ST (7)

The hamster was only slightly dead.

Analysis

Adjectives that are non-binary antonyms can easily be modified: e.g. very old, rather young, quite wide, and extremely narrow. Logically, it would follow that binary antonyms do not accept modifiers: an organism is either dead or alive, a door is either open or shut, a floor is either clean or dirty, and one is either asleep or awake. But language is not logic, argues, Kreidler, as quite dead, very much alive, wide open, slightly dirty are meaningful expressions. For instance, it is perfectly acceptable to utter a sentence like:

Some said he had died, but when I met him last week, I could see that he was very much alive.

Speakers cannot agree as to whether a door which is "ajar" is open or shut, nor can they do on the precise location of the distinction between "clean" and "dirty". Language, in this sense, is fluid-flexible, concludes the linguist (Kreidler, 1998:101-2). Non-binary adjectives are also gradable adjectives. We can say, for instance, very long, rather short, quite strong, somewhat weak, too old, young enough, extremely rude, utterly happy...From a logical viewpoint, binary adjectives are not gradable. But people treat these essentially ungradable adjectives as if they were gradable. Something is either complete or incomplete, but we sometime say "more complete" (Ibid,1998:103-4).

Proposed Rendering

ST (8)

You can't say that John drank his sandwich.

It is fairly common for words with the same basic entailments to differ with respect to their selectional restrictions. German has two words corresponding to the English word

"eat": "essen" for people and "fressen" for animal. (One might use "fressen" to insult or tease someone-basically saying they eat like an animal) (Kroeger, 2018:123).

Proposed Rendering

ST (9)

He's become irrational-he thinks his exam results are sleeping.

Analysis

The semantic anomaly is experienced throughout the text above in a very odd way. So, it is a must to find out possible interpretation so as to arrive at the intentionality of the text producer as much as possible. As a matter of fact, the above-mentioned text implies anomaly and vagueness at the same time. Now the text, all in all, includes only semantic anomaly. It is essential to remove the vagueness by adding certain items as follows:

Proposed Rendering

ST (10)

John drank his sandwich and took a big bite out of his coffee.

Analysis

There is no doubt that there is a deal of anomaly in the selectional preference in the text above. The key point is not to remove the anomaly from the text. It is quite easy to put "took a big bite out of" in the place of the verb "drank". In fact, it seems that the writer is creative; therefore, he made deliberate use of semantic anomaly to make his text more effective.

Conclusions

The present paper arrives at the following conclusions:

1. Most selectional preferences, in English as well as in Arabic, serve an active part in constructing anomalies.
2. Meaning is usually expanded considerably by means of anomalies which come from the selectional preferences.
3. Ideal communication is very often unattainable because most of text recipients cannot arrive at the hidden meanings behind the anomalous linguistic choices which are packed in the texts to arrest the attention of the text recipient.
4. No selectional preference is experienced in a vacuum, but there must be a certain intentionality to be listed in the text.
5. Priority, as a critical stylistic tool, is always activated by virtue of the anomalous selectional preferences.
6. Selectional preference can be exploited in many discourses, and especially in the political and economic ones because they are preferred by a large group of text producers.
7. In translating the anomalous selectional preferences, one can make wide use of the strategy of addition to clarify the implicit meaning more and more.

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