DICTIONARIES LOOKUP STRATEGIES FOR ARABIC-ENGLISH TRANSLATION[1]

***Résumé**: Bien que les dictionnaires ont une extrême importance dans les cours de traduction, on les considère comme une épée à double tranchant. De grotesques traductions indiquent clairement que les étudiants utilisent les dictionnaires d'une façon incompétente. Les données de cette étude représentent les traductions d'une vingtaine d'étudiants de premier cycle d'Anglais à l'université d'Al-quds et l'université de Palestine Ahlyia. Les traductions sont examinées à base des stratégies de recherche en dictionnaire. Les résultats de l'étude montrent que les pièges des sorties de la traduction que les étudiants font sont dus au: 1-la dépendance exagérée du dictionnaire. 2- le manque de compréhension du texte dans sa langue d'origine. 3- le fait de choisir le premier sens. 4- le peu d'attention accordée aux exemples illustrés dans le dictionnaire. 5- favoriser la lecture attentive sur la lecture superficielle. 6- ignorance totale des collocations, des idioms, et des proverbes. 7- l'incapacité de comprendre le sens du contexte. Quelques stratégies de recherche dans le dictionnaire qui peuvent aider les étudiants de traduction à effectuer leur travail rapidement et efficacement sont proposées.*

***Mots clés**: Dictionnaire bilingue, dictionnaire monolingue, stratégie de recherche, formation en traduction, Arabe, Anglais*

***Abstract:** Although dictionaries are of paramount importance in academic translation course, they are always thought of as a double-edged sword. Voluminous grotesque translations are obviously indicators that translation students have used dictionaries incompetently. The data of the present study consists of translations by twenty undergraduate English students at Al-Quds University and Palestine Ahlyia University. The translations are examined in terms of the dictionary lookup strategies. The findings of the study show that the pitfalls in translation output are due to (1) addiction to dictionaries; (2) lack of comprehension of the Source Language (SL) text; (3) first meaning selection; (4) scant attention to the examples provided by dictionaries; (5**)** prioritising scanning over skimming**;** (6) a total disregard for collocations, idioms and proverbs; and (7) failure to grasp the contextualised meaning. Some dictionary lookup strategies that may help the student translator do the job as quickly and effectively as possible are suggested.*

***Key Words**: Bilingual dictionaries; monolingual dictionaries; lookup strategies; translator training; Arabic; English*

[1] **Mohammad Ahmad THAWABTEH**, Al-Quds University, Jerusalem, Occupied Palestinian Territories.
mthawabteh@arts.alquds.edu

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

1. Introduction

Translator training is gaining weight and momentum nowadays, and has become an integral part of translation studies (Kiraly, 2000). Holms (1988/2000: 78) has attached much significance to translator training by placing it within the ambit of applied translation studies. A blossoming area in such training is dictionary use, which is very much needed by either novice or fully-fledged translators in any translation activity. In translation classes, dictionaries constitute irresistible temptation to student translators— for example, when sitting for a translation test, they are obsessively addicted to dictionaries. Duff (1989: 15) believes that a dictionary "tends to make the students less resourceful, because they take the entry as the final word, and do not explore other possibilities." Therefore, lexicographers have left no stone unturned in the search for emerging lexis to compile in specialised or general dictionaries with a view to maximising interlingual/intralingual communication among language users. Armstrong (2005: 69) considers a dictionary "as a book consisting of translations, mostly of individual words and phrases. A dictionary is therefore unconcerned with the effect a translation may have on a more extended stretch of language." More precisely, a dictionary is defined by *Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* (CCALED) (2003) as "a book in which the words and phrases of a language are listed alphabetically, together with their meanings or their translations in another language." Two key terms are worthy of mentioning here. First, 'meaning' is usually based on denotation and connotation (Farghal and Shunnaq, 1999: 2). The former involves "the relationship between lexical items and non-linguistic entities to which they refer, thus [...] equivalent to referential, conceptual, propositional, or dictionary meaning" (Shunnaq, 1993: 37-63; see also Hatim and Mason, 1997: 180**)**. The latter, however, refers to "an aura of ideas and feelings suggested by lexical words" (Newmark ,1988: 16), our strong, weak, affirmative, negative, or emotional reaction to words (Nida and Taber, 1969). Or, in the words of Hatim and Mason (1997: 179), connotation refers to "additional meanings which a lexical item acquires beyond its primary, referential meaning." A translation can then never be called a translation without a minimal layer of conceptual meaning of original text— "in a non-literary text the denotations of a word normally come before its connotations" (Newmark, 1988: 16). However, translation goes far beyond the denotative meanings to include connotative meanings. A good dictionary is the one that caters for both layers of meaning. It ensues, therefore, that dictionaries are the fulcrum of any translation activity. It is more often than not that the translators are stumbled on new and/or unfamiliar words in the course of translation, thus it becomes necessary for them to consult a dictionary in order to complete a translation task effectively. Second, translation is the transferring of meaning from one language into another. Transferring implies SL, the language from which translation occurs and the TL, the language into which translation takes

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

place. In such a case, divergence between the SL and TL emerges because languages often cut linguistic reality quite differently. The translation of (un)related languages implies intimate intricacies as envisaged by Tytler (1790: 20), that translation is an "evaporation of the beauties of the original."

In spite of their significance, dictionaries are a double-edged sword indeed; they would either be user-friendly or user-unfriendly. Combining elegance with accuracy is usually epitomised by the right use of a dictionary. What is important at this particular juncture, however, is that a user-friendly dictionary may be turned out to be a user-unfriendly one when a student translator misuses it. Unless the student translator is well-prepared in the use of dictionaries, a run-of-the-mill translation is likely to emerge. A case of failure in cross-cultural communication may be explicitly shown in the translation of the polysemous Arabic زوج ('a husband' or 'a pair of') in زوج أحذية ('a pair of shoes') into English as 'a husband of shoes', a translation that definitely raises our eyebrows[1]. Roberts (1992: 50) highlights that "students both in professional translation courses and in academic translation courses have constant recourse to dictionaries, which they use incompetently. So the need for teaching dictionary use seems obvious."

2. Types of Dictionaries

Newmark (1988) recommends that the translator should separate the wheat from the chaff. Newmark (1988: 114) explains that "bilingual dictionaries are indispensable, but they normally require checking in at least two TL monolingual dictionaries and sometimes an SL monolingual dictionary, to check the status (i.e. modern currency, frequency, connotations) of the word." It would be superfluous here to enter into a detailed description of dictionaries, but, for the sake of the present study, dictionaries can be classified into two main types: monolingual and bilingual. Whilst the former "list the words within one language, giving the meanings of these lexical items" (Farghal and Shunnaq, 1999: 30), the latter "deal with two languages by listing the words within one language" (Farghal and Shunnaq, 1999: 31). Despite their significance, monolingual dictionaries are less common among translators than bilingual ones (see Ronowicz et al. 2005: 590; Jensen 1999). It is unquestionably true that a translator is expected to be in need for both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries in the course of translation. The complementarity between the two types should set off any blueprint for translator training. However, Wilkinson (2005) (as cited in Wilkinson, 2007: 111) takes the discussion of monolingual dictionaries a step further saying that "a specialised monolingual target-language corpus can be of great help to the translator in confirming intuitive decisions, in verifying or rejecting decisions based on other

[1] This notorious translation is in an undergraduate translation class.

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

tools such as dictionaries, in obtaining information about collocates, and in reinforcing knowledge of normal target language patterns."

3. Methodology

3.1. Procedures and Data Collocation

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the translation problems made by the subjects, in conjunction with dictionaries use. The data of this study is mainly elicited through a translation task especially designed for the purpose of this study. The task comprises two texts: the Arabic text consists of 128 words (see Appendix I) whereas the English one is comprised of 182 words (see Appendix II). The Arabic text is selected from Arab Bank Annual Report 2000, and the English text is chosen from BBC Learning English. The considerations we have in mind while thinking of the data is due to the fact that it should be familiar with the subjects and easy to translate so not to jeopardise their chances of giving proper translations. The students are allowed to use bilingual and monolingual dictionaries. All the students have already taken a minimum of fifteen language and/or literature courses, thus, we assume, they have a considerable command of English. For the sake of the study, CCALED (2003) is used to evaluate students' dictionaries lookup strategies.

3.2. Subjects

The population of this study consists of twenty undergraduate students reading towards the BA degree in English Language and Literature, and they are enrolled in the second semester of the academic year 2012/2013 at Al-Quds University and Palestine Ahlyia University in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Both groups are senior students currently taking a one-off translation course offered as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the BA degree by the two universities.

4. Dictionaries Lookup Strategies

Since languages the world over have propensity for divergence as shown by the Qur'an: "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know" (Ali 30:21)[1], the fiendish difficulties aggravate. This may be

[1] Available at: http://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=5&verse=56# (5:56:1). Visited August 26, 2013

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

especially true with genetically unrelated languages, e.g. Arabic and English. Roberts (1992: 53) speaks of the problems the translation students are faced with in using dictionary incompetently, namely "knowing what to look up in a dictionary; knowing where to look for lexical information; knowing how to interpret lexical information provided; and knowing when and how to consult dictionaries during the translation process." Based on these problems, Roberts (1992: 53) suggests four strategies for improving dictionary use, namely familiarisation "with different types of lexical items; […] dictionaries; […] dictionary entry formats; and illustration of ways to combine text analysis, translation and dictionary consultation." In order to effectively look up a word in a dictionary, the translator should bear in mind that the potential meaning reached at should be worked against the text. Arguably, the following strategies integrated with those suggested by Roberts (1992: 53) might be of help insofar as student translator is concerned.

5. Data Analysis

The forgoing analysis requires that we put theoretical framework to practice. We shall go over the problems of lookup strategies which translator students face. For the sake of the study, a taxonomy of the problems is presented.

5.1. Addiction to Dictionaries

Dictionary consultations are important for student translators and may be deemed as a virtuous circle in the course of translation, but excessive use of dictionaries unknowing what to look up is viewed as stumbling-block rather than a merit— a vicious circle, as it were. Such use gives rise to addiction to dictionaries. Ronowicz et al. (2005: 589) state that "the higher number of dictionary consultations by novices is directly related to the lower content of their [frequent lexis stores]." It is incumbent upon student translators to minimise lookup strategies, not more than a 'hit-and-run strategy'**.** Lookup strategies may start at bilingual dictionaries moving towards monolingual dictionaries with varying degrees of success, relying on students' mastery of a foreign language. Categorically, 'bilingual dictionaries first, monolingual dictionaries follow' is perhaps a good lookup strategy, very much encouraged in translator training settings. Conversely, Newmark (1988: 101) succinctly puts it: that look up every word "first in a monolingual, then in a bilingual encyclopaedic dictionary." To complete the translation activity the student translator is up to, he/she should resort to a bilingual dictionary. This should, or even must, not be the end of the story. Usually student translators are not competent enough in the TL; therefore, consulting monolingual dictionaries turns out to be important because many monolingual dictionaries are corpus-based, e.g. CCALED. Needless to say, looking

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

up discrete words in a dictionary is doomed to failure. Dictionary consultation should also be concomitant with 'text analysis' (Roberts, 1992: 68). To illustrate the point, take Example 1 below:

Example 1

SL	كما أن العلاقات الاقتصادية الجوهرية فيما بين الدول العربية كمشروع السوق العربية المشتركة **وحرية_انتقال الأموال** ... لم يتطرق إليها المجلس الاقتصادي التابع للجامعة العربية.
TL	Furthermore, the economic ties among the Arab countries (e.g., the Arab Union Market, freedom of moving monies) were all not addressed in Arab league-run Economic Council.

Closer scrutiny of the highlighted SL phrase وحرية انتقال الأموال shows awkward translation, i.e. 'freedom of moving monies'. The student translator seems to have opted for a wrong lexical choice**,** i.e. 'monies' as الأموال can translate into 'monies', 'capital', etc. The need for a monolingual dictionary is urgent. 'Monies' "is used to refer to several separate sums of money that form part of a larger amount that is received or spent" (CCALED, 2003) whereas 'capital' "is a large sum of money which you use to start a business, or which you invest in order to make more money" (CCALED, 2003). A myriad of signs (e.g. 'the economic ties" and 'the Arab Union Market') in the SL text in Example 1 is inextricably woven together to stress 'capital' rather than 'monies'. A suggested translation may be something like "Moreover, the economic ties among the Arab countries (e.g., the Arab Union Market, freedom of capitals…" The student translator should carry out bilingual and monolingual dictionaries consultations conscientiously.

5.2. Lack of Comprehension of the SL Text

We may perhaps assume that initial translator training should start at honing translation students' skills to better comprehension of the SL text before actual translation takes place. "In principle, a translational analysis of the SL text based on its comprehension is the first stage of translation" (Newmark, 1988: 17). When the meaning for a SL word is sought in a dictionary, the translation student should be able to negotiate different meanings taking the SL text into full consideration, and eventually recourse to the most appropriate one although, as Roberts (1992: 52) argues, "the more information is packed into dictionaries, the greater the dilemma of these students, for they are unable to find what they need in the mass of information provided." Ronowicz et al. (205: 581) stress the importance of SL text comprehension, that "unless a [SL text] has been well understood, a good translation cannot be produced." The following elements, suggested by Gile (1995: 78-80), are likely to enhance basic comprehension: "knowledge of the language", "extralinguistic knowledge" and "analysis" (see also

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

Roberts, 1992: 68). Let us now look at a further example to explore how English polysemy is rendered by our student translators.

Example 2

SL	For weeks police were puzzled by repeated thefts from suitcases firmly locked inside the luggage compartment of a **coach** travelling between Girona Airport and Barcelona.
TL	وكانت الشرطة في حيرة من أمرها جراء السرقات المتكررة من حقائب محكمة الإغلاق [1]لمدرب / [2]لمدرس/[3] لحافلة / [4]عربة_تجرها الخيول يسافر من مطار خيرونا إلى مدينة برشلونة.

The context in Example 2 above plays a crucial role in determining the intended meaning. It is posited that the SL text reads smoothly, and it should be so in the translation. The dictionary helps the translation student to look for a suitable meaning, typically one among several. In view of the multiple meanings offered (nine in total according to CCALED, see Table 1 below), he/she should select the most salient one for a maximum communication purpose. The highlighted study item in Example 2 above seems to be challenging as it translates into Can. 1[1]: لمدرب ('trainer'), Can. 2: لمدرس ('tutor'), Can. 3: لحافلة ('bus') and Can. 4 عربة تجرها الخيول ('horse-drawn cart') respectively. Happily, only one out of these renderings does the trick namely, i.e. لحافلة ('bus'), i.e. Can 3, whereas the others may all be recalcitrant to the flow of communication in the translation.

Gile's (1995: 78-80) suggestions for SL text comprehension are quite valid for the study item under discussion. Mastery of English may pave the way for better understanding of the SL text. In approaching a translation like the one we have in Example 2, what assumptions does TL audience make? To reflect this, analysis should then be aptly made, with 'extralinguistic knowledge' of the SL text as an important determinant of appropriate lexical choice in consideration. Odd as it may sound, 'horse-drawn carts", as Can. 4 may show, are used to transport goods or people from Girona Airport to el *centro de la ciudad or la plaza de Cataluña*, etc. in the busiest city in Spain. Can. 1 and Can. 2 are also really bizarre as they kill the massage intended in the SL stone-dead, and further create a TL text with plenty of opportunities for the TL readers to forge their own interpretations, i.e. thefts are from a trainer's suitcase(s) in the former and from a tutor's in the latter. Neither is true. The choice for Can. 1 and Can. 2 seems to be formally-motivated on the one hand, or is due to negligence on the part of the student translators on the other. Al-Jabr (2008: 113) explains that "Arab translation students normally opt for formal equivalence." Al-Jabr (2008: 113) adds that opting for "functionally (dynamic) equivalence solves the problem."

[1] It stands for candidate.

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

5.3. First Meaning Selection

The translation students should be meticulous enough not to take the first meaning they come up with. Instead, they should take time to read through the meanings offered slowly and carefully. In Example 2 above, the choice for Can. 1 is a case of first meaning selection in which the student seems to take the first meaning for granted, a selection that never comes to his/her rescue. Al-Jabr (2008: 110) argues that a "formidable problem can be attributed to […] the student [who] often takes the first meaning provided by the dictionary for granted or copy the sentence without paying attention to its anomalous structure." Example 2 above illustrates how a translation student has erroneously opted for the first meaning provided for the item 'coach', thus giving rise to an unnatural translation (see Table 1 below). Table 1 shows a number of meanings offered by CCALED for 'coach' in order. It is crystal-clear that the student seems to have opted for an unsatisfactory solution. What the student has done is no more than pay lip service to his/her view. The selection for a sport-bound word in Arabic, i.e. لمدرب ('trainer'), to render a text about robbery defies description. Perhaps skimming for the right meaning for the jargon of the SL text may be helpful insofar as the student translator is concerned. Highlighted are the items that are indicators of the text type (and the jargon) through which the student can skim ('team'; 'sport'; 'sports'; 'baseball'; 'teaching'; 'examination'; 'bus'; 'train'; 'horses').

Order of meanings	***Acceptability***
(1) A coach is someone who trains a person or **team** of people in a particular sport.	No
(2) When someone coaches a person or a team, they help them to become better at a particular **sport**.	No
(3) A coach is a person who is in charge of a **sports** team.	No
(4) In **baseball**, a coach is a member of a team who stands near the first or third base, and gives signals to other members of the team who are on bases and are trying to score.	No
(5) A coach is someone who gives people special **teaching** in a particular subject, especially in order to prepare them for an examination.	No
(6) If you coach someone, you give them special teaching in a particular subject, especially in order to prepare them for an **examination**.	No
(7) A coach is a large, comfortable **bus** that carries passengers on long journeys.	Yes
(8) A coach is one of the separate sections of a **train** that carries passengers.	Yes
(9) A coach is an enclosed vehicle with four wheels which is pulled by **horses**, and in which people used to travel. Coaches are still used for ceremonial events in some countries, such as Britain.	No

Table 1 the meanings offered by CCALED for 'coach' in order.

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

As can be seen in Table 1 above, almost all the meanings are not possible compromise with the exception of Meaning 7 and 8. The latter is also excluded when the text unfolds; a fuller picture becomes self-evident, that is, 'His friend bought a bus…' and 'Before the bus pulled into the stop …'.

To elaborate more on the point, consider Example 3 below in which the highlighted Arabic item المؤتمرات has at least two English equivalents, namely 'conferences' and 'summits'.

Example 3

SL	ولكن لم تسفر **المؤتمرات** الاقتصادية العربية التي عقدت في عواصم مختلفة عام 1961 عن نتائج إيجابية في ميدان التعاون الاقتصادي الشامل المنشود.
TL	However, the Arab economic conferences held in different capitals in 1965 didn't bring about positive results in the aspired comprehensive economic cooperation.

It is obvious from the context in Example 3 above that a meeting of chiefs or leaders of Arab governments is intended, thus the latter rather than the former should be used. A cursory look at Figure 1 and Figure 2 below shows how 'conference' and 'summit' are used within English context through a number of authentic examples in italics.



Figure 1: the English context for 'conference'

Figure 1 above shows meanings of 'conference' with all possible connotations. The illustrative example in Figure 1: "Last weekend the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland held a conference, attended by 450 delegates" may be of great help to a student translator. The contextual units (e.g. 'Roman Catholic Church' and '450 delegates') require the use of 'conference' *per se* whereas 'NATO', for instance, in

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

Figure 2 implies high-profile people, top leaders etc., thus 'summit' should be used.



Figure 2 the English context for 'summit'

The contexts provided in Figure 1 and Figure 2 by means of various sentences (all italicised) are likely to be an asset for the student translator not to rush into any decision to select 'conference' as an equivalent for the SL item in question, but to take ample time to go over the meanings offered and also examine their authentic usage in English language.

5.4. Scant Attention to the Examples Provided by Dictionaries

Corpus-based dictionaries like CCALED (2003) highlight examples for any word because the more examples, the more the task for translation becomes easy. The examples provided by a dictionary are intended to illustrate the definitions of a word in terms of the syntactic structure, meaning, pragmatic etc. (see Roberts 1992: 51-52). Having decided on 'summit' in Example 3 above for instance, the student translator may do more to look into the word language-wise. In Figure 2 above, CCALED (2003) provides 1-19 English Dictionary (D) and 1-144 English Wordbank[1] (W) example sentences including 'summit', some of which are:

1. The Group of Seven major industrial countries concluded its annual summit meeting today.

[1] CCALED illustrates Wordbank: "A corpus of five million words of texts extracted from the 'Bank of English'."

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

2. The president stopped off in Poland on his way to Munich for the economic summit.
3. The summit, scarred by acrimony, ambivalence and confusion, marked one of the low points for Nato (sic) morale.
4. On June 18th, at a summit in Cologne, the rich world's leaders came up with a plan to ease their plight.
5. For those of you who are not well versed in SAARC, this is a regional cooperation among the countries there that got a great deal of push forward by the summit in the Maldives in May (CCALED, 2003).

Having indulged a little bit in these examples in terms of semantics, syntax, culture and pragmatics, the student translator can take cue from the sentences above bringing about the following suggested translations, other things being equal:

1. However, the Arab economic summits held in different capitals in 1965 *concluded* with no positive results in the aspired comprehensive economic cooperation (based on example 1 above).
2. In the Arab economic summits held in different capitals in 1965, however, there is little *push forward* in the aspired comprehensive economic cooperation (based on example 5 above).
3. However, the Arab economic summits held in different capitals in 1965 are *scarred* by no positive results in the aspired comprehensive economic cooperation (based on example 3 above).
4. In their Arab economic summits held in different capitals in 1965, however, the Arab leaders *came up with no plan* for the aspired comprehensive economic cooperation (based on example 4).

As can be seen, CCALED may provide the student translator with a wealth of vocabulary that can not only help him/her narrow the lexical gap between the language pairs, but it also makes the translation sound more natural.

5.5. Prioritising Scanning over Skimming

Scanning is looking through written material "quickly in order to find important or interesting information" (CCALED, 2003). In contrast, skimming a piece of writing is to "read through it quickly" (CCALED, 2003). Scanning rather than skimming is likely to be the suitable reading strategy when it comes to dictionary use. Although the translator is always limited with deadlines, skimming may be a good reading strategy because it tends to save time. Instead, it is time-consuming unless there is a good reason for using it. Some student translators are fond of extending their repertoire of new words. Therefore, scanning may be considered a means by which they can build a wealth of vocabulary for future

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

career. Looking up a word in a dictionary, students may glance through (or skim) the previous and subsequent words in a dictionary, but should, or even scan for the intended word. By the passage of time, the students may find themselves fine-tuning the linguistic skills by building day-to-day vocabulary (see Figure 3 below). Sooner or later, the vocabulary that is unneeded for a given translation task for today would become highly needed in another future translation task. Consider Example 4 below:

Example 4

SL Before the bus pulled into the stop in Barcelona he had **zipped** himself back into his hiding place.

TL وقبل وصول الحافلة إلى الموقف في برشلونة، يكون اللص قد رجع إلى مخباه في الحقيبة،

A mere glance at the translation of the highlighted word 'zipped' would immediately reveal the degree of challenge the student translator is faced with. Having consulted CCALED (2003), 'zip' refers to "a device used to open and close parts of clothes and bags. It consists of two rows of metal or plastic teeth which separate or fasten together as you pull a small tag along them." Deletion strategy for زمام (lit. 'zip') is opted for by the student translator as it may be too difficult for the TL audience to imbibe. It is important for the student translator to read between the lines in search for optimal translation, rather than mere skimming. Perfect translation, as it were, requires patience. While looking up a word, the student should not rush. We may then safely assume that nothing untoward happens. A meaning that is rushed out may be disastrous as can be shown in Example 4 above.



Figure 3: Scanning for new words other than the intended one

With hypothetical insight into the way to look up a word in a dictionary, we argue as Figure 3 above may show, that the vertical sequence in a bottom-up direction or

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

otherwise requires skimming whilst the linear sequence represented in the horizontal axis needs scanning.

5.6. Disregard for Collocations, Idioms and Proverbs

Granted, an item may have more than one meaning, and determining the meaning relies on the context. In the SL text, it is posited that SL text reads smoothly and it should be so in translation. Dictionaries help the translator to look for a suitable meaning, particularly "to indicate the semantic ranges of words as well as, through **collocations**, the main senses" (Newmark, 1988: 17; emphasis added). One of the problematic areas in translation, particularly in languages of little linguistic and cultural affinity as is the case in Arabic and English, is translating collocations, idioms and proverbs (see Al-Jabr, 2008: 113). Bahumaid (2006: 133) argues that collocations refer to "a phenomenon in language whereby a lexical item tends to keep company with other words. It is a lexical relation of occurrence that binds words together with varying degrees of strength." The source of difficulty in translating collocations, according to Kharma and Hajjaj (1989: 67), is attributable to the fact that "each language appears to have its own collocation patterns" (see also Bahumaid, 2006: 136; Roberts, 1992: 64). It is true, in the words of Roberts (1992: 64) that "the use of appropriate word combinations shows awareness of the idiomatic nature of language." Take Example 5 below

Example 5

SL وكنا نأمل أن تتوصل الدول العربية خلال عام 1961 إلى عقد اتفاق تجاري على نطاق واسع فيما بينها.

TL We hope that the Arab countries arrive to a large scale commercial agreement with each other during 1965.

Other things being equal, the Arabic collocation تتوصل... إلى عقد إتفاق (lit. 'to reach an agreement') seems to be difficult for the student translator to translate as he/she fails to appropriately use the dictionary. The words that collocate with إتفاق 'agreement' are numerous as CCALED (2003) shows:

1. It looks as though a **compromise agreement** has now been reached.
2. The two countries **signed an agreement** to jointly launch satellites.
3. The two men had not **reached agreement** on any issues...
4. The judge kept **nodding in agreement**...
5. The clinic doctor will then write to your GP to **get his agreement**.
6. The president was **in full agreement with** the proposal.
7. Many other surveys have produced results essentially **in agreement with** these figures.

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

The highlighted segments are all possible collocations for 'agreement'. Arguably, no. 3 may furnish the student translator with the possible collocation. Based on that, the following is a possible translation: "We were hoping that the Arab countries reach a large-scale commercial agreement in 1965." For more illustration, consider Example 6 below:

Example 6

SL Police are reported to have described the crime as an '**open and shut case**'.

TL ونقلت التقارير عن الشرطة وصفها هذه الجريمة بأنها [1]'حالة فتح وإغلاق'/ [2]'جريمة فتح الحقيبة وإغلاقها'.

A clear distortion of SL text is discernible in Example 6 above in which the translation choices for highlighted idiomatic expression are so diffused, obscure and overwrought. Can.1, i.e.حالة فتح وإغلاق (lit. 'open and shut incident') falls short of the SL. Similarly, Can. 2:جريمة فتح الحقيبة وإغلاقها (lit. 'the crime of opening and shutting the case') is detrimental to the SL. The students seem to fail to grasp the meaning of the idiom. Jettisoning the translations at the first glance is likely to be justifiable. CCALED (2003; emphasis in original) aptly defines the idiom as "[i]f you describe a dispute or a legal case as **open-and-shut**, you mean that is easily decided or solved because the facts are very clear." A suggested translation can be

ونقلت التقارير عن الشرطة وصفها هذه الجريمة بأنها واضحة وسهلة.
Police are reported to have described the crime as easily solved.

It is clear that failure to recognise the segment as proverbial, collocational or idiomatic may give rise for awkward translations as seen in Example 5 and Example 6. The onus is on translator trainers to draw the attention of the student translators to these areas of difficulty.

5.7. Contextualised Meaning

Occasionally, it happens that a dictionary does not include the item intended for search. Or, a SL item lacks an equivalent in the TL, thus leading to lexical incongruence as is the case with English and Arabic. In such cases, reliance on the context may be a way out for the student translator. Contextual factors are of paramount importance in deciding on the underlying meanings, in which case translation may go smoothly. Take Example 7 below:

Example 7

SL With the help of an accomplice, who was also arrested, the six-foot **contortionist** had crammed himself inside.

TL كان اللص البالغ طوله ستة أقدام قد حشر نفسه في الحقيبة بمساعدة شريك له تم إعتقاله ايضا.

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

It happens that a dictionary does not include the item intended for search. Or, a SL item lacks an equivalent in the TL, thus leading to lexical incongruence as is the case with unrelated languages. English and Arabic stand as a perfect example. In such cases, reliance on the context may be a way out for the student translator. The heavenly dream of equivalence that the translator has in mind is circling the square as shown by contortionist. First, the highlighted 'contortionist' is the production of SL culture**,** more or less difficult for the SL to coin an equivalent except through loan-translation, i.e. concept level; hence, it can be translated into something like بهلوان. The item in question is gender-free in English, not quite known whether it is male or female. By means of intertextuality, nevertheless, we, as text receivers, can make out of it through a sign at the outset of the text: "Police in Spain have arrested a man who stole valuables from people's luggage while they were on a bus heading for Barcelona." In Example 7 above, the student translator has made decision 'contortionist' into اللص (lit 'thief').

6. Conclusion

Bilingual/monolingual or specialised/general dictionaries are described by translation theorists and practitioners as the fount of good translation projects. And the fact that both translation student and translator trainer are at pains to have perfect translation makes it necessary to place a high premium on dictionary lookup strategies irrespective of dictionary types to be used by student translators (i.e. monolingual or bilingual). It is true that the student translators are thrown in at the deep end, so it is crucial that concerted efforts should be made to equip translation students with a high calibre training to employ appropriate strategies to do a translation task at hand the best way possible.

The study discusses some of the problems in the use of dictionaries in Arabic-English translation. When a student translator is stumbled on an unknown word, he/she look it up in the dictionary. Dictionary consultations should be as effective as possible. Without lack of comprehension of the SL text, these consultations have proven to be with little avail. The students seem to take the first meaning at hand disregarding other meanings offered by dictionaries. The students also ignore the illustrative examples given by dictionaries. The translation students give precedence to skimming over scanning, a point that may lead to erroneous translations. Scant attention was paid to collocations and meanings in context.

The following specific conclusions can be drawn: (1) student translators are ill-prepared for the problems they face in the use of dictionaries, thus contagion traces of erroneous translations usually surface; (2) attention should be given to two layers of meaning, namely denotative and connotative. This helps better comprehension of SL text; (3) it is an oft-repeated truism in translation that dictionaries pose a formidable challenge to novice translators; (4) it is important to familiarise translation students with different types of dictionaries and dictionary

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

entry formats (Roberts, 1992: 53). Perhaps it would be useful for student translator to start with bilingual dictionaries and, most importantly, to consult monolingual dictionaries for accuracy of their translations; (5) familiarisation with different types of lexical items, types of dictionaries and entry formats is needed; (6) student translators should not be brusque, i.e. take up the first meaning they come across; (7) comprehensive and dedicated reading is highly recommended; (8) the examples provided to explain a word, phrase or expression by a dictionary are significant and should be taken into consideration in translating from one language into another; (9) "it seems logical to include dictionary use exercises into the first translation course offered" (Roberts, 1992: 68); and (10) "[y]ou should check any word you look up in a bilingual dictionary in at least one SL and one TL monolingual dictionary" (Newmark, 1988: 221). We assume that a monolingual dictionary in need is a friend indeed, to check whether the words have currency or not insofar as the target audience is concerned.

Bibliography

Al-Jabr, A.F., 2008, "Impact of e-dictionaries on Arab students' translation strategies", *Babel*, *54*, 2, p.110–124.

Armstrong, N., 2005, *Translation, linguistics, culture: A French–English handbook*, Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Collins Cobuild English Dictionary, 2003, Version 4.11. Birmingham, HarperCollins Publishers.

Bahumaid, S., 2006, "Collocation in English–Arabic translation", *Babel*, 52, 2, p.133–152.

Farghal, M., Shunnaq, A., 1999, *Translation with reference to English and Arabic: A practical guide*, Jordan, Dar Al-Hilal for Translation.

Duff, A., 1989, *Translation,* Oxford University Press.

Gile, D., 1995, *Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins.

Hatim, B. Mason, I., 1997, *The Translator as communicator*, London, Routledge.

Holmes, J., 1988/2000, "The name and nature of translation studies", in Venuti, L., (ed.). *The translation studies reader*, London, Routledge, p.172-185.

Jensen, A., 1999, "Time pressure in translation", In Hansen, G., (ed.). *Probing the process in translation: Methods and Results (Copenhagen Studies in Language 24)* Copenhagen, Samfundslitteratur, p.103–119.

Kharma, N., Hajjaj, A. 1989, *Errors in English among Arabic speakers: analysis and remedy*, London, Longman.

Kiraly, D., 2000, *A social constructivist approach to translator education: Empowerment from theory to practice,* Manchester, St. Jerome Publishing.

Newmark, P., 1988, *A textbook of translation*, Hertfordshire, Prentice Hall International.

Nida, E., Taber, C., 1969, *The theory and practice of translation*, Leiden, E.J. Brill.

Roberts, R., 1992, "Translation Pedagogy: Strategies for improving dictionary use", *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction 5*, 1, p.49–76.

Ronowicz, et al., 2005, "Translator's frequent lexis store and dictionary use as factors in SLT comprehension and translation speed – a comparative study of professional, paraprofessional and novice translators", *Meta: Translators' Journal 50*, 2, p.580–596.

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)

Shunnaq, A., 1993, "Lexical incongruence in Arabic-English translation due to emotiveness in Arabic", *Turjumān 2*, 2, 37–63.
Tytler, A. 1790, *Essay on the Principle of Translation*, London
Wilkinson, M., 2007, "Corpora, serendipity & advanced search techniques", *The Journal of Specialised* Translation *7,* 108-122.

Appendix I[1]

وكنا نأمل أن تتوصل الدول العربية خلال عام 1961 إلى عقد اتفاق تجاري على نطاق واسع فيما بينها، ولكن لم تسفر المؤتمرات الاقتصادية العربية التي عقدت في عواصم مختلفة عام 1961 عن نتائج إيجابية في ميدان التعاون الاقتصادي الشامل المنشود. كما أن العلاقات الاقتصادية الجوهرية فيما بين الدول العربية كمشروع السوق العربية المشتركة وحرية انتقال الأموال والمنتوجات العربية من أي قطر عربي إلى آخر، وإعطاء الشركات العربية والأفراد العرب مطلق الحرية في العمل في أي قطر عربي بدون قيد أو شرط – كل هذه الأمور لم يتطرق إليها المجلس الاقتصادي التابع للجامعة العربية بل أجلّ بحثها لاجتماعه في دمشق في شهر حزيران 1961، ثم أجلّ بحثها إلى اجتماعه في القاهرة في شهر أيلول 1961، ولم يتم الاتفاق في ذلك الاجتماع على الأمور الاقتصادية الرئيسية واكتفى المجتمعون بتبادل وجهات النظر.

Appendix II

'Thief' hides inside luggage in Spain[2]

Police in Spain have arrested a man who stole valuables from people's luggage while they were on a bus heading for Barcelona. The police found the thief inside a suitcase in the luggage compartment. For weeks police were puzzled by repeated thefts from suitcases firmly locked inside the luggage compartment of a coach travelling between Girona Airport and Barcelona. After one journey when bags had again been broken into, one of the passengers pointed out a large, suspicious suitcase. Police opened it and to their amazement found a man curled up inside. With the help of an accomplice, who was also arrested, the six-foot contortionist had crammed himself inside. His friend bought a bus ticket and put the case into the luggage hold. Once the bus set off the man in the case clambered out, opened other suitcases in the hold looking for valuables. Before the bus pulled into the stop in Barcelona he had zipped himself back into his hiding place. Police are reported to have described the crime as an 'open and shut case'.

Mohammad Ahmad Thawabteh is Associate Professor of Translation and Interpreting, Al-Quds University, Jerusalem, Occupied Palestinian Territories. He holds an MA degree in English Language from Yarmouk University in Jordan, Advanced Higher Diploma (D.A.E) in Translation and Intercultural Studies from Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Spain and a doctorate in Translation and Intercultural Studies from Universidad de Granada in Granada, Spain. His main research interests include translation technology, audiovisual translation, translator training, pragmatics, cultural studies, discourse analysis and semiotics.

[1]Report of the Directors of the Arab Bank, December 31, 1961
[2]http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2011/06/110609_witn_contortionist_page1.shtml (accessed 10 October 2012)

BDD-A13363 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-31 07:24:28 UTC)