

## **Investigating of Punctuation Marks Problems in English-Arabic Translation**

ترجمة علامات الترقيم من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية  
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### **المُلخَص:**

يُنقل المعنى اللغوي من خلال عناصر مختلفة في الكتابة، وأحد هذه العناصر هو استخدام علامات الترقيم، حيث يستخدم الكتاب علامات الترقيم لتقسيم النصوص إلى وحدات ذات معنى ليسهل على القارئ فهم النص. يقوم هذا البحث باستكشاف تأثير ترجمة بعض علامات الترقيم على المعنى في الترجمة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية، ويتمثل الموضوع قيد الدراسة في بعض النصوص الإنجليزية وترجمتها إلى العربية من قبل عدد من طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية بجامعة مصراتة الذين يدرسون مقررات الترجمة، اختار الباحث عينة الدراسة عشوائياً للتعرف على كيفية نقل الطلاب لعلامات الترقيم في عملية الترجمة، حيث استخدم نصوصاً باللغة الإنجليزية مقتبسة من موقع (ويكيبيديا) على الإنترنت، وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن بعض الطلاب فشلوا في نقل المعنى باستخدامهم لعلامة ترقيم غير مناسبة للسياق، كما أضع بعضهم علامات الترقيم في الترجمة مما أضر سلباً على المعنى العام للنص، ويمكن الاستنتاج أن بعض الطلاب يعتمدون اعتماداً كبيراً على الترجمة المباشرة من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية.

**الكلمات الأساسية:** علامات الترقيم، الترجمة، النص المصدر، النص الهدف، الترجمة المباشرة.

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### **Abstract**

Meaning is carried through different elements in written contexts. One of these elements is the use of punctuation marks. Writers, in both languages, use punctuation marks in order to breakdown texts into meaningful units to convey ideas to the reader. This paper explores the influence of transferring

some punctuation marks on meaning in English-Arabic translation. The topic under study is represented by some English texts that had been translated by a number of English students enrolled in translation courses. The sample were randomly chosen to see how punctuation is transferred between the two languages. The texts were taken out from wikipedia website. The results of the study revealed that some students failed to transfer the meaning by using wrong punctuation marks, others missed out punctuation marks completely which negatively affected the overall meaning of the text. It can be concluded that some students rely too much on direct translation as a technique of translation.

**Key words:** punctuation marks, translation, source text (ST), target text (TT), direct translation.

## **1. Introduction**

Punctuation marks serve as important linguistic tools, aiding in the conveyance of meaning, clarity and emphasis in written texts. They form a part of the sentence meaning. Moreover, they are essential for effective communication in writing. They make a big difference in how writing is perceived and understood by its readers.

According to Catford (1995:20), “translation is the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)”. In other words, it should have a number of elements to be considered as a good and accurate translation. One of these elements is using convenient punctuation marks. Therefore, translators should use convenient punctuation in order to convey the same intended meaning of the source text. However, the student should realise that in translation (particular, from English into Arabic), some elements of the target text cannot be the same as the source text. Although translation should have the same meaning of the source text, some changes need to be made on the target text in order to produce a good structured text that readers can perceive and understand easily.

## **2. Research Problem and Limitations:**

Students most often make mistakes when translating a text from English into Arabic as a result of the presence of many differences between the two languages. This paper focuses on the translation of some punctuation marks from English into Arabic (comma, full stop, period). It studies students’

translations to observe the influence of the transfer of the intended meaning into Arabic focusing on some punctuation marks. The sample of this study is the students of English Department at Faculty of Education, Misurata University, who are studying Translation courses.

### **3. Objectives of the Study:**

This paper aims to find out how students transfer punctuation marks from English into Arabic when translating English texts. It provides some English texts that students have translated to work as a guideline in order to use Arabic punctuation and to produce the same intended meaning of the source text.

### **4. Review of Related Literature:**

#### **4.1. Punctuation Marks:**

Punctuation is the technique of employing the various stops and markings in writing appropriately to help the reader understand the meaning of the paragraph. Mohammed et al. (2017) stated that punctuation is merely a tool for making written or printed material easier to read and comprehend. Without punctuation, it may be difficult to understand what the statement means. Nasrudin (2015) claimed that punctuation marks serve as markers for intonation and pauses that should be noticed when reading aloud, as well as the structure and organisation of written text.

Additionally, Zulkifli (2015) mentioned that punctuation is a rational and sensible system that gradually evolved as printers and publishers sought to make writing understandable and simple to read. Punctuation is crucial because it helps the reader grasp what is being written, allowing them to comprehend the words being sent even when they are not looking at the writer's face. He also said that punctuation mistakes are when a punctuation mark is omitted or used incorrectly. Punctuation marks serve to separate words and phrases inside a sentence according to their meanings. It indicates that punctuation helps to make a sentence's meaning clear.

#### **4.2. Types of English Punctuation Marks:**

According to Nurhaidah (2018), the punctuation marks are:

1. Capital letter: it is difficult to give precise rules about the use of capital letters in modern English. However, they should be used in the first word in a sentence, names of organizations, days and months, nationality words, and names of people or place.

2. Semicolon ( ; ): it is used to show the link between two connected phrases, when a comma would be too weak and a full stop too strong. Semicolons are also used to divide up items in a list when they have a complex structure.

3. Colon ( : ): is a punctuation mark that has two dots of equal size placed vertically. It is used to introduce explanations, start a list, and introduce a quotation.

4. Apostroph ( ' ): it is one of the most misused features of English punctuation. It is used to show contractions, and with possessives

5. Quotation marks ( “ ” ): single quotation marks are used to emphasis a word, to give quotations from other writers and to show direct speech. Double quotation mark is used to show quotations inside quotations.

6. Hyphen ( - ): it is used with certain words and structures such as: *well-structured*.

7. Quotation mark ( ? ): it is a signal that a question is asked.

8. Exclamation mark ( ! ): it is a signal surprise, amazement, or strong emotion.

9. Brackets ( ) : they are used to contain information of lesser importance.

10. Comma ( , ): separates clauses and marks a ‘breathing space’ between ideas.

11. Full stop/Period ( . ): mark boundaries between two thoughts/ideas.

#### 4.3. Punctuation Marks in Arabic:

According to Salem (2009), some of the quotation marks used in Arabic writing are:

1. Qatea’a/Waqfa ( . ): it has many positions in Arabic writing. It is used at the end of the complete sentence that is not interrogative or exclamatory. It is also used at the end of the paragraph that explains one idea. However, it is sometimes used in some abbreviations, as in (ق.م) for (قبل الميلاد) /qabla al-milad/).

2. /Fasela/ ( ، ): it could be used in a number of situations, such as the following:

- Between main clauses that form a paragraph which has one main idea.
- Between short sentences and phrases.
- Sometimes, it functions as a conjunction.
- In prepositional phrases.

- In listing things, or between parts/kinds of something.

3. Al-fasela al-manquta/al-fasela al-kubra (؛): it is placed between sentences that have a strong connection between them or an unnecessary connection, and the reader pauses at it a little longer than he pauses at /al-fasela/, and shorter than he pauses at /al-qatea'a/.

4. Shareha ( : ): it is the sign of clarification and story, or the points of interpretation and clarification. That is, they are generally used in the context of clarification or explanation.

5. /Al-hadf/ (...): it is three points (no less and no more). It is used when a writer quotes a part of someone else's words to cite it in reporting, or in discussing an idea. The writer uses (...) in place of the deleted sentence/s to indicate to the reader that the quoted writer is faithful in citations. The writer sometimes uses ellipsis to indicate brevity and abbreviation.

6. /Alamat al-istefham/ ( ? ): it is placed after the interrogative sentence, whether the interrogative tool is mentioned in the sentence or deleted. Moreover, when there is doubt or uncertainty about information.

7. /Alamat al-ta'ajub/ ( ! ): it is placed after sentences that express psychological emotions: sadness, joy, supplication, astonishment, seeking help, hope, wish, regret, etc.

#### **4.4. Functions of Punctuation Marks in English**

Punctuation marks serve as writing signs that help readers understand what is being written in a sentence. Additionally, English punctuation is a crucial component of written communication since it affects the intonation of sentences. There are three functions of punctuation marks as following:

a. Phonetic Function: punctuation marks make the rhythm, pauses, and tone inflexions in a written work obvious. The tone is frequently ignored, and readers are allowed to read the way they want that might result in confusing situations. Commas, semicolons, colons, or points of ellipsis are used to control the tone (Awad, 2012).

b. Grammatical Function: punctuation is employed in a direct manner to establish questions, highlight emphatic content, draw attention to syntactic elements displaced from their natural positions, and build the structure of sentences, complex phrases, paragraphs, documents, etc (ibid.).

c. Semantic Function: punctuation helps to understand the meaning of words/phrases by using italics, for instance. They enable the reader to

comprehend the intended meaning. Therefore wrong punctuation can interrupt the flow of ideas and change meaning. (Rumki 2005, cited in Awad 2012).

#### **4.5. Functions of Punctuation Marks in Arabic**

Punctuation marks in Arabic are in three groups according to their function. (Salem, 2009)

**Stop signs:** ( ‘ ‘ . ) they enable the reader to pause completely, moderately, or briefly, and give a rest or breath to continue the reading process.

**Acoustic accent marks:** ( : ... ? ! ); these are also pausing signs, but - in addition to pausing - they have special vocal tones and certain psychological emotions during reading.

**Calculation marks:** ( « » - ( ) [ ] ): they contribute in organizing written speech and helps to understand it.

#### **5. Previous Studies**

A number of researchers conducted studies on punctuation marks and their importance in translation.

Mogahed (2012) provided illustrated examples of English sentences and their accurate translations in Arabic focusing on some practical and illustrative examples about some punctuation marks, especially the comma and the full stop. He assured that the misuse of these marks affects meaning, and consequently affects translation. However, he gave equal importance for the writer and the translator. Moreover, the translator does not need to imitate the source text in translation, but he/she has to observe the norms and context of the target text.

Alqinai (2013) investigated some of the significant differences in punctuation marks between Arabic and English. He said that although both languages share many of the basic punctuation marks such as the period, the comma, and the question and exclamation marks, Arabic has its own method of punctuation which is not strictly governed by the same rules as in English. He concluded that Arabic does not solely rely on conventional punctuation as a marker of sentence division and even in those texts that do, punctuation is not always a clear guide. Intersentential conjunctions, discourse markers, superscript diacritics and lexical insertions create coherence without the need for visual space division.

The research of Alhuraithi (2021) has shown that punctuation marks have visual metadiscourse and pragmatic functions and they are problematic for translators. In Arabic, visual metadiscourse devices such as (*wa*) are employed to replace the punctuation marks used in English. He mentioned that Arabic tends to use words rather than punctuation marks which are of the characteristics of the English language. He concluded that deviations are much more vivid in languages belonging to families as well as cultures of different origins in the case with Arabic and English. Therefore, the English language has well-defined strict rule for the use of punctuation marks, Arabic has its own methods of punctuation represented in visual metadiscourse devices.

Dendenne (2010) discussed the Arabic conjunctions and their translations into English and the contribution of the punctuation marks in the target language. The results revealed that the learners lack awareness of the multiple meanings the Arabic connectors have in different co-texts and misuse punctuation marks that contribute in building the text in the target language. Therefore, they are unable in handling punctuation marks that contribute in holding the parts of the target text together. Moreover, they are often unable to choose the correct conjunctions that capture the semantic relation expressed by conjunctions/connectors in Arabic language.

The study of Awad, Mourad & Elamil (2021), addressed the role of punctuation marks in translation. They have analysed a corpus of French-Arabic based on Amin Maalouf's book "*Les identités meurtrières*". According to their findings, translators prefer to omit punctuation if it does not have a syntactic function in the original text and only translate the main meaning of a sentence. Therefore, their translation is incomplete because they exclude tacit information that the author expressed using punctuation marks, especially if it is a literary text. However, they believed that this omission proves that punctuation marks do not have universal meanings or functions. In order to translate punctuation marks, they must be regarded as signs with a semantic capacity equal to words. Translators should divide the text into different semantic units by employing punctuation marks that are specific of a language.

## 6. Methodology:

The researcher follows a qualitative approach. Observation was implemented as a research tool based on the analysis of students' translation of some English texts. Four groups of Translation form the community of the study. More than 60 students participated in the study. The researcher provided some English texts, taken from Wikipedia website, and asked the students to translate them into Arabic. The texts were selected randomly to see how the students convert the punctuation marks into Arabic. In addition, to check if the translation accuracy and the punctuation marks were negatively affected the overall meaning.

## 7. Findings and Discussion

The Arabic punctuation mark /Fasela/ is written as (؁), not the same as the English comma (,). Most of writers make this mistake although Arabic comma /alfasela/ is there in computer keyboard. It is written adjacent to the preceding word immediately without any spaces. (Salem, 2009)

By exploring students' translations, it has been found that they sometimes fail to put the right punctuation mark in Arabic. The following are some texts that have been given to the students in order to see how they deal with punctuation marks in translation and transfer their meaning into Arabic.

1. Replacing the English comma with (a conjunction) (/waw alatif/ واو العطف) in Arabic.

### **Example:**

*A dream is a succession of images, ideas and sensations that usually occurs involuntarily.*

الحلم هو سلسلة الصور والأفكار والأحاسيس التي عادة ما تحدث تلقائياً.

In this example, the student used the conjunction (واو العطف) instead of the comma. Apparently, to keep the flow of the idea, and to produce a well-structured Arabic text.

2. Using a full stop in English and that students have kept it as a full stop (Qatea'a) in Arabic where they have to use a comma in Arabic. Sometimes, students should replace the English (full stop) with (fasela) in Arabic in connecting phrases within the same paragraph. English uses comma only between phrases and clauses, but the Arabic comma (fasela) is different and can be used to divide sentences within the same paragraph. This is one of the fundamentals of Arabic writing.



**Example:**

*Social media is a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas and information and the building of virtual networks and communities. Users engage with social media via computer, tablet or smartphone, often utilizing it for messaging.*

مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي هي تكنولوجيا الحاسوب التي تعنى بمشاركة الأفكار والمعلومات وبناء مختلف الشبكات والوحدات. المستخدمون يستعملون مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي عن طريق الكمبيوتر والهاتف الذكي أو اللوح الإلكتروني الذكي وغالبا ما يساعدهم هذا في عملية المراسلة.

3. Using comma in listing items in the English text, but in Arabic translation, students should use a different punctuation mark, as the conjunction (أو).

**Example:**

*Users engage with social media via computer, tablet or smartphone, often utilizing it for messaging.*

المشتركون يستخدمون الوسط الاجتماعي عن طريق الحاسوب أو الحاسوب اللوحي أو الهواتف الذكية وغالبا يستخدم للمراسلة.

The student, here, has successfully conveyed the intended meaning of the English text, although using a different punctuation mark (the conjunction أو) instead of the punctuation mark; i.e. the English comma (,).

4. Using the English comma in students' translations (,) instead of the Arabic /fasela/ (،).

**Example A:**

*Flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning that reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content, often online, outside the classroom.*

الفصل الدراسي المقلوب هي تعليمات استراتيجية ونوع من الانسجام التعليمي الذي يعكس بيئة التعلم التقليدية بواسطة توصيل المعلومات الذي غالبا ما يكون المحتوى عن بعد, خارج الفصل الدراسي, تحركات النشاطات...

**Example B:**

*A dream is a succession of images, ideas and sensations that usually occurs involuntarily.*

الدراما هي سلسلة من التصورات, الأفكار, الأحاسيس عادة تحدث تلقائيا.

5. Some students deleted the punctuation mark and have not used any of them either between sentences or in the whole paragraph. As a result, they produced ill-structured and unreadable text in Arabic.

**Example A: (One English sentence)**

*Flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning that reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content, often online, outside the classroom.*

الغرفة الصفية تكون استراتيجية من مؤسسة مختصة ونوع من التعليم المدمج انعكست على التعليم التقليدي بيئة التعليم توصل مؤسسات مختلفة محتوى غالبا متصل بالإنترنت خارج غرفة المدرسة.

**Example B: (A paragraph)**

*Flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning that reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content, often online, outside the classroom. It moves activities, including those that may have traditionally been considered homework, into the classroom. In a flipped classroom, students watch online lectures, collaborate in online discussions, or carry out research at home.*

الغرفة الصفية تكون استراتيجية من مؤسسة مختصة ونوع من التعليم المدمج انعكست على التعليم التقليدي بيئة التعليم توصل مؤسسات مختلفة محتوى غالبا متصل بالإنترنت خارج غرفة المدرسة تحتوي على حركات ونشاطات ربما تساعدهم عادة في التفكير الواجب المنزلي في الصف انقلاب الغرفة المنزلية (التعليم عن بعد) يشاهدون دروسهم متصلة بالإنترنت يتعاونو ويتناقشو فيها عن طريق الإنترنت بالبحث خارجها في المنزل

**8. Conclusion and Recommendations:**

When translating from English into Arabic, the transfer of punctuation marks presents unique challenges due to the differences in syntactic structures. To ensure accurate and effective transference of punctuation marks, students must possess a deep understanding of the source and target languages, as well as their punctuation marks. Students may also rely on contextual interpretation to determine the appropriate placement of punctuation marks. In addition, they should use their creative skills to adapt and modify punctuations to suit the target language and maintain the intended meaning.

It can be concluded that some students depend too much on direct translation. It is clear that most of them do not know the difference between Arabic and English punctuation marks. They should learn how to use punctuation marks and know their function, not only in English, but also in Arabic. However, they should reduce using direct translation, and learn other translation strategies to convey the intended meaning accurately and in a language that conforms to Arabic stylistics. Therefore, revising translation is

very crucial to build a faultless and meaningful text. Arabic punctuation marks such as the fullstop /*Al-qatea'a*/, question mark, exclamation mark, and comma /*Al-fasela*/, are critical in shaping sentences' structure and meaning. The placement of punctuation marks in Arabic can affect the emphasis and tone of the sentence, making it imperative to use them appropriately in translation.

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