

**Bridging the intercultural gaps between English and Arabic translation
through various procedures**

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the intercultural challenges inherent in English-Arabic translation and identifies systematic procedures to bridge these gaps. Given that English and Arabic emerge from distinct cultural, religious, and rhetorical traditions, direct linguistic transfer often results in loss of meaning, unintended connotations, or communicative failure. The study highlights key areas of divergence, including non-equivalent concepts, politeness norms, religious references, and rhetorical styles that demand more than lexical substitution. The research outlines and analyzes major translation procedures used to mediate these differences: cultural adaptation for idioms and social practices, explication to clarify implicit cultural information, functional equivalence for legal and administrative terms, borrowing with explanation for new or culture-specific concepts, and transcreation for marketing and literary texts. Each procedure is illustrated with practical English-Arabic examples to demonstrate how translators can preserve the source text's intent while ensuring cultural appropriateness and naturalness in the target language. Findings suggest that successful intercultural translation requires the translator to function as a cultural mediator who balances fidelity to the source with sensitivity to the target audience's worldview. The paper concludes that applying these procedures not only enhances accuracy and readability but also promotes cross-cultural understanding, facilitates knowledge transfer, and expands the social impact of translated content in domains such as education, healthcare, media, and international relations.

Key words: bridging, intercultural, gap, mediate, procedure

Introduction

Translation is not merely a linguistic transfer of words from one language to another; it is an act of intercultural mediation. This becomes particularly complex when bridging English and Arabic, two languages rooted in distinct historical, religious, and social worldviews. While both languages possess rich literary and scientific traditions, their underlying cultural codes often lack direct equivalents, creating significant “intercultural gaps” that can distort meaning, intent, and impact if left unaddressed. The challenge for translators extends beyond grammar and vocabulary. Concepts such as privacy, individualism, or idioms like “break a leg” carry cultural assumptions that do not translate literally into Arabic without loss or misunderstanding. Conversely, Arabic rhetorical features including parallelism, religious invocations, and kinship honorifics may appear redundant or overly formal to English readers if rendered word-for-word. Failure to navigate these gaps risks producing translations that are either culturally alienating or factually inaccurate, undermining communication in critical domains such as diplomacy, education, law, and healthcare. This paper attempts to measure how various translation procedures can bridge intercultural gaps. Drawing on translation theory and practice, it explores key strategies including cultural adaptation, explication, functional equivalence, borrowing, loanwords, paraphrase and so on. Each procedure serves as a tool to preserve the source text’s purpose while ensuring it resonates naturally within the target culture’s cognitive and social framework. By applying these procedures, the gap between English and Arabic can be transformed from a barrier into a bridge; one that facilitates mutual understanding, safeguards cultural identity and expands access to knowledge across linguistic borders.

2.Literature review

Translation procedures: Translation procedures refer to the strategy which translators apply within a text dealing with its components; e.g., expressions, sentences, phrases, structure, idioms, etc. Translation procedures include two types. The first type is referred to as direct or literal procedures which work when the structural and conceptual elements of the source language correspond to those of the target language. Direct/literal procedures include borrowing (loan words, *claque/* through-translation (collocations, names of organizations, etc.), and literal translation. The second type is known as indirect (oblique) translation procedure which works well when there is no way to directly transfer the structure and conceptual elements of the SL into TL. Therefore, some kinds of meaning alterations, grammar and stylistics adaptation are needed. Translation procedures include transposition, modulation, equivalence, functional equivalence, compensation, transference/ transliteration (e.g., in words such *décor*, *coup*, etc). Naturalization / adaptation is more developed translation procedure that adapts the pronunciation of loan words and their morphology to those of the target language (Ali 2014). Importantly, Ordudari (2007) refers to translation methods as global strategies while he refers translation procedures as local strategies. In distinction between global and local translation strategies Bell (1998) and Jaaskelainen (2005) refer to translation methods as global strategies and procedures as local strategies explaining that global strategies deal with the entire text while local strategies deal with text’s components (Ali 2014). Translation procedures are practical techniques employed to solve

specific linguistic and cultural problems. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995) identified seven major procedures: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. Among these, adaptation is considered the most culturally oriented strategy, allowing translators to replace unfamiliar cultural elements with functionally equivalent ones in the target culture. Newmark (1988) expanded this framework by introducing additional procedures such as cultural equivalent, descriptive equivalent, functional equivalent, synonymy, reduction, expansion, compensation, paraphrase, and notes. These procedures offer translators greater flexibility when dealing with culturally loaded expressions in Arabic and English. Baker (2018) examined translation at different linguistic levels, including words, grammar, cohesion, and pragmatics. She emphasized that translators should combine various procedures rather than relying exclusively on literal translation. Her framework is especially relevant for Arabic-English translation because linguistic differences often require multiple strategies within the same text.

Translation Theory and the Concept of Equivalence: Translation studies have evolved considerably since the mid-twentieth century. Early linguistic approaches focused primarily on achieving equivalence between source and target texts. Catford (1965) defined translation as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language. However, his structural approach was criticized for paying insufficient attention to cultural and contextual factors. Nida (1964) introduced the concepts of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, arguing that effective translation should prioritize the response of the target audience rather than merely reproducing the linguistic form of the source text. His theory has been particularly influential in translating religious and literary texts between Arabic and English, where literal translation often fails to convey the intended meaning. Newmark (1988) further distinguished between semantic translation, which emphasizes fidelity to the source text, and communicative translation, which seeks to produce the same effect on target readers. His work highlights the importance of selecting translation procedures according to the communicative purpose of the text.

Linguistic Differences between English and Arabic: One of the principal challenges in Arabic-English translation lies in the structural differences between the two languages. Arabic exhibits a rich morphological system, flexible word order, and extensive use of derivation, while English relies more heavily on fixed word order and analytical grammatical structures. Hatim and Mason (1997) argue that successful translation requires understanding discourse, context, and communicative intent in addition to linguistic forms. They note that translators must consider textual cohesion, coherence, and pragmatic meaning to produce natural translations. Dickins, Hervey, and Higgins (2017) specifically examined Arabic-English translation and identified common problems involving lexical ambiguity, grammatical structures, idiomatic expressions, and stylistic variation. Their work demonstrates that adaptation is frequently necessary when direct equivalence cannot be achieved.

Cultural Adaptation in Translation: Culture is inseparable from language, making cultural competence essential for translators. Bassnett (2014) argues that translation is fundamentally an act of intercultural communication rather than simple linguistic substitution. Venuti (1995) introduced the concepts of domestication and foreignization. Domestication adapts the source text to target cultural expectations, whereas foreignization preserves the foreign character of the original. In Arabic-English translation, translators often balance these strategies depending on the text type and intended audience. Nord (1997) proposed the functionalist approach, emphasizing that translation decisions should be guided by the purpose (Skopos) of the translation. According to this perspective, adaptation is justified whenever it helps fulfill the communicative function of the translated text.

Previous Studies: Research on Arabic-English translation consistently highlights challenges related to culture-specific expressions, Islamic terminology, metaphors, proverbs, and collocations. Ghazala (2014) emphasizes that many translation errors arise from insufficient awareness of contextual meaning rather than inadequate vocabulary. Farghal and Shunnaq (1999) investigated pragmatic and cultural issues in Arabic-English translation, concluding that translators must possess linguistic competence alongside deep cultural knowledge. Their findings support the strategic use of adaptation procedures to maintain communicative effectiveness. Al-Qinai (2000) analyzed problems of translation quality assessment and emphasized that successful translations should be evaluated according to both linguistic accuracy and communicative appropriateness.

Adaptation as a Bridge between English and Arabic: Recent studies increasingly recognize adaptation as a dynamic problem-solving strategy rather than a departure from faithful translation. Adaptation enables translators to overcome differences in idiomatic expressions, religious references, social conventions, humor, and metaphorical language while preserving the communicative intent of the original text.

Scholars generally agree that no single translation procedure is universally effective. Instead, translators should select procedures according to the text's purpose, target audience, and cultural context. This flexible approach is particularly valuable in Arabic-English translation, where linguistic and cultural differences frequently prevent direct equivalence.

Research Gap: Although extensive research has explored English to Arabic translation strategies, relatively few studies have focused specifically on how translators systematically transfer meaning by multiple translation procedures to bridge both linguistic and cultural gaps across different text genres. Existing research often examines individual procedures in isolation rather than investigating how combinations of procedures contribute to effective communication. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to developing practical guidelines for translators working across diverse communicative contexts.

Methods of Data collection

The study used a test was targeting different 25 students of English. The test was intended to give evidence of which translation procedure students use more to achieve fiddle translation of the source text. The test presented four lists of terms/phrases covering idioms,

greetings, holiday names and food names Moreover; a paper-pencil-questionnaire was also used for data collection from participants. The questionnaire was intended to collect impressions about suitability of some translation procedures when transferring English text into Arabic. It is assumed that there is a need for the use of more than one translation procedure in translation process. That is, the situation often requires the involvement of more than one translation procedures which depend on the distance between source and target texts. Therefore, there are variations of translation procedures presenting options for students to use to achieve sensible translation. These procedures include paraphrase, compensation, equivalence, omission, loan word and transliteration.

4. Test material

The tested material of this paper covered English language cultural items in the area of intercultural differences. Intercultural difference covered four lists of food names, idioms, greeting expressions and names of holidays, social, religious and pragmatic differences which are supposed to have single conceptual shapes in English and Arabic languages.

Testing procedure: students were asked to read a list of 60 English word/phrase or idiom. In the test students were asked to translate words/phrases using the most effective translation procedure for communicating the intended meaning of the source text/word. Students were also asked to group their responses into six lists according to the procedure they used. This is because the test targeted six translation procedures. *The scoring procedure:* responses of students are evaluated against the model response which subject to test and questionnaire specifications. If a student chooses the translation procedure which matches the model answer, he/she will obtain a mark and vice versa.

5. Participants

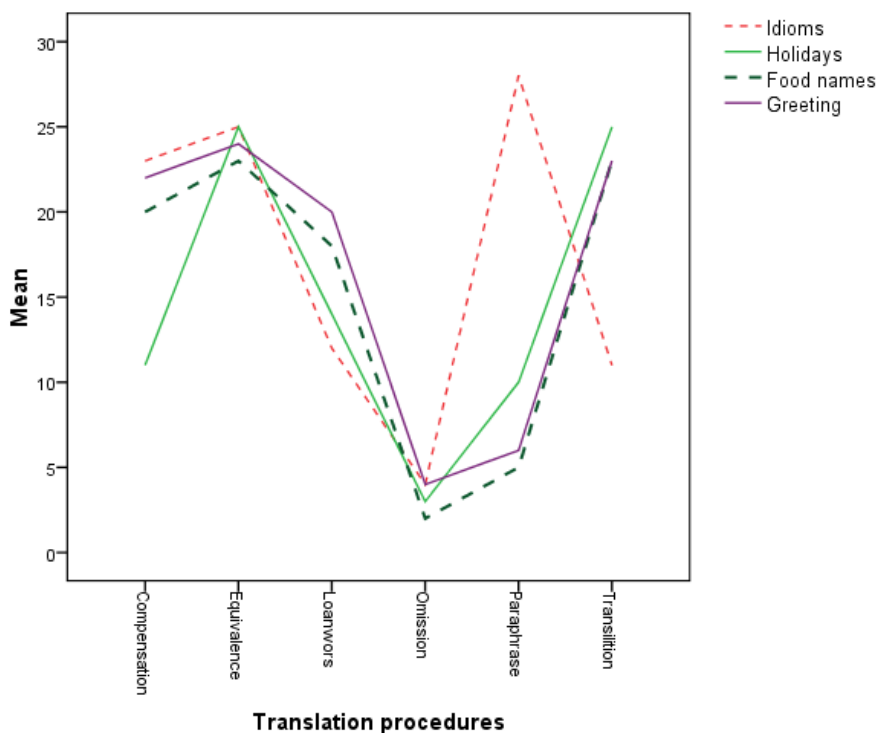
In this research paper, participants are 25 students from the department of English at faculty of Arts and Humanities at Gadarif University. Participants voluntarily took part in the study to provide data responding to translation test. Other 30 students were asked to reply to paper pencil questionnaire. As demographic Characteristics here are some baseline traits that might influence the study's results. Firstly students involved in this study are at the same grade level; preparing for bachelor degree of English. Secondly, in the course of their study the students studied three translation courses: sequenced as translation I, II and III. Students developed considerable knowledge of translation and had much practice of translation from English into Arabic/ Arabic-English.

6. Results

6.1 Results collected via test

The results below represent the scores of 25 translation students responding to test and other 30 responding questionnaire conducted to measure the frequency of some translation procedures in translating cultural items.

Figure (1) Scores of 25 responding to translation test utilizing different translation procedures to interpret various cultural items



As figure (1), shows the use of equivalence translation procedures attained the highest scores compared to the four assessed items where the total mean is 24.23%. The total mean for transliterations was 20.5%. Moreover, compensation procedures accounted for 19%, while Loanwords stood at 16%. Paraphrase procedures were observed to have a total mean of 12.25%. In comparison, Omission translation procedure exhibited the lowest frequency, with a total mean of 3.23%. Details are in table (1) below.

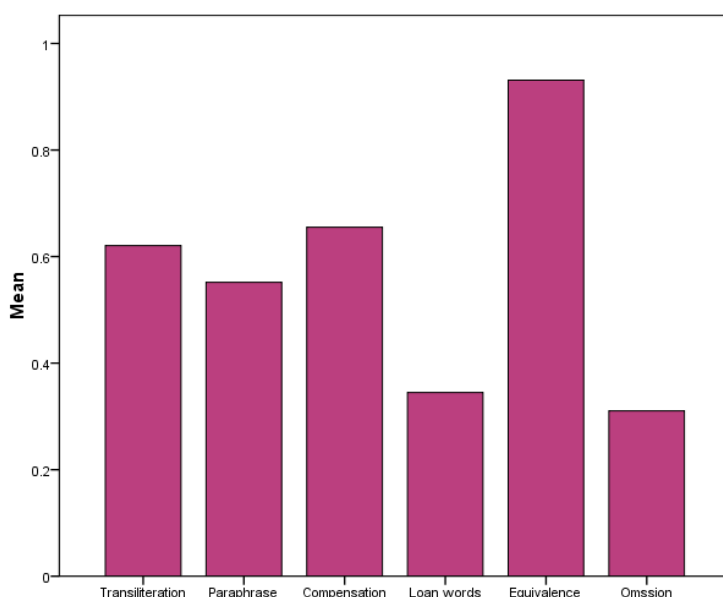
Table (1) Students' preference fitting translation procedures for different cultural items between English and Arabic

Translation procedures	Cultural tested Items			
	Idioms	Holidays	Food names	Greeting
Equivalence	25	25	23	24
Transliteration	11	25	23	23
Compensation	23	11	20	22
Loanwords	12	14	18	20
Paraphrase	28	10	5	6
Omission	4	3	2	4

Table (1) presents the scores of students who utilized various translation procedures to adapt cultural items from English into Arabic. The scores are organized in descending order. Nearly all students, numbering between 23 and 25, opted for equivalence translation procedures to convey idioms, holidays, food names, and greetings from English to Arabic. A range of 11 to 23 students selected transliteration translation procedures for the same purpose. Additionally, between 11 and 23 students chose compensation translation procedures for transferring idioms, holidays, food names, and greetings, while students numbering between 12 and 20, preferred Loan word procedures for the transfer of cultural items from English to Arabic. Interestingly, the use of paraphrase procedure is very high with idioms translation but low with food names, greetings and holidays (28 to 5). Omission procedure recorded the lowest preference with only 2 to 4 students selecting Omission translation procedures for the transfer of idioms, holidays, food names, and greetings from English into Arabic. The results suggest that equivalence, transliteration, compensation and loan words form the most frequent translation procedures when students translate the tested items; compared to Omission strategy.

6.2 Results collected via questionnaire

Figure (2) Impressions of 30 translation students about the suitability of 7 translation procedures collected via questionnaire



As figure (2), shows the use of equivalence translation procedures attained the highest scores compared to the four assessed items where the total mean is 93%. The total mean for transliterations was 20.5%. Moreover, compensation procedures accounted for 19%, while Loanwords stood at 16%. Paraphrase procedures were observed to have a total mean of 12.25%. In comparison, Omission translation procedure exhibited the lowest frequency, with a total mean of 3.23%. Details are in table (1) below.

6.2.1 Mean Standard Deviation

Table (2) Total Mean and Standard Deviation of the performance of 30 students

Translation procedure	Mean	Std. Deviation
Transliteration	.62	.494
paraphrase	.55	.506
compensation	.66	.484
Loan	.34	.484
equivalence	.93	.258
Omission	.30	.466

Table (2) presents the mean and standard deviation of seven translation procedures. From the data the lower SD of equivalence .258 suggests that students' scores are closer the mean.

It indicates that around 70% of the data follows bell-curve (normal) distribution. Interestingly, the SD values of the other translation procedures spread out over .466 to .506 points. According to data spread rule rates (68 - 95- and 99.7) all SD values fall in normal distribution. These points relatively are moderately clustered around the mean suggesting fairly moderate consistency.

7.Discussion and Conclusions

The findings indicate that students predominantly favor equivalence, transliteration, compensation, and loan word procedures for translating cultural items from English to Arabic, while the omission procedure remains the least utilized. This suggests a clear preference for strategies that maintain cultural integrity and meaning in translation emphasizing the importance of these procedures are in effective cross-cultural communication.

Importantly the impressions of data collected via questionnaires congregate with those of the test where equivalence translation procedures significantly outperform other methods, achieving a remarkable impression. Other procedures were also preferred which include transliterations, compensation, loanwords and paraphrase. However, omission and loan words procedure lags behind the baseline value. These results highlight the effectiveness of equivalence in translation practices. Compensation, Transliteration and Paraphrase procedures are also favored as alternative translation procedures across cultures. This bare contrast emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate translation strategies to enhance overall quality and accuracy.

Importantly, the analysis of the translation procedures also reveals that the equivalence procedure demonstrates a notably lower standard deviation, indicating a closer clustering of student scores around the mean and suggesting a higher consistency in performance. Conversely, the wider spread of standard deviations among the other procedures reflects a moderate level of variability, yet all values conform to the principles of normal distribution, emphasizing the reliability of data.

8.Recommendations

Adopt a “culture-first” analysis before translating: Identify culture-loaded terms, idioms and concepts in the source text.

Build a cultural procedures toolkit: Do not rely on one method. Combine adaptation for idioms, explication for implicit references, and footnotes for untranslatable religious or historical terms within the same text when needed. Prioritize equivalence over literalism in legal, medical, and technical texts to avoid miscommunication. In creative texts, use transcreation to preserve emotional impact.

Back translation assessment is often needed which provide feedback into the naturalness, cultural acceptability and clarity of translation. Use real-world case studies to

train students on advertising slogans, NGO reports, and legal contracts where cultural gaps cause real problems, not only literary texts.

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