

Punctuation Marks Make a Difference in Translation: Practical Examples

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“The writer who neglects punctuation, or mispunctuates, is liable to be misunderstood.”

American Writer: Edgar Allan Poe

ABSTARCT

This article deals with the issue of using punctuation marks correctly. The misuse of punctuation marks affects meaning; therefore, it affects translation. As a result, the writer should pay more attention to punctuation marks and not to use them randomly. Simultaneously, the reader has to take care of the punctuation marks when interpreting a certain text for translation. The article tackles the jobs done by punctuation marks such as the use of the comma to set off nonessential information, the comma to set off interrupters, the comma separating direct-address expressions, the comma with short introductory statements and the comma before a relative pronoun. Moreover, the difficulties caused by lack of a comma will be discussed. The problematic use of comma before "and" will be handled. Cases in which no comma is needed in the target language will be provided. The current article provides some practical and illustrative examples, especially the comma and the full stop. Translation from English into Arabic and vice versa is considered.

Keywords

Punctuation, Translation, English, Arabic, Meaning, Writing, Reading, Contrastive Analysis

1. Introduction

Punctuation plays a vital role in the interpretation of a certain text. So using it haphazardly leads to misunderstanding the text and consequently the wrong translation. There are many differences between languages with regard to punctuation marks, particularly Arabic and English, which have to be taken into consideration by translators.

In order to realize the importance of punctuation, consider the following string of words with various punctuation marks. Try to decide what they are supposed to mean and the effect of the changed meaning on translation. Examples are taken from Trask (1997 :3) with some modifications. What is the problem in each sentence?

Example 1: We had one problem: only Adel knew we faced bankruptcy.

Example 2: We had one problem only: Adel knew we faced bankruptcy.

Example 3: We had one problem only, Adel knew: we faced bankruptcy.

Example 4: We had one problem only Adel knew we faced: bankruptcy.

The underlined text is the problem in each sentence. Following are translations of the previous example:

مثال 1: لم تواجهنا إلا مشكلة واحدة ألا وهي أن عادل وحده علم بتعرضنا للإفلاس.

مثال 2: لم تواجهنا إلا واحدة ألا وهي أن عادل علم بتعرضنا للإفلاس.

مثال 3: علم عادل أنه لم تواجهنا إلا مشكلة واحدة ألا وهي تعرضنا للإفلاس.

مثال 4: واجهتنا مشكلة واحدة علم عادل وحده بها ألا وهي الإفلاس.

Based on the above Arabic translation, it became clear the use of different punctuation marks in one sentence leads to different meanings.

To attract and keep the reader's serious attention, the writer must write and punctuate correctly. "Too many stops and commas make the text look spotty" is a wrong remark that ignores the proper function of punctuation. The following example will refute it.

Example 5: I have taken several science courses this year; my favorite was neuroscience.

Example 6: I have taken several science courses this year, but my favorite was neuroscience.

In Example 5, the *semicolon* (;) is used primarily to join two closely related independent clauses in a single sentence. When using a semicolon to join clauses, make sure they are independent; that is, they can stand alone as sentences. On the other hand, in Example 6, the two clauses are joined with the conjunction *but*. This changes the meaning slightly from the previous version; it emphasizes the contrast between the group of courses in the first clause and the single course in the second clause. As a result of the change in meaning, the Arabic translation will be different as follows:

مثال 5: لقد درست، على مدار هذا العام، العديد من المقررات العلمية، وكان أفضلها مقرر علم المخ والأعصاب.
مثال 6: لقد درست، على مدار هذا العام، العديد من المقررات العلمية، ولكن أفضلها مقرر علم المخ والأعصاب.

2. The Jobs of Punctuation Marks

Punctuation marks are integral parts of writing. They do two jobs. One is grammatical and the other is rhetorical (Kirkman, 2006).

- Grammatical: they show where the boundaries are meant to be between segments of larger statements, and how segments of text are meant to relate to each other. Here is an example that illustrates the boundary-marking role:

Example 7: Executors delay giving information about substantial deviations from agreed dates. Because of this action cannot be taken in time.

The reader mis-reads that statement at first, since he/she reads "*Because of this action*" as a group; but then he/she realized that the group at the beginning of the second sentence was intended to be just "*Because of this*". If the writer had supplied a comma at the meaning-boundary between "*this*" and "*action*", the reader should not have been misled as follows:

Example 8: Executors delay giving information about substantial deviations from agreed dates. Because of this, action cannot be taken in time.

مثال 7: يُؤخر المسؤولون تقديم معلومات بشأن التجاوزات الخطيرة في المواعيد المتفق عليها، لأن هذا الإجراء لا يمكن اتخاذه في الوقت الراهن.

مثال 8: يُؤخر المسؤولون تقديم معلومات بشأن التجاوزات الخطيرة في المواعيد المتفق عليها، وبسبب هذا التأخير، لا يمكن اتخاذ إجراء في الوقت الراهن.

In the same vein, the reader should note how punctuation marks signal the relations between segments of text in the following statements:

Example 9: Take no action as the camera operates automatically ... (The as ... group tells us *when*)

Example 10: Take no action, as the camera operates automatically ... (The as ... group tells us *why*)

The words in the previous two statements are exactly the same, but the relations between the words change in accordance with whether a comma is present or absent.

مثال 9: لا تفعل شيئا عندما تعمل الكاميرا ذاتيا/تلقائيا.....
مثال 10: لا تفعل شيئا فالكاميرا تعمل ذاتيا/تلقائيا

- Rhetorical: they show the emphasis or tone the writer wants to give to a word or word-group.

The next three examples illustrate the rhetorical job done by punctuation marks. Note how they signal the emphasis or tone the writer wants to give a word or word-group – information which, if we were speaking, we would express by inflections of voice:

Example 11: This is known as *exact* replacement of the old medicine.

Example 12: You must report the burglary to the police.

Example 13: Rescue parties were sent out immediately **AFTER** the avalanche.

مثال 11: هذا معروف بأنه بديل فعلي تماما للدواء القديم.
مثال 12: وجب عليك كل الوجوب إبلاغ الشرطة بعملية السطو.
مثال 13: أرسلت فرق الإنقاذ على الفور بعد (ونؤكد على ذلك) الانهيار الجليدي.

As all these examples show, punctuation marks (including the use of italics, underlining and capital letters) are vital parts of our signaling system. They are not just optional extras.

Punctuation marks have been introduced rather recently into the Arabic writing system. Arabic writers shift between ideas using conjugating conjunctions instead of punctuation marks. In Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), however, due to the influence of translation which, to some extent, transfers punctuation marks from the target languages, and due to the tendency of modern writers to use punctuation marks more consistently, Arabic has come to see more punctuation. Yet, even in modern writing, it is rather impossible to rely on the period, for example, as a demarcation of the sentence boundary (Attia, 2004).

Punctuation marks facilitate reading as they guide the reader to the appropriate meaning as shown in the following instances:

مثال 14: ما أحسن الرجل.
مثال 15: ما أحسن الرجل!
مثال 16: ما أحسن الرجل؟

Example 14: The man did not do well.

Example 15: How handsome the man is!

Example 16: What did the man do well?

Based on the use of punctuation marks in the previous examples, the first sentence is a statement, the second an exclamation and the third a question. Thus, the punctuation mark makes a difference to meaning in target and source languages.

Following are the different uses of the comma and the full-stop and how they affect meaning accordingly.

3. Comma

As with all punctuation, the most important reason to place a comma is to clarify the meaning of the sentence. There is a world of difference between sentences with and without commas (Woods, 2006) as follows:

Example 17: Ahmed tipped Hani because he appreciated good service.

Example 18: Ahmed tipped, Hani, because he appreciated good service.

In the first sentence Ahmed tipped someone named Hani. In the second, Hani is being addressed, and the reader does not know whom Ahmed tipped—a waiter, a taxi driver, or a housecleaner. Ahmed may even have tipped Hani himself. The translation into Arabic may be:

مثال 17: أعطى أحمد هاني بقشيشا لأنه يُقدّر الخدمة الجيدة.
مثال 18: اعلم يا هاني أن أحمد قدم بقشيشا لأنه يُقدّر الخدمة الجيدة.

In the following sentences, the separation created by commas radically changes the meaning of the second sentence:

Example 19: Students who are obnoxious should be disciplined firmly.

Example 20: Students, who are obnoxious, should be disciplined firmly.

If you read this pair of sentences aloud, pausing at the commas in sentence two, you will probably hear the difference in meaning. In the first sentence, no commas set off *who are obnoxious* from the rest of the sentence. The main idea is the entire sentence: *The students who are obnoxious*—but not those who are not—should be disciplined firmly. In the second sentence, which may have been written by a burned-out teacher, the separated material may be lifted out. The main idea of sentence two is what is left: *Students should be disciplined firmly*. In this version, *all* students should be disciplined firmly because *all* students are obnoxious (Woods, 2006). The translation into Arabic could be:

مثال 19: علينا تأديب الطلاب المشاغبين بحزم.
مثال 20: علينا تأديب كل الطلاب بحزم وبخاصة المشاغبين.

In Example 20, the use of "while" as a subordinate conjunction means a short action (*thunderbolts fell unceasingly over his head*) interrupts a comparatively long action, which began before the short action (*feeling his way in the dark*). The interruption and surprise are reflected by the word "فإذا" or "فجأة" in Arabic.

Example 21: While feeling his way in the dark, thunderbolts fell unceasingly over his head.

مثال 21: بينما كان يتحسس طريق في الظلام ، فإذا بالصواعق تسقط فوق رأسه بلا توقف.
أو: بينما كان يتحسس طريق في الظلام ، سقطت الصواعق فوق رأسه فجأة وبلا توقف.

In Arabic, it is wrong to use the comma in conditional sentences/clauses between the antecedent and the consequent if the consequent is short; but if it is long, it can be used. On

the other hand, it is normal to use it in English especially when the conditional conjunction comes at the beginning of the sentence.

Example 22: If you finish work early, I will visit you.

Example 23: If you finished work early, I would visit you.

Example 24: If you had finished work early, I would have visited you.

مثال 22: إذا/إن/لو أنهيت العمل باكرا، فسوف أزورك.
أو: إن/لو تنهي العمل باكرا، فسوف أزورك.
مثال 23: لو أنهيت العمل باكرا لزررتك.
مثال 24: لو أنهيت العمل باكرا لزررتك/لكننت زرتك.

In certain cases ^٣ fills the same function as the punctuation mark, comma, in English, e.g.:

Example 25: As for the translated part, it is very diverse.

مثال 25: أما القسم/الجزء المترجم فمتنوع جدا.

In English, the comma must not be used instead of a full stop. A sentence with two main clauses separated by a comma is wrong, either put a full stop between them or use a conjunction to link them (Field, 2009) or use a semicolon. What is wrong with this sentence?

Example 26: My name is Yasser, I live in Mansoura.*

(* indicates that it is a wrong sentence)

The mistake is called a comma splice: the use of a comma to join two independent clauses. However, splices are sometimes acceptable when the clauses are short and alike in form, such as:

Example 27: The gate swung apart, the bridge fell, the portcullis was drawn up.

Example 26 can be corrected as follows:

Example 28: My name is Yasser. I live in Mansoura.

Example 29: My name is Yasser and I live in Mansoura.

Example 30: My name is Yasser; I live in Mansoura.

Examples 28, 29 and 30 could be translated into Arabic:

أمثلة 28 و 29 و 30: اسمي ياسر وأعيش في مدينة المنصورة.

The following sentence, for example, uses commas abundantly. Hardly any of these commas will be transferred in the translation into Arabic.

Example 31: This year, the man, however, and his wife, too, will go on holiday.

مثال 31: ومع ذلك سيذهب الرجل وزوجته أيضا في إجازة هذا العام.

Example 31 is provided to show that the translator should not follow the source text exactly, but he/she has to observe the norms of the target text.

3.1. The Comma to Set off Nonessential Information

Grammarians label some elements as either essential or nonessential to the meaning of the sentence. The terms restrictive and nonrestrictive are also used at times to describe the same elements. These elements are usually descriptive, explaining how or when something happened or giving information about a person or a thing. In grammar terminology, adjective and adverb clauses and phrases may be essential or nonessential (Woods, 2006).

If the writer separates a nonessential element, he/she should be sure to do so completely. It is not enough to place one comma and let the beginning or the end of the element blend into the rest of the sentence. The following examples show that:

Example 32: My oldest sister, Sara plans to become an oral surgeon.*

The nonessential element (*Sara*) is preceded by a comma but not followed by one. Hence, it should be:

Example 32: My oldest sister, Sara, plans to become an oral surgeon.

مثال 32: تخطط أختي الكبرى سارة لتصبح جراحة فم وأسنان.
أو: سارة، تخطط أختي الكبرى لتصبح جراحة فم وأسنان.

Example 33: The attempted coup in Uganda, involving many senior officers, was quickly foiled.

مثال 33: قُضي بسرعة على محاولة الانقلاب التي وقعت في أوغندا وشارك فيها/انضم إليها كثير من كبار الضباط.

3.2. The Comma to Set off Interrupters

An interrupter, as its name implies, may be left out of the sentence without changing the main idea. Interrupters resemble nonessential elements, discussed earlier in this article, in that they give the reader extra information. An interrupter may indicate a contrast, an example, or an extra comment. Like nonessential elements, interrupters are always set off by commas (Woods, 2006).

Example 34: This bowl of sugar, however, could add more than 4000 calories to one's diet. (*However* makes an extra comment and should be translated into Arabic as such)

مثال 34: قد تزود سلطانية السكر هذه، على قلتها، الفرد في وجبته بأكثر من 4000 سعر حراري.

Example 35: Ali did not, after all, run for office on an independent ticket.

(*After all* comments on the main idea of the sentence.) (after all: used in order to say that what you expected did not happen)

مثال 35: لم يترشح علي، خلافا للتوقعات، لمنصب الرئاسة كمستقل/مستقلا.
أو: خلافا للتوقعات، لم يترشح علي لمنصب الرئاسة كمستقل/مستقلا.

Example 36: The salt shaker, not the pepper mill, was carved from solid marble.
(Note that "not the pepper mill" creates a contrast)

مثال 65: صُنعت المملحة، وليس مطحنة الفلفل، من مرمر جامد.
أو: المملحة هي التي صُنعت من مرمر الصلب وليست مطحنة الفلفل.
أو: صُنعت الملاحه من المرمر القاسي على خلاف مطحنة الفلفل.

Example 37: No newspaper is completely unbiased, in my expert opinion.
(*In my expert opinion* is an extra comment.)

مثال 37: لا توجد جريدة غير متحيزة تماما، في رأيي كواحد من أهل الخبرة.
أو: لا توجد جريدة تتمتع بقدر كامل من الحياد وذلك في رأيي كخبير بهذه الأمور.
أو: بحكم خبرتي، ليس هناك جريدة تلتزم الحياد الكامل.

Example 38: Yasser has been appointed to a position of some importance, but not Ahmed.
(*But not Ajmed* creates a contrast.)

مثال 38: قد عينت الإدارة ياسر في منصب مرموق نوعا ما/ إلى حد ما، ولم يحظ أحمد بهذا المنصب.
عُيّن ياسر لمنصب على قدر من الأهمية، وهو ما لم يحظ به أحمد.

Example 39: Steam, for example, is just as damaging as acid for that material.
(*For example* labels an example.)

مثال 39: يشكل البخار، على سبيل المثال، ضررا مثله مثل الحامض على هذه المادة.
أو: على سبيل المثال، البخار يتلف هذه المادة مثلما يتلفها الحامض.
أو: على سبيل المثال، يضر البخار هذه المادة بنفس درجة ضرر الحامض لها.

In the preceding examples (33, 34, 35, 36, 37 and 38), the interrupter occurs within or at the end of the sentence. If one of these expressions occurs at the beginning of a sentence, the writer may not need to separate it from the rest of the sentence with a comma.

Example 40: In my expert opinion no newspaper is completely unbiased. (Comment occurs at the beginning of the sentence and does not need to be separated by a comma.)

3.3. The comma Separating Direct-Address Expressions

Many writers wrongly place only one comma instead of the two needed to separate a direct-address statement from the middle of a sentence (Woods, 2006), as in the following sentence:

Example 41: He explained, Mohannad that you should never cross the street against the light.*

With only one comma, the word *Mohannad* is linked to the rest of the sentence. The reader tends to see *Mohannad that* and the words following as a unit. The meaning of the sentence, however, calls for *Mohannad* to be separate as shown in Example 42:

Example 42: He explained, Mohannad, that you should never cross the street against the light.

مثال 42: وأوضح مخاطبا مهند: عليك ألا تعبر الشارع مخالفا إشارة المرور.
أو: أوضح لمهند بأن عليه أن لا يخترق الشارع مخالفا إشارة المرور.
أو: أخذ يشرح لمهند أنه عليه ألا يخالف الإشارة عند عبوره للشارع.

3.4. Commas with Short Introductory Statements

Very short introductory statements may not need commas. If the meaning is clear and the writer has a choice, he/she may omit these commas. Otherwise the writing may sound choppy (Woods, 2006), as shown in Example 43:

Example 43: Tomorrow, Hala will attend her karate class.*

No comma is needed because *tomorrow* is so short. It should be written as such in Example 44:

Example 44: Tomorrow Hala will attend her karate class.

مثال 44: غدا سوف تحضر هالة درس الكاراتيه.
أو: ستلتحق هالة غدا بفصل الكاراتيه.

Yes and *no*, when they are not part of the main statement of the sentence, are always followed by commas. However, if *no* is part of the main idea of the sentence, the writer does not place a comma after it. The following two sentences have very different meanings and thus different punctuation:

Example 45: No apples remain in the refrigerator.
(Meaning: the refrigerator is bare of apples.)

Example 46: No, apples remain in the refrigerator.
(Meaning: Don't take the apples out of the refrigerator.)

مثال 45: لا يوجد تفاح في الثلاجة.
مثال 46: لا، يوجد تفاح في الثلاجة.
أو: لا تأخذ التفاح من الثلاجة.

The writer should always place a comma after an introductory expression if there is a chance the reader may link ideas that should be separate. Take a look at Example 47, which is poorly punctuated:

Example 47: Chanting the choir raised the volume as the celebrant intoned the prayer.*

Without a comma the reader naturally reads *chanting the choir* and then lapses into confusion. The point of punctuation is to make the reader's task easier. Here is the same sentence, this time with a comma:

Example 48: Chanting, the choir raised the volume as the celebrant intoned the prayer.

مثال 48: رفعت فرقة الإنشاد صوتها بالغناء إذ/حين بدأ الكاهن ترانيم الصلاة.
أو: رفعت الجوقة أصواتها بالترانيم، بينما كان الكاهن يرتل صلواته.

Now *chanting* is clearly introductory and the main idea of the sentence, *the choir raised the volume*, is more understandable.

3.5. The Comma before a Relative Pronoun

The presence or absence of a comma before a relative pronoun is very important in signalling to the reader the intended meaning (Kirkman, 2006). Following are examples of defining use and commenting use:

Example 49: A six-month-old calf was submitted for examination, showing lameness in all four legs which had been present since soon after birth.
(The which ... clause *defines*: it relates to *legs*, and tells us that the legs had been present since soon after birth) (the which ... clause defines, is restrictive)

مثال 49: خضع عجل عمره ستة أشهر للفحص الطبي، أصيب بالعرج في أرجله الأربعة كلها والتي كان يتمتع بها بعد ولادته بوقت قصير.

Example 50: A six-month-old calf was submitted for examination, showing lameness in all four legs, which had been present since soon after birth.
(The which ... clause *comments*: it relates to *lameness*, and tells us that the lameness had been present since soon after birth) the which ... clause comments, is non-restrictive)

مثال 50: خضع عجل عمره ستة أشهر للفحص الطبي، أصيب بالعرج في أرجله الأربعة كلها بعد ولادته بوقت قصير.

Likewise, the following examples makes plain the point under discussion.

Example 51: Planning authorities should provide alternative locations for small businesses, which are or would be offensive in a residential area.

مثال 51: على سلطات التخطيط توفير مواقع بديلة للمشروعات الصغيرة، على اعتبار أن هذا يُمثل أو سيُمثل ضررا للمنطقة السكنية.

He did not intend to comment that *all* small businesses are offensive in a residential area: he wanted to restrict his remark just to the types of businesses that would be offensive. He should have written:

Example 52: Planning authorities should provide alternative locations for small businesses which are or would be offensive in a residential area.

مثال 52: على سلطات التخطيط توفير مواقع بديلة للمشروعات الصغيرة التي تُسبب أو قد تُسبب ضررا للمنطقة السكنية.

Example 53: He evolved a new theory for handling rural poverty, which seemed plausible enough, but the committee believed it required a great deal of elaboration before being considered for implementation.

مثال 53: ابتدع نظرية جديدة للتصدي لمسألة الفقر في الريف، ورأت اللجنة أنها مقنعة إلى حد كبير، ولكنها طلبت منه تحري المزيد من الدقة وإدراج التفاصيل اللازمة قبل النظر في تنفيذها.

In deciding whether or not to put a comma before "which", you may find the following remark useful (Kirkman, 2006: 40): "Commenting clauses need a comma, defining clauses do not".

3.6. Difficulties Caused by Lack of a Comma

Forgetting to place a comma may distort the intended meaning altogether. Consider the following extract. The reader has to read it twice before he/she is able to interpret it correctly.

Example 53: As the machine develops the forms we use to record data from past projects will be amended.

Most people begin to interpret that sentence as a statement about a machine developing some forms; but then they have to adjust their understanding as they progress further along the lines. No doubt, the reader can see the cause of disturbance. If the writer had provided a comma after the preliminary word-group, the reader would not have had to stop and re-read the extract:

Example 54: As the machine develops, the forms we use to record data from past projects will be amended.

مثال 54: أثناء تطور الآلة، سوف تتحسن الطرق التي نستخدمها لتسجيل بيانات المشروعات السابقة. أو: بما أن الجهاز يتطور، سوف تُعدل النماذج المستخدمة في تسجيل بيانات المشروعات السابقة. أو: ونظرا لتطوير الآلة فسوف تُعدل الأشكال التي نستخدمها لتسجيل بيانات المشروعات السابقة.

Here is another extract, which causes difficulty for readers in a different way:

Example 55: He draws an analogy between this and the learning process of a new-born child as it develops into maturity and quotes Freud: ...

To read that comfortably and without a smile at the ambiguity, a comma is needed before "*and quotes Freud:*" as follows:

Example 56: He draws an analogy between this and the learning process of a new-born child as it develops into maturity, and quotes Freud: ...

مثال 56: يقدم تناظر بين هذا وعملية العلم للطفل المولود حديثا عندما ينمو حتى يصل مرحلة البلوغ، ثم يورد كلام العالم فرويد: ...

The reader may be surprised by the suggestion that a comma should be put before and. Teachers of English seem to have left many people with a feeling that it is a cardinal sin to do such a thing. There are some circumstances in which a comma is not needed before and, and some in which it is.

If comma is missed out, the sense of the sentence is sometimes lost or it has to be read twice. Sometimes the meaning can be changed by the placing of the comma (Field, 2009). Look at the following:

Example 57: As mentioned, first impressions can be misleading.

Example 58: As mentioned first, impressions can be misleading.

مثال 57: كما ذكرنا يمكن للانطباعات الأولى أن تخدعنا.
مثال 58: كما ذكرنا في البداية، الانطباعات يمكن أن تكون خادعة.

3.7. The Comma Before "and"

It is not usual in British usage to put a listing comma before the word *and* or *or* itself (though American usage regularly puts one there). For that reason, in British usage, it is not usual to write (Trask, 1997):

Example 59: The three soldiers were Ali, Hani, and Radi.

This is reasonable, since the listing comma is a substitute for the word *and*, not an addition to it. However, the writer should put a comma in the following position. If he/she does so, the meaning would become clearer:

Example 60: My favourite opera composers are Verdi, Puccini, Mozart, and Gilbert and Sullivan.

مثال 60: أفضل مؤلفي الأوبر: فيردي وبوتشيني وموزت وكل من جيلبرت وسوليفان.

Here the comma before *and* shows clearly that Gilbert and Sullivan worked together.

If the writer omit the comma, the result might be confusing:

Example 61: My favourite opera composers are Verdi, Puccini, Mozart and Gilbert and Sullivan.

مثال 61: أفضل مؤلفي الأوبر فيردي وبوتشيني وكل من موزت و جيلبرت، إضافة إلى سوليفان.

Here, the reader might possibly take Mozart and Gilbert as the pair who worked together. The extra comma removes the problem. So the rule is clear: Put a listing comma before *and* or *or* only if this is necessary to make the meaning clear.

3.8. No Need for the Comma

Sometimes the translator does not need to use a comma in the target language, as the norms of the target language do not require the use of a comma in that context. Following are some examples to illustrate this point.

Example 62: When he heard of the collapse of his plan, he had an access of despair.

مثال 62: عندما سمع بانهيار خطته، استولى عليه اليأس.
أو: أصابه اليأس بعدما علم بفشل خطته.
أو: لازمه اليأس لما سمع بانهيار خطته.

Example 63: The only problem with the new project, established in the desert at high cost, is the lack of good access roads.

مثال 63: المشكلة الوحيدة التي تواجه المشروع الجديد الذي أنشئ في الصحراء بتكاليف باهظة هو عدم شق الطرق إلى الموقع.
أو: المشكلة الوحيدة في المشروع الجديد الذي أقيم في الصحراء بكلفة باهظة هي افتقاره إلى طرق تسمح بالوصول إليه دون عناء.
أو: ليست هناك أية مشكلة تواجه المشروع الجديد المقام في الصحراء بتكلفة عالية سوي نقص الطرق السليمة المؤدية إليه.

Example 64: To put the commission into action, an executive order was required.

مثال 64: لم تستطع اللجنة مزاوله نشاطها لأنها كانت تنتظر صدور القرار التنفيذي.
أو: يستلزم قيام اللجنة بمهامها إصدار قرار ببدء التنفيذ.
أو: حتى تباشر اللجنة مهامها، كان لا بد من قرار تنفيذي.
أو: لتستهل اللجنة مهام عملها لا بد من استصدار قرار تنفيذي.

Example 65: The casino was full of upstarts wanting action, but the manager had decided to call it a day.

مثال 65: كان نادي القمار غاصا بمحدثي النعمة الذين يريدون اللعب ولكن المدير كان قد قرر إنهاء اللعب.
أو: كان نادي القمار غاصاً بمحدثي النعمة الذين أرادوا افتعال المشاكل، فقرر المدير إغلاق النادي.

Example 66: If you take my advice and study hard, you'll pass the examination.

مثال 66: إذا استمعت لنصحي واجتهدت في الدرس فسوف تنجح في الامتحان.
أو: إذا عملت بنصحتي وذاكرت جيداً، سوف تنجح في الاختبار.

Example 67: Having failed in all previous attempts, he evolved a new plan which surprised everybody.

مثال 67: فشلت جميع محاولاته السابقة فابتكر خطة جديدة فوجئ الجميع بها.

Example 68: When the film was developed, none of the pictures proved satisfactory.

مثال 68: اتضح بعد تحميض الفيلم أن الصور جميعا فاسدة.

Example 69: Though quite impressive, the project has been a disaster in financial terms.

مثال 69: كان المشروع، على الرغم من مظهره الباهر، بمثابة كارثة مالية.
أو: بالرغم من إعجابي بالمشروع إلا أنه كان كارثة من الناحية المالية.
أو: بالرغم من أن المشروع كان مثيراً للإعجاب إلا أنه كان كارثة مالية.

Example 70: The school has adequate study facilities, but hardly any sports facilities.

مثال 70: يوجد بالمدرسة ما يكفي من الوسائل التعليمية، ولكنها تكاد تفتقر إلى المرافق الرياضية.
أو: تحتوي المدرسة على منشآت دراسية كافية، بيد أنها تكاد تخلو من المنشآت المخصصة لممارسة الرياضة.
أو: لدى المدرسة مقومات دراسية كافية في حين تكاد تخلو من المرافق الرياضية.

Example 71: In his daily traffickings, a Cairene resident is often made conscious of the suffocating pollution.

مثال 71: كثيراً ما يشعر قاطن القاهرة في حياته اليومية بالتلوث الخانق.
أو: غالباً ما يشعر مواطن القاهرة بالتلوث الخانق أثناء تنقلاته اليومية.

مثال 72: أكل محمد، وصديقه في البيت.

مثال 73: أكل محمد وصديقه في البيت.

Example 72: Muhammed ate while his friend was at home.

Example 73: Muhammed and his friend ate together at home.

It is clear from Examples 72 and 73 that the comma makes a great difference in meaning.

Example 74: This is made of glass, so please handle it with care!

مثال 74: هذا مصنوع من الزجاج فأرجو تناوله بحذر!
أو: هذا مصنوع من الزجاج فأرجو حمله بعناية!
أو: هذا الشيء مصنوع من الزجاج، لذا من فضلك تعامل معه بحرص!
أو: الرجاء توخي الحذر عند التعامل مع هذا الشيء لأنه مصنوع من زجاج!
أو: رجاءً تعامل معها بحذر لأنها مصنوعة من الزجاج!
أو: شي قابل للكسر، فرجاء تعامل معه برفق!

Example 75: If drama implies conflict, and poetry metaphor, then poetic drama must imply the dramatization of metaphor!

مثال 75: إذا كانت الدراما تتضمن الصراع والشعر يتضمن الاستعارة، فلا بد أن تتضمن الدراما الشعرية المعالجة الدرامية لاستعارة ما!

Example 76: The idea of total equality is attractive, no doubt, but it cannot be put into practice.

مثال 76: مثال لا شك في جاذبية فكرة المساواة التامة، ولكن تطبيقها مُحال.
أو: فكرة المساواة التامة هي فكرة جذابة بلا شك، ولكن لا يمكن وضعها موضع التطبيق.
أو: ليس هناك شك في أن فكرة المساواة التامة محببة ولكن من الصعب تفعيلها.

Base on the previous examples, the translator does not need to imitate the source language in terms of the use of the comma; on the contrary, he/she has to observe the norms of the target language.

4. Full Stop

In Arabic, a full stop is placed at the end of a complete meaning or a paragraph. In Arabic, a sentence is a stream of ideas with or without a full stop at the end. On the other hand, segmentation of sentences in English revolves around punctuation marks that signal the end of a sentence. In Arabic, a comma can signal a new sentence and also certain words can signal a new sentence: for example, (وبهذا، وعلى ذلك، وهكذا، وعادة، وأضاف، وكان، ومن، ولكن، ويعتبر، وليس هناك شك في أن فكرة المساواة التامة محببة ولكن من الصعب تفعيلها. (Attia, 2006).

So, commas and resumptive particles are consistently used instead of periods. In accounting for this fact, Daimi (2001) remarked that Arabic is distinguished by its high context sensitivity with the desire to exhibit the different synthetic coherence relations. This is why it might be difficult to identify the end of an Arabic sentence. In certain instances, short function words such as 'and' actually function in Arabic texts as punctuation marks would function in English texts (Ryding, 2005). Other relationships include: sequence ثم، second sentence is interpretative وهكذا and first sentence is interpretative لذلك.

Translating the full stop from English into Arabic depends largely on the meaning relationship between the two sentences, e.g.:

Example 77: Teaching staff members conducted several research activities. This is important for their promotion.

The second sentence interprets the first, hence it is rendered:

مثال 77: قام أعضاء هيئة التدريس بتنفيذ العديد من الأنشطة البحثية مما يساعد في ترقيةهم.
أو: أجرى أعضاء هيئة التدريس أبحاث عديدة، حيث إن إجراءاتها مهم من أجل ترقيةهم.
أو: قام أعضاء هيئة التدريس بإجراء العديد من الأنشطة البحثية لما لذلك من أهمية في ترقيةهم.
أو: أجرى أعضاء هيئة التدريس العديد من الأنشطة البحثية، فهي مهمة لهم لغايات الترقية.

Example 78: Teaching staff members conducted several research activities. They published papers and books and attended scientific conferences.

The second sentence could be interpretative or illustrative. If it is interpretative, it could be translated as:

مثال 78: أجرى أعضاء هيئة التدريس العديد من الأنشطة البحثية، فنشروا البحوث والكتب وكان لهم حضور في المؤتمرات العلمية.
أو: أجرى أعضاء الهيئة التدريسية عدة نشاطات بحثية فنشروا أبحاثاً وكتباً وحضروا كذلك مؤتمرات علمي

If it is illustrative, it could be translated as:

مثال 78: أجرى أعضاء هيئة التدريس العديد من الأنشطة البحثية، من خلال نشر البحوث والكتب والحضور في المؤتمرات العلمية.

Example 79: Success in life depends on patience and hard work. A pupil who starts learning his lesson from the beginning of the year will find no difficulty in passing his examination.

مثال 79: يعتمد النجاح في الحياة على الصبر والعمل الجاد ولذلك فالتلميذ الذي يبدأ بتعلم دروسه من بداية العام لن يجد صعوبة في اجتيازه الامتحان.

Example 80: It is indeed hard to underestimate the value of language in communication but it is even harder to underestimate its value in thinking. Language is tied to the very process of thought.

In Example 80, the idea is continuous throughout the text, so it is preferable to translate the "full stop" as "حيث" or "إذ" as a suitable text connector in Arabic.

مثال 80: في الواقع من الصعب التقليل من قيمة اللغة كوسيلة للاتصال، بل الأمر الأصعب هو إغفال قيمتها في التفكير، حيث / إذ ترتبط اللغة بصميم عملية التفكير.

Example 81: The government always tries to increase production in all fields. In agriculture, for example, it has prepared a plan for land reclamation. Egypt has made great progress in this field.

مثال 81: تسعى الحكومة دائما إلى زيادة الإنتاج في كل المجالات، ففي مجال الزراعة، على سبيل المثال، نجدها قد أعدت خطة لاستصلاح الأراضي، و أحرزت مصر تقدما كبيرا/تقدمت مصر تقدما كبيرا في هذا المجال.

Example 82: Some people prefer the life of the country. They avoid the smoke of factories. They enjoy the fresh air.

مثال 82: يفضل بعض الناس حياة الريف فهناك يتجنبون دخان المصانع ويستمتعون بالهواء الطلق/النقي.
أو: يفضل بعض الناس حياة الريف، فهم بذلك يتجنبون أدخنة المصانع، ويتمتعون بالهواء النقي.
أو: يفضل البعض حياة الريف، حيث يتجنبون أبخرة المصانع ويستمتعون بالهواء العليل.
أو: يحبذ بعض الناس حياة الريف بعيدا عن أدخنة المصانع، حيث يستمتعون بالهواء المنعش.

5. Conclusion

After the previous discussion of the effect of punctuation marks on meaning and consequently on translation into the target language, it is evident that the writer should use punctuation marks properly. At the same time, the reader should not belittle the importance of punctuation marks in understanding a certain text. Additionally, 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. Accordingly, punctuation marks differ from one language to another.

Biography

Mogahed M. Mogahed is a PhD researcher at the Curriculum & Instruction Department, Faculty of Education, University of Mansoura, Egypt. His PhD dissertation is on teaching translation. He got his MA degree in teaching writing form Faculty of Education, University of Mansoura. He is a team member of project in charge of developing admission tests at the University of Mansoura, responsible for developing proficiency tests and aptitude tests in English.

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