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Translation Students' Difficulties With English Neologisms

ABSTRACT

A sample of junior students majoring in translation was enrolled in an Arabization course. The students received direct instruction in word formation processes in English and Arabic such as compounding, derivation, back formation, conversion, blends, clipping, acronyms and neologisms. Focus was on similarities and differences between English and Arabic word formation processes and how English lexical items in each category can be translated into Arabic. Although the students had completed several translation and interpreting courses prior to the Arabization course, post-test results showed that the students had difficulty recognizing, understanding the meaning of, translating English neologisms into Arabic. The subjects tended to translate words literally rather than conceptually and gave a single-word equivalent rather than a borrowing, periphrasis or explanatory equivalent Students' difficulties with English neologism were due to unfamiliarity with neologisms, lack of background knowledge, inability to infer the meaning of neologisms from context.

KEY WORDS: translation, English neologisms, problems, Arabization, linguistic differences, Arabic equivalents.

1. INTRODUCTION

A *neologism* refers to any newly coined word, identifying a new concept. In the 1980s, English neologisms included *yuppie, pocket phone,* and *user-friendly*. In the 1990s, Internet neologisms, such as *spam* and *texting* were common, In the 2000s, Internet neologisms related to blogging, such as *videoblog and blogosphere* became widespread (Cambridge Encyclopedia). In the field of language pathology, *neologism* refers to the coining of a word of obscure or no meaning; the phenomenon is found in aphasia, schizophrenia, and several other disorders (Cambridge encyclopedia).

Neologisms appear in all subject fields such as linguistics, biometrics, medicine, information technology, media and so on. The higher society has neologism in their speech, as in *dial-a-meal, dial-a-taxi*. Words ending in *speak*, e.g., *artspeak, sportspeak, medspeak, education-speak, video-speak, cable-speak* developed in professional jargon. There are neologisms belonging to everyday life such as *starter, microbiotics, crude rice, clingfilm, microwave stove, consumer electronics, fridge-freezer, pants-skirt,* and *touch-tone*.

Neologisms develop in three main ways: (i) a lexical unit existing in the language changes its meaning to denote a new object or phenomenon as in *umbrella.* (ii) A new lexical unit develops in the language to denote an object or phenomenon which already has some lexical unit to denote such as *slum* which was first substituted by *ghet to* then by *inner town.* (iii) A new lexical unit can be introduced to denote a new object or phenomenon. Many of those are new terminology (Leo).

Neologisms may be classified into phonological, semantic, syntactic neologisms and borrowings. Phonological neologisms are formed by combining unique sounds as in *rah-rah*, *yucky/yecky.* Syntactical neologisms are divided into morphological (word-building) and phraseological (forming word groups). Morphological and syntactical neologisms are usually built on patterns existing in the language. These include compound words *(free-fall, bioastronomy, zero-zero, x-rated, Amerenglish, tycoonography)*; abbreviations *(resto, teen)*; analogy with lexical units existing in the language (*snowmobile /automobile/, danceaholic /alcoholic/, cheeseburger /hamburger/);* and neologisms formed by affixation (*decompress, disimprove, overhoused, educationalist*). Examples of phraseological neologisms with transferred meanings are *electronic virus, rubic's cube, acid rain,* and *boot trade* (Leo). With regard to style, neologisms can be classified into 'terminological neologisms' that designate newborn concepts and 'stylistic neologisms' coined because their creator seeks expressive utterance Galperin, 1977). (From a translation perspective, neologisms can be divided into 'primary neologism' formed when a new term is created for a new concept in a certain language and 'translated neologisms' formed when a new expression in another language is created for an existing term.

In language learning and translation, neologisms pose several problems for learners and translators. A new use of an old word or expression is particularly difficult. The growing popularity of abbreviations creates problems which may require the learner or translator to do substantial research before understanding them. Other problem arises from shifts in parts of speech, which create new grammatical usages and require attention to structure. Euphemisms created to suit new social and political preferences can be misleading. Some new expressions may not also be found in a dictionary. Some of the new forms should not be taken literally without considering hidden meanings. The help of a native speaker is valuable in understanding them (Ching (1983).

A review of the literature has shown that neologisms have been the focus of numerous studies in the field of language pathology: autism, aphasia and learning disabilities. For example, Volden & Lord (1991) conducted a study with 80 autistic (ages 6-18), mentally handicapped, and normal children. They found that more autistic subjects used neologisms and idiosyncratic language than age - and language-skill-matched control groups. More autistic children used words that were neither phonologically nor conceptually related to intended English words than control children.

By contrast, studies that investigated the use of neologisms in the second/ foreign language (L2) and translation are very few. For example, Charteris-Black (1998) investigated the extent to which English real and invented compound nouns are problematic for university ESL learners in English for academic purposes courses. Results showed that the subjects had difficulty comprehending some compound nouns because their idiomatic and syntactic opacity, in the absence of culture-specific pragmatic knowledge, constrained the identification of deleted elements. However,

when the students have sufficient exposure to L2, those difficulties are readily overcome. There was also evidence that learners use figurative strategies in dealing with idiomaticity. The researcher concluded that problems that ESL learners have in comprehending compound nouns may be very similar to those faced by native speakers.

In another study, Alawneh (2007) examined how translators deal with neologisms associated with the Palestinian Intifadas and focused on mistranslations and translation problems caused by cultural, political and linguistic differences. The findings indicated that it is important for translators to have some background knowledge of the subject matter of Intifada neologisms to help them understand the concepts implied therein and enable them to render the message content accurately. The findings also showed that achieving a translational equivalent of an Intifada neologism without considering its contextual use is not an easy task. Translators often fail to convey all of the nuances and the subtleties of Intifada neologisms being unaware of the cultural implications and differences between Palestinian Arabic and English.

Although, neologisms are extensively used in information technology and the media, studies that investigate problems that L2 students and translators have in translating IT and media texts are lacking. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate translation students' ability to recognize, comprehend English neologisms and translate them into Arabic; to explore the causes of students' difficulties and the strategies they use in identifying, comprehending the meaning of, and translating English neologisms. The study specifically focuses on recognition, comprehension and translation of IT neologisms in technology news headlines and news stories.

Training translation students to identify, comprehend and translate English neologisms is of ultimate importance due to the widespread use of neologisms especially in IT and media. Robert Burchfield who worked at compiling a four-volume supplement to NED indicated that an average of 800 neologisms appear every year in Modern English. Information technology, in particular, witnesses a rapid increase in neologisms. New software, techniques and objects are continually being created and changed, so are new neologisms and terminology in this field. In the global integration process, knowledge of information technology is of great importance and it is often acquired through translated texts written in English. The translation of neologisms in general, and of IT neologisms, in particular, is a translator's most difficult task due to their novelty. Because they are new, the translator has to find ways to transfer the whole denotation of the terms into the target language to help receptors understand (xuxu moon).

Similarly, neologisms occur very often in journalism and media report for their ability and power of information condensation and their expressive effect. Translators have to render them in the target language by using quite complicated reasoning, that involves many factors, such as text type, creative traditions, literary norms and conventions with which the reader of a certain society is familiar (GrP, 2007).

2. SUBJECTS
Twenty junior EFL female college students majoring in translation at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

participated in the study. They were in semester 7 of the translation program and were enrolled in an Arabization course (2 hours per week) that the author taught. The subjects had completed 4 levels of listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary building in the first four semesters of the program. In semester 5 they took linguistics (2 hrs), semantics (3 hrs), text linguistics (2 hrs), and consecutive, liaison and simultaneous interpreting courses (6 hrs). In semester 6, they completed 1 6 hours of translation courses in the fields of medicine, engineering, physical sciences, media, Islamic studies, military, administration and the humanities humanities (2 hrs each).

Arabization of neologisms, i.e., the translation of English neologisms into Arabic, is an important skill that English-Arabic translations students must acquire not only in the Arabization course but also in subsequent translation courses that students take in the translation program and after graduation when they are confronted with unfamiliar English words and phrases.

3. METHODS

3.1 Instructional Tasks

Results of a needs-assessment questionnire administered to the subjects at the beginning of the semester showed that the subjects almost had no knowledge of English word formation and Arabization processes and in particular neologisms. In the first 6 weeks of the semester, the students received direct instruction in word formation processes in English and Arabic such as compounding, derivation, back formation, conversion, extension, blending, clipping, acronyms and abbreviations, onomatopoeia, periphrasis, borrowings and neologisms. Each word formation process was explained, illustrated by English and Arabic examples, then English examples were translated into Arabic. Focus was on similarities and differences between English and Arabic word formation processes and how English lexical items in each category can betranslated into Arabic. Exercises that required the students to identify, understand, and apply, and discriminate the word formation processes under study were given (Al-Jarf, 1990; Al-Jurf, 1995).

3.2 Instrument

Six weeks after the beginning of the semester, the subjects were given a test that consisted of lists of words covering all of the word formation and Arabization processes covered in isolation and in context. For each word, the test required the subjects to identify the type of linguistic unit, give the Arabic equivalent and identify the word formation and Arabization process used. The words selected were commonly used on the Internet such as *"wi fi, Facebook, Twitter, EduGate,eRegister, cybercafe*, in the technology field such as '*Sony, Toshiba*', in TV commercials such as *Qtel, Amana Care*. Words tested were presented in news headlines and short news stories from the BBC and Aljazeera websites. Target neologisms tested were mixed with distracters that were not neologisms.

3.3 Data Analysis

The subjects' written responses were marked by the author. To be marked as correct, each word had to be classified and translated correctly. To find out the strategies that the subjects used in identifying and translating neologisms, misclassifications and mistranslations were compiled and subjected to further analysis. This corpus consisted

of 325 incorrect responses. Percentages of faulty responses within each strategy were calculated.

3.4 Reliability

Since it was not possible to use parallel forms, split-halves, or re-test the students two weeks after the first administration of the test, reliability of the test scores was calculated using the Kuder-Richardson 21' formula as it estimates the internal-consistency of the test items from a single administration of the test. The reliability coefficient of the test scores was .89. Inter-scorer reliability was also calculated by having a colleague who taught stylistics mark a sample of answer sheets and by comparing both analyses. There was a 94% agreement between the two scorers. Disagreements were solved by discussion.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the responses indicated that the percentage of subjects who could correctly identify neologisms as a linguistic unit was 24% and 76% failed to recognize neologisms. *Facebook* , *wi fi* and *EduGate* were classified as compounds not neologisms; *iPad, eRegister* and *Qtel* were classified as abbreviations not neologisms, and *Twitter* was classified as a back formation, not a neologism.

The percentage of subjects who could translate neologisms into Arabic correctly was 33% and those who failed to do so constituted 67%. The subjects tended to give the literal, non-technical meaning of the word, not the special meaning used in the context provided in the headline or news story. For example many subjects translated *Apple* as a fruit, not as a computer firm or a computer brand name. They did not give the Arabic equivalent used for EduGate and eRegister, the two portals used by King Saud University for student admission and registration, although the English and Arabic terms are both used in the portals and the students see both every time they log into the system. When words are borrowed in Arabic such as *Sony* and *Toshiba* the subjects did not give an identifier to tell whether each is referring to the firm, product and so on. When words have multiple meanings, some provided the first meaning that came to their mind which probably shows that the subjects knew only one meaning.

Findings of the present study are consistent with findings of other prior studies on the acquisition and translation of neologisms by L2 learners and translators. As in Charteris-Black's (1998) study, subjects in the present study had difficulty comprehending some neologisms in the absence of pragmatic knowledge and insufficient exposure to neologisms. Many subjects do not watch news channels such as Aljazeera, do not read news headlines, and do not pay attention to certain types of T.V. commercials. As in Alawneh's (2007) study, mistranslations of neologisms in the present study reveal the importance of background knowledge of the subject matter of the material to be translated to help them understand the content and give a translational equivalent of neologisms without considering the context in which they are used. They did not figure out the exact context in which certain words, which was different from the context in which the meaning they gave is used.

Although the subjects had completed 2 vocabulary, 4 reading and 11 transaltion and interpreting courses prior to the Arabization course, test results showed that the subjects had difficulty recognizing, understanding the meaning of, and translating

common English neologisms into Arabic. Poor identification, comprehension and translation of English IT neologisms in a media text by translation subjects in this study may be due to inadequate linguistic competence as revealed by the incorrect responses. Many confused *iPad* with *iPod* as they were more familiar with *iPods* than the new technology introduced by Apple. The subjects were familiar with *Toshiba* and *Sony* but unfamiliar with *iPad* and *Apple* due to lack of background knowledge. They could not connect *EduGate, eRegister, telebanking, cybercafe* with their Arabic equivalent either.

The subjects tended to translate words literally rather than considering the context in which a word is utilized. They probably think that words have single meanings, not multiple meanings each of which is used in a different context. They also tend to give single-word equivalents rather than a borrowing, periphrasis, or explanatory equivalents. Many subjects translated *'Apple'* as a fruit, not a computer firm or computer brand and that the exact name is borrowed and used in Arabic and *cyberc afe* as 'a cafe that sells a type of coffee called 'cyber' and not 'internet cafe'.

Mistranslations also showed poor reading skills such as inability to infer the meaning of neologisms from context. Many did not pay attention to clues such as capitalization, did not use their background knowledge while reading, and did not connect what they learn in class with the outside world.

Incorrect responses also reveal inadequate transferring and application skills. Many subjects failed to match the lexical items with their corresponding word formation and Arabization process. They could not distinguish neologisms from other linguistic units and processes such as abbreviations, acronyms, compounds, clippings, blends and derivatives. They tended to label neologisms as compounds and abbreviations, probably because they encountered such terms in earlier vocabulary courses.

In addition, incorrect responses revealed ineffective and inefficient study skills. Some subjects just memorized the terms for word formation processes but could not match them with the words they apply to.

Finally, incorrect responses indicate inadequate situational and world knowledge. The subjects seemed to be unfamiliar with news headlines, news stories and IT terms in an English context. They probably could not understand the general theme of the headline or news story.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Choi (2006) recommends that the widespread use of neologisms be reflected in the pedagogy of translators and interpreters to ensure intelligibility and not to give the literal meaning but are rather to be faithful to the user's meaning. Instruction in neologism recognition, comprehension and translation should be part of each specialized translation and interpreting course at COLT. Students can be given examples of specialized neologisms and taught how to translate them. They can practice identifying neologisms in specialized written texts, in news stories and news headlines, examining the context in which each neologism is used before in translating it. They can be encouraged to compile their own glossary of neologisms and use online dictionaries of neologisms when necessary. These teaching guidelines are believed to help develop translation students' awareness of specialized neologisms.

APPENDIX

NEOLOGISM TEST

(1) Translate each word into Arabic. Which word formation process is used in each word?

- Sony – ARAMCO – EduGate –Toshiba – eRegister – telebanking - Wi fi - Facebook - Twitter - Qtel – infocenter - Telecom - Biomedical - Amana Care - Computer virus - Cybercafé - Telefax - Aircon - Biotechnology - Fast food.

(2) Translate the underlined words/phrases into Arabic, then identify the type of linguistic unit each is, which word formation, Arabization process is used in each.

- *Apple* acknowledge *iPad problem* with internet
- ***iPad*** owners raise *wi fi* issues
- ***Reuters****: Federal authorities* arrest man for threatening *Pelosi*
- *Al Gore urges You Tube video volunteers for Earth Day*
- *Google urges White House Summit on home energy use*
- *Since 2000, when the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) established the first Open Courseware site, schools like Harvard have been releasing educational materials to the public through platforms that include iTunes, YouTube.*
- *A survey carried out by Webroot, a company specializing in IT security, has recently given us an indication of the risks to which members of the social networks are exposed. The company interviewed a panel of 1,100 people registered on Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace.*

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