A Theoretical Examination of the Influence of Cultural Competence on Translation Accuracy Between Arabic and English

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Abstract

The Arabic-English translation is also a matter of navigating the complicated cultural system as well as linguistic transfer of the problem. This theoretical work goes to analyze how cultural competence affects accuracy in translation in Arabic-English contexts. Based on the developed theories of translation, such as the dynamic equivalence concept presented by Nida, cultural categories of Newmark, Translation Quality Assessment by House, and intercultural competence model by Byram, this paper condenses the conceptual formulation of this relationship between cultural knowledge and translation output. The analysis shows that cultural competence determines the interpretive capacity of translators, makes them better strategists, and improves the validity of expressions that are culturally encoded. The paper finds that cultural competence is an essential attribute of the quality of translation and recommends that cultural literacy training should be included in the education programs of translators. Future theoretical and empirical research recommendations are also presented.

Introduction

The Arabic to English translation is an especially linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic problem based on the in-depth differences between the two languages and their sociocultural backgrounds. Arabic is a semitic language that is strongly related to religious speech, traditions and sociocultural norms, and English is related to the Western communicative patterns and secularized language (Baker, 2018). Such discrepancies make it difficult to faithfully translate a text, particularly when the text implies some cultural meaning, idiomatic phrase, or context-dependent allusion.

The cultural competence of the translator is a vital element that determines the outcome of translations and it can be defined as aptitude of the translator to interpret, appraise and translate cultural information

within source texts (Byram, 1997; Risager, 2006). Most errors in translation are not due to linguistic weaknesses but a lack of proper comprehension of cultural structures that create meaning (Katan, 2014). In cases where translators are not culturally competent, in most instances, the translation will result in a distortion of religious ideas, idioms, politeness strategies as well as figurative language that are culturally exclusive to either the Arabic or English language (Al-Qinai, 2010).

Problem Statement

Despite the fact that cultural competence is a well-known concept that is deemed to be crucial in translation, the theoretical impact that it has on the quality of Arabic-English translation is under-investigated. A lot of the existing literature focuses on linguistic equivalence or translation practices and little on the presence of deeper cultural grounds that need to be achieved to ensure proper meaning transfer (Baker and Saldanha, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The proposed study seeks to theorize in terms of the role of cultural competence in the accuracy of translation between Arabic and English and therefore synthesizes key scholarly theories and conceptual frameworks in translation research and intercultural communication.

Research Questions

1. What is the conceptualization of cultural competence in translation theory?
2. Theoretical question is how cultural competence has a theoretical impact on the accuracy of translation in Arabic-English translation?
3. What are the most appropriate conceptual frameworks to explain culture-related translation issues?

Significance of the Study

The study is a contribution to the field of translation as it elucidates how cultural competence serves as a theoretical need in producing sound Arabic-English translation. It also lays a ground on how to ameliorate the curriculum in training translators.

Conceptual Clarifications

Culture

Culture refers to a set of values, beliefs, practices, and symbolic meanings that are common to a society and which determine how that society communicates (Hofstede, 2011). The cultural aspect becomes one of the determinants in translation that governs the way the texts are encoded and decoded.

Cultural Competence

The conceptualization of cultural competence by Byram (1997) is seen as that of having the ability to comprehend

differences in culture in communication and act accordingly. This competence facilitates the process of translation in the sense that the translators are able to interpret culturally related meaning and transfer it to the target language easily.

Translation Accuracy

Translation accuracy is the extent to which translation renders the meaning, intention, and the cultural background of the original text (House, 2015).

Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence entails comprehending the way in which context shapes language application as well as meaning (Levinson, 2000). In the case of Arabic-English translation, it involves sensitivity to politeness rules, discourse markers and hierarchy.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication refers to the process of negotiating meaning among speakers or texts of different cultures (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2012). All these concepts constitute the theoretical framework of this study.

Literature Review

Cultural Dimensions in Translation Theory.

The importance of culture in the transfer of meaning has not been new to the translation theory. The theory of dynamic equivalence by Nida (1964) states that translation should evoke similar results in the target readers and this involves the use of cultural sensitivity. Newmark (1988) emphasizes that cultural categories, ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations and gestures determine translation choices.

The Translation Quality Assessment model by House (2015) focuses on pragmatic equivalence as the viewpoint that the quality of translation is based on the ability to retain the functional meaning of a message across cultures. The theories on which they are based agree on the fact that linguistic equivalence is not sufficient; there is need to understand the culture.

Cultural Competence in Translation Studies

Several scholars believe that cultural competence is an essential part of the expertise of the translator (Katan, 2014; Baker and Saldanha, 2019). The intercultural competence framework developed by Byram (1997) includes five elements, such as attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating skills, discovery skills and critical cultural awareness. These skills are useful in translation because they assist translators to decode messages that are covered by culture.

According to Gopferich (2009), professional translators need to have linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge

(religion, history and cultural practices) to deliver an accurate translation.

Arabic–English Cultural and Linguistic Contrasts

The Arabic and English languages have several differences in sociolinguistic principles, politeness strategies, registers, and metaphoric systems.

- **Religious allusions**: Quranic allusions in Arabic should be interpreted in a cultural way (Mustapha, 2019).

- **Idioms & metaphors**: Arabic proverbs and idioms are culturally-based and in most cases they cannot be translated word-to-word (Al-Sohbani, 2013).

- **Honorifics & politeness**: Arabic has elaborate expressions of honorifics that cannot be directly transferred into English (Al-Qinai, 2010).

- **Historical allusions**: The numerous Arabic sources refer to the collective Arab history and tribal ideals that are unknown to Western audience.

These contrasts create frequent areas of mistranslation.

Issues of Culture-related Translation.

Some translation issues caused by culture according to the previous research are as follows:

- Loss of implicit meaning (Baker, 2018)

- Misinterpretation of culturally loaded expressions (Al-Sohbani, 2013)

- Errors in religious and ethical terminology (Mustapha, 2019)

- Failure to reproduce pragmatic functions (House, 2015)

The literature is very emphatic that cultural competence is the key in surmounting these challenges.

Identified Gap

An analysis of literature indicates that there is less theoretical synthesis of the role of cultural competence as a predictor of translation accuracy in the Arabic-English scenario. This paper aims at filling this gap.

Theoretical Framework

This paper combines five significant theoretical models:

The Intercultural Competence Model by Byram (1997).

Gives a basis of how cultural awareness makes a contribution towards communication.

Nida's Dynamic Equivalence

Demostrates of how culture must be adapted to translation in order to preserve functional meaning.

Newmark's Cultural Categories

Provides a systematic means of analysing culturally-specific items of text.

House's Translation Quality Assessment (2015)

Raises the concept of high-level pragmatic equivalence as part of translation accuracy.

Cognitive Linguistics

Demonstrates that conceptual metaphors vary between cultures (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003), which influences the transfer of meaning.

All these theories provide a context in which cultural competence is a central issue on the provision of translation accuracy.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical model of this paper assumes the following correlation: Cultural Competence - interpretation of Cultural Content - choice of Translation strategy - better accuracy in translation. Key constructs:

- Cultural knowledge
- Pragmatic competence
- Intercultural interpretive abilities.
- Translation decision-making

This framework helps in directing the analysis in subsequent chapters.

Methodology (Theoretical Research Design)

Research Design

This paper uses a theoretical research design, which is library based. There was no data collection of field surveys and empirical data.

Data Sources

- Peer-reviewed journal articles.
- Theory of translation books in scholarly literature.
- Recorded instances of cultural translation issues.
- Classics of intercultural communication.

Analysis Method

Theoretical literature content analysis.

Theoretical comparison of translations.

Dimensions of cultural competence, thematic synthesis.

Scope

Concentrate on literary, religious, media, and diplomatic translation into Arabic and English.

Limitations

- No empirical data or translator interviews
- Findings are theoretical and need empirical validation

Theoretical Findings

The literature review shows that there are a number of important insights:

Cultural Competence Improves the meaning Interpretation.

Culturally trained translators have a greater chance to grasp implicit meanings, metaphors, and cultural allusions (Katan, 2014).

Translation Strategy is Affected by Culture Competence.

Culturally competent translators have been found to use suitable strategies more frequently including adaptation, explicitation, or cultural substitution (Newmark, 1988).

Multicultural Competency minimizes Mistranslation.

The level of misinterpretation of religious, idiomatic, or historical material is greatly minimized when the translators have an appropriate cultural awareness (Al-Qinai, 2010).

Cultural Competence Enhances pragmatic Accuracy.

Knowledge of politeness and discourse styles enhances natural translations and precision of translation (House, 2015).

Cultural Competence Endorses Dynamic Equivalence.

This model by Nida can only work to its advantage when the translators are culturally competent in such a way that they are able to reproduce communicative intent (Nida, 1964).

Discussion

The results highlight the importance of cultural competence as one of the foundation elements of precise Arabic-English translation. Cultural competence increases the interpretive skills of translators and advances the transfer of meanings that are culturally encoded. All the theoretical approaches discussed lead to the same premise that good translation cannot be done with a simple linguistic equivalence but it needs contextual, historical, and cultural expertise.

This paper will support the argument that most of the errors in translations that are recorded in Arabic-English are due to the cultural misunderstandings as opposed to the linguistic shortage. Cultural competence is therefore an intermediary between understanding and quality of translation. Such insights carry deep implications on translation training programs, which in most of the cases, focus on the linguistic proficiency rather than cultural literacy. By including cultural studies during translator training, the accuracy of translation in the fields of diplomacy, religion, media and literature would probably increase.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper shows that cultural competence is one of the crucial elements that determine the accuracy of translation between Arabic and English. Its synthesis of the theories of translation and models of intercultural communication defines that cultural competence helps to a considerable degree in the capability of translators to interpret and convey culturally bound meanings. The paper recommends that translation curricula incorporate cultural literacy training and that future studies be done to empirically test the conceptual relationships found in this paper.

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