

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

The Challenges of Using Translation Applications in a Global Context

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Abstract:

This paper studies the pros and cons of using mobile applications like Google Translate as a translation tool for non-Arabic speakers in Saudi Arabia. Translation Apps are simple to use, cost-free, and capable of providing direct translations. Some of them, like Google Translate, support many languages, making it an essential tool for people who need to translate material swiftly or survive in a foreign country. However, employing these tools has certain disadvantages as well. Although Translation Apps can be a helpful tool, it is vital to use caution and consider any potential drawbacks. The paper will highlight the challenges non-Arabic speakers face while decoding the texts and whether these apps can bridge linguistic gaps between the two cultures. The biggest issue with translating text or images with text is correctness and perfection, especially regarding creative and scientific works or contextual texts. The study's objectives are to examine the pros and cons of Translation Apps and the challenges and possible solutions concerning translating Arabic into English.

Keywords: Challenges, apps, text, translation, Arabic, English

1. Introduction

Translation is one of the key ways in which linguistic diversity can be preserved and shared between communities and cultures. Translation can bridge languages and cultures, enabling communication and understanding between people who speak different languages. Translation promotes linguistic diversity by allowing knowledge and cultural expressions to be shared and understood across linguistic boundaries. It also enables the preservation of minority and endangered languages by providing access to works written in these languages and promoting the use of these languages in various contexts.

It is impossible for any human being to learn all the languages to communicate with other human beings. People want to travel and explore countries without the need to know the language. Language in the present world is not an obstacle for anyone to work in a foreign country or to make a livelihood. Basnett, S. (1980:21) states that "translation involves the transfer of 'meaning' contained in one set of language signs into another through competent use of the dictionary and grammar; the process also involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria." (Akan et al. 58-65)

Francis Steele states, "You should be as much as possible near the original text, preserving the authentic atmosphere and emphasis. As the translator strives for the closest approximation in words, concepts, and rhythm, he must scrupulously avoid adding comments or ideas not required by the text or context. The function of any translating app should not only be to extend or explain but also to translate and preserve the spirit and essence of the original work. As much as the ideas and words are important, the order of the words in the sentence plays a dramatic role in presenting the translated text. Thus, translation from Arabic to English needs the processes and techniques used to convey the meaning of the source language (i.e., Arabic) into the target language (i.e., English). (Akan et al. 58-65)." Rapid developments in technology and communication tools create many valuable applications in almost all aspects of life.

1.1. Translation Applications

There are many translating apps present at users' disposal. Services provided by many apps are free to use, and some offer chargeable premium services.

- *Google Translate:* It provides features such as translating text from images or photos, pronouncing translated words, translating from speech recognition, translating with handwriting, and translating web pages and whole documents.
- *Microsoft Translator:* It offers regular text, voice, conversation, and photo translations in about 60 languages. This app efficiently translates text but cannot translate photos with Arabic text.
- *Yandex Translate:* Yandex offers translation in 90+ languages, and it can translate text, voice, conversation, and photo translations. One can also interact with social media accounts and texting apps for quick communication.
- *DeepL Translate:* DeepL Translate has 29 available languages, from German and Japanese to Czech and Ukrainian. Users can translate text, speech, photos, and even files.

- *SayHi Translate*: This app offers 50+ languages. It uses Microsoft's translation tech and a different type of speech tech and has one main translation feature: basic two-way conversation.
- *Reverso Translate and Learn*: It offers translation in 14 languages. Reverso also includes a Favorites list and search history, plus games, quizzes, and flashcards so you can study terms you have learned through the app. Its best application is looking up idioms and phrases.
- *Dictionary Linguee*: It only offers translation in some of the major languages such as English, German, etc., to find the meaning of any word or phrase, it gives example sentences, related words, and phrases, and also excerpts from genuine websites, which makes it an excellent tool for language learners.
- *iTranslate Translator*: iTranslate provides offline translation for more than 40 languages and text translation between 100 languages. Voice, conversation, photos, and websites are some more inputs. It is also important to note that this program performs best when translating short conversations. (Cook)

These are some known translation applications that are useful for language learners or people who want to translate for different purposes. Out of all the apps, Google Translate is the most popular among Android users and is the best for overall use. Whereas DeepL Translate is known for its accuracy, Microsoft Translate is best for business, and SayHi is best for live conversations.

When traveling to Saudi Arabia without knowledge of Arabic, using translation apps may present some challenges. When the app does not provide accurate translations or needs a specific vocabulary, non-Arabic speakers may need help. For instance, when ordering food from a local restaurant, the app may need to accurately translate the names of local dishes or ingredients, causing difficulty in placing an order. Additionally, while navigating unfamiliar streets, the app may be unable to translate the names of local landmarks and street signs, leading to confusion and making it challenging for foreigners to find their way around. These are just a few examples of how translation apps may need more accuracy in real-life situations, making communication and interaction with locals difficult for non-Arabic speakers. As per a recent survey conducted by Common Sense Advisory, it has been found that 75% of consumers prefer purchasing products in their native language. Additionally, 60% of the participants seldom or never buy from websites exclusively in English. This underscores the significance of translation tools in promoting cross-cultural communication and aiding business transactions on a global level.

1.2. Objectives of the Research

The research seeks to know the pros and cons of using *Translation Apps* and the extent of effectiveness and accuracy of translation in bridging the gap between the source language (Arabic) and the target language (English). The quality of translation produced by apps still needs to be improved from the quality produced by professional translators. These two languages, i.e., Arabic and English, belong to two different language families, and their cultures are vastly different, so the output of the translated text will vary. Therefore, capturing the essence of the original text into the translated one takes much work.

1.3. Scope of the Research

The scope of the research project refers to the boundaries and limitations of the study, including what is included and excluded. The importance of this research comes from the fact that the modern translator uses information and communication technologies so intensively in his activities that it is only possible to maintain competitiveness in the translation services market with them. Machine translation has become one of the leading translation technologies, and the quality has dramatically improved due to the use of so-called neural networks (Cho et al.).

2. Literature Review

Translation is an activity that "inevitably involves at least two languages and cultural traditions" (Toury, 1978, p. 200). However, the main argument of scholars who have questioned the possibility of translation (Nida, 1964; Toury, 1978; Baker, 1992; Shunnaq, 1997) is that language and culture are intrinsically linked, and therefore, cultural diversity makes translation impossible as no two languages are the same, so the meaning contained in phrases and sentences has no absolute correspondence between languages (Nida, 156). Moreover, Shunnaq (1997) added that the differences between languages in terms of linguistic forms and cultural patterns might differ in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gap between the two languages involved, such as Arabic and English.

Alsohybe et al. (2017) discussed several kinds of machine translation. The authors described the findings of a few earlier studies and looked at some of the tools required for machine translation. This study advanced the field of machine translation by giving future scholars a description of the Machine-Translation research groups and shedding light on the significance of the translation mechanism.

Akan et al. (2019) tried fixing the problems of translating Arabic texts into English with prospective and suitable solutions. He states that a translator must have critical linguistic knowledge and an understanding of language's surface and underlying relations. Arabic and English are very different in terms of vocabulary, sound, style, usage, and grammar.

Research by Jawaher Ali Almufawez and Nadia Marouf, female students of Yanbu University, Saudi Arabia (2018), entitled "Using Google Translate to Improve Young Students' Translation." This was mixed-bag research. It contained experimental and control groups for pre and post-tests. This study showed that Google Translate affected student translation in some parts; it affected student understanding, word choice, and punctuation, but it did not affect the translation of conventions. Moreover, the students had an almost positive opinion of it.

Jabak (2019) tried to determine the translation method that can be used consistently. The current qualitative study evaluates some Arabic-English translations from Google Translate and compares their accuracy to model translations of these samples provided by Dickins, Hervey, and Higgins (2017). The texts were taken from a book titled *Thinking Arabic Translation* (Dickins et al., 2017) and entered into Google Translate. Then, an error analysis was performed to determine the accuracy of the translation. The error analysis results demonstrated that Google Translate frequently committed lexical and syntactic mistakes that degraded the accuracy of the translations and rendered their meanings incomprehensible.

3. Research Methodology

The study uses a qualitative research methodology to reach a conclusion highlighting the research questions. The present study will use the technique of discourse analysis to describe and analyze the translation of different types of Arabic text into English.

3.1. Example 1 (Media)

Source Text

ويشمل برنامج طرح الشركات، المزج مع إنتاجها في المرحلة الأولى من البرنامج في قطاع خدمات البترول والتكرير، الشركة الهندسية للصناعات البترولية والكيماوية "انبي"، وشركة الحفر المصرية، وشركة الشرق الأوسط لتكرير البترول "يدو"، وشركة أسيويت لتكرير البترول، وشركة الإسكندرية للزيوت المعدنية.

3.1.1. Translation by App (Google Translate)

The program of offering companies to be included in the first phase of the program in the petroleum and refining services sector include the Engineering Company for Petroleum and Chemical Industries "ENPI," the Egyptian Drilling Company, the Middle East Oil Refining Company "Midor," the Assiut Oil Refining Company, and the Alexandria Mineral Oil Company.

3.1.2. Human Translation

The program of companies to be included in the first phase of the program in the oil and refining services sector include the Engineering Company for Petroleum and Chemical Industries (ENPI), the Egyptian Drilling Company, the Middle East Oil Refining Company (MIDOR), Assiut Oil Refining Company and Alexandria Mineral Oils Company.

3.1.3. Analysis

In text 3, Google Translate used the phrase *the program of offering companies* creating a semantic error. There is a problem with punctuation in several places, including the acronym "Midor," which makes the translation more flawed. The overall meaning is understood. Overall, media text translation aims to convey the intended message accurately and effectively, which is missing in the above example.

3.2. Example 2 (Literary)

Source Text (Poetry by Najwan Darwish)

وأسمع صوتاً يقول لي: اهرب
واترك جزيرة الإنكليز وراءك
لا شيء تنتمي إليه سوى هذا المذبح المقلد بإتقان
سوى سخان القهوة
سوى أشجار الحديقة المخططة على حرير السماء
وأسمع الصوت بلغاتٍ أعرفها
وأخرى أجهلها:
اهرب

3.2.1. Translation by App (Google Translate)

And I hear a voice telling me: Run away
And leave the island of the English behind
Nothing belongs to it, but this perfectly imitated radio
Only a coffee maker
Except the trees of the garden striped on the silk of the sky
And I hear the voice in languages I know
And others I don't know: run away

3.2.2. Human Translation by Atef Alshaer

I hear a voice saying: escape
And leave this English isle behind
You belong to nothing except this ornate radio
Except the coffee pot
Except the garden trees outlined against the silky sky
I hear voices speaking in languages I know

And others I don't:
Escape

3.2.3. Analysis

By comparing GT in text 1 to Atef Alshaer's translation, we can spot some Lexical and semantic errors in GT, such as the word *runaway* being used instead of *escape* and the word *island of English* instead of the English *isle*. Semantic errors can also be noted by using the word *imitated radio* instead of *ornate radio* and through 'the trees of the garden striped on the silk of the sky.' The translation has destroyed the beauty of the poem in English.

3.3. Example 3 (Medical)

Source Text

غسل اليدين
بالماء و الصابون ٤٠ ثانية أو المعقم الكحولي ٢٠ ثانية
التباعد الاجتماعي
وترك مسافة آمنة عند الخروج من المنزل
الحد من الانتشار
بالالتزام بالحجر المنزلي عند ظهور الأعراض
تغطية الفم و الأنف
بالمنديل أو المرفق عند السعال أو العطاس وبالكمامة القماشية عند الخروج

3.3.1. Translation by App (Google Translate)

Cleaning Hands: With soap and water for 40 seconds or alcohol sanitizer for 20 seconds

Social Distancing: Leave a safe distance when leaving the house

Limit Spread: By adhering to home quarantine when symptoms appear

Covering the mouth and nose: With a tissue or elbow when coughing or sneezing and with a cloth mask while going out

Original Text

Wash Your Hands: With soap and water for 40 seconds or rub them with an alcohol-based sanitizer for 20 seconds.

Social Distancing; Keep a safe distance from others whenever you are outside your home.

Stop The Spread: Keep yourself away from others if you experience any symptoms.

Cover Nose And Mouth with your bent elbow or a tissue when coughing or sneezing and with a cloth mask when going out.

3.3.2. Analysis

Text 3 translation by Google Translate has many syntactic and semantics errors. All the headings are inappropriate. The heading in the original text is more like an imperative sentence that gives instructions, but the translation done by Google Translate is vague and generic. Using the word 'limit,' whereas in the original text, it is 'stop,' has a semantic error. Limit never means stopping. The word (leave a safe distance) is inappropriate.

3.4. Example 4 (Colloquial)

Source Text

امي : صباح الخير , شخبارك؟
انوار: صباح النور , طيبه
امي : بابنتي قبل ماتدخلي الاختبار توكلي على الله واقري اذكارك
انوار : ابشري
امي : ها بشري وش صار على الاختبار
انوار : كان زين بس الاختبار يلخبط و اخر سوا □ لخبطت فيه بس بشكل عام كان حلوا

3.4.1. Translation by App (Google Translate)

Mom: Good morning, how are you?

Anwar: Sabah Al-Nour, good

Mom: My daughter, before you take the test, trust in God and read your memories

Anwar: cheers

Mom: Ha, human, what happened to the test

Anwar: Zain, but the test was messed up, and the last question I messed up, but in general, it was nice.

Human Translation

Mom: Good morning. How are you?

Anwar: Good morning. I'm fine.

Mom: My daughter, before you take the exam, trust in God and say your prayers.

Anwar: All right

Mom: Yes, tell me, what happened in the exam?

Anwar: It was good but complicated, and I got confused about the last question, but in general, it was good.

3.4.2. Analysis

In Text 1, we can see how GT mistranslated the daily chats by using words which does not deliver the right and intended meaning in the source text, such as using the word ‘memories’ instead of ‘prayer,’ ‘cheers’ instead of ‘all right,’ ‘human’ instead of ‘tell me.’ The punctuation is also entirely incorrect, which is crucial for clarity and avoiding vagueness in conversation. There are grammatical mistakes also, like “what happened to the test” here; the use of ‘to’ is improper, leading to a grammatical error.

3.5. Example 5 (Image Translation)



Figure 1

Translating images through *Translation Apps* poses several challenges that can affect the accuracy and reliability of the translations. One of the main issues is limited accuracy due to the reliance on Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology. OCR may struggle with handwritten or stylized fonts, low-resolution images, or complex backgrounds, leading to errors in text extraction and subsequent translation inaccuracies. Furthermore, image *Translation Apps* cannot understand the context of the text within the image, potentially resulting in misinterpretations. Additionally, the support for multiple languages or non-standard layouts in images can be limited, making it challenging to handle diverse content effectively. While image *Translation Apps* can be helpful for quick and essential translations, critical and professional translation needs are better served by human translators who can ensure precise and culturally appropriate translations while maintaining data confidentiality.

A similar problem occurs in the translation of speech or conversation. The rate of speech varies from individual to individual. Also, there is a personalized touch in the pronunciation of individuals. So, it is a very challenging task for any translation app to overcome these translation issues. Further research is recommended on this topic in the future. It needs a detailed analysis of the mechanism and working of *Translation Apps*.

4. Pros of Using Translation Applications

Using translation applications from Arabic to English offers several benefits, making the language translation process more accessible, efficient, and accurate. Here are some of the key advantages:

- Arabic is spoken in various regions, each with its unique dialect. Translation applications often accommodate different Arabic dialects, allowing users to choose the most appropriate translation based on the context and audience.
- For language learners, translation applications can be valuable tools for practicing Arabic and English. Users can compare translations, improve their language skills, and grasp linguistic nuances.
- Many translation applications offer their essential services for free, making them a cost-effective solution for individuals.
- Many *Translation Apps* support image and audio translation. Users can take a picture of a sign or scan a document written in Arabic, and the application will provide an English translation. This feature is beneficial while traveling or dealing with foreign language documents.
- Modern translation applications utilize sophisticated algorithms and neural networks to interpret context and offer more accurate translations. They can consider sentence structure, grammar, and idiomatic expressions for a more natural and precise translation.
- Translation applications are available on various platforms, including smartphones, tablets, and computers. This wide accessibility ensures that users can access translation services whenever and wherever they need them.

- *Translation Apps* facilitate communication between Arabic and English speakers, bridging the language barrier and promoting cross-cultural understanding.
- *Translation Apps* often have extensive databases with a vast collection of words and phrases in both Arabic and English. This helps users learn new vocabulary and better understand language usage.
- *Translation Apps* provide instant translations, allowing users to understand Arabic content in English immediately.

While translation applications have significantly improved accuracy and efficiency, they may still have limitations, especially when dealing with complex or specialized content. Verifying critical translations with a human translator or a professional service is always a good idea. Translation applications can be valuable tools for everyday translations and casual interactions.

5. Cons of Using Translation Applications

While translation applications offer numerous benefits, they also have certain drawbacks, mainly when translating from Arabic to English. It is essential to be aware of these limitations to avoid potential misunderstandings or inaccuracies in the translation. Here are some of the drawbacks:

- Translation applications may not always provide accurate translations, especially when dealing with complex or ambiguous content. Languages have nuances and cultural contexts that automated systems might struggle to grasp fully.
- *Translation Apps* cannot often understand the context in which a word or phrase is used, leading to potentially incorrect translations.
- Automated translators may struggle to translate idiomatic expressions, regional slang, or colloquial language, resulting in awkward or incorrect translations.
- While translation applications have improved in their grammatical accuracy, they can still produce sentences with grammatical errors that might be confusing or misleading in English.
- Cultural differences between Arabic and English can lead to misinterpretations in the translation.
- Automated translations lack a human touch. Human translators can provide a deeper understanding of the content and ensure more accurate and culturally appropriate translations.
- Some *Translation Apps* might not effectively support or handle regional Arabic dialects, leading to errors when translating colloquial content.
- Automated translations may not capture the original tone, style, and voice of the source text, which could be essential in specific contexts like literary works or creative writing.
- Relying solely on translation applications can discourage language learning and human interaction, potentially limiting one's ability to communicate effectively with Arabic speakers.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, while translation applications are valuable tools for quick and casual translations, they are not foolproof, and their limitations must be acknowledged. To effectively use translation apps in a global setting, it is important to follow some key strategies. Firstly, it is crucial to recognize that translation apps are not flawless, and there may be some inaccuracies in the translations. As a result, it is vital to verify the translations with a native speaker or use multiple apps to confirm their accuracy. Secondly, it is essential to be aware of the context and tone when using translation apps. Nuances in language may not always be captured accurately, and mistranslations can lead to misunderstandings or offense. Thirdly, it can be beneficial to learn some basic phrases in the local language before traveling to a foreign country to aid in communication. Finally, it is essential to use translation apps as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, human interaction. Engaging with locals, immersing oneself in the local culture, and using translation apps only as a last resort can help overcome communication challenges in a global setting. Consulting with professional human translators or translation services is advisable to ensure accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and context-appropriate communication for critical and essential translations, especially in professional settings. The research findings and conclusion will help future studies on machine translation. The results of this study will increase awareness of the need to use machine translation tools with caution. The research's findings will also identify specific problems with the effectiveness and efficiency of *Translation Apps*, problems that affect the translation market, professional and semi-professional translators, students, and foreign language users.

7. Acknowledgment

I extend my profound thanks and gratitude to the Deanship of Scientific Research at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University for its role in supporting scientific research through the Humanitarian Research Support Program in the English language.

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