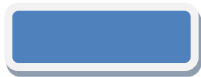


Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances in Simultaneous Interpreting: The Case of Iraqi Students of Translation

**Lect. Hala Ghanim Mohammed
Mustansiriyah University**

h.mohammed@Uomustansiriyah.edu.iq



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Abstract

The main goal of this paper is to shed light on those elements that most frequently lead to inaccurate performances by Iraqi simultaneous interpretation (SI) students interpreting from Arabic into English. Awareness of these elements will increase learners' accuracy; it will also assist their tutors to teach this oral module by focusing on these elements during lectures so that their students can avoid them. To achieve this aim, a triangle method was used to create the theoretical set up; both quantitative and qualitative methods were used, the first in the form of an experiment and the second in the form of a survey. The study identified two types of elements: linguistic elements such as (i) incorrect word choice (ii) misinterpreting titles (iii) false interpretation of numbers (iv) wrong rendering of acronyms (v)

misinterpreting fixed expressions (vi) incorrect use of prepositions and linking words (vii) mispronouncing words; and non-linguistic such as lack of knowledge. Having recognised the importance of these elements in facilitating SI assignments, Iraqi students have shown increased eagerness to learn about and memorise these elements in both A and B languages.

Keywords: Inaccurate simultaneous interpreting, Qualitative/Quantitative methodologies, Iraqi Students of Translation, Triangle method.

1. Introduction

Interpreting is a process of communication whose practitioners must acquire qualities like competency, fluency and accuracy in two languages (source and target) and knowledge of their associated cultures. The Oxford Dictionary and thesaurus

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

defines *accuracy* linguistically as “the state of being accurate” (Waite, 2007, p. 8). In translation, *accuracy* means the degree of correspondence between source and target text (Suttleworth & Cowie, 1997). Similarly, in the interpreting domain, Seleskovtich (1978) defines *accuracy* as the communicative effect of interpretation on both parties; likewise, Donovan-Cagigos (1990) links the concept of accuracy with the success of communication. However, Pochhacker (2015, p. 4) argues that defining *accuracy* “may prove challenging” as it is difficult to measure it. For example, Barik (1975) gives accuracy the three categories of omission, addition and substitution; Mackintosh (1983), however, measures accuracy by semantic equivalence for units of meaning. Many more recent studies link the notion of accuracy with quality of interpretation, depending on the degree of interpreter errors to measure accuracy (Kurz, 1993; Gile, 1999; Turner, Lai, & Huang, 2010).

Stress and the shortness of time make it difficult for interpreters to select the correct equivalent word from a set of synonyms while simultaneously interpreting; however, that task is easier if the interpreter is rendering into the A language (Weller,

1991). High-frequency words are easily and accurately interpreted (de Groot, 1997); to produce an accurate interpretation, it is essential to understand the intended meaning of vocabularies. Regarding the benefit of learning and using vocabularies, Marion (2008) and Nation (2011) both stress the positive impact for second-language learners to produce a complete spoken text.

Correct pronunciation is an essential part of language acquisition; a professional interpreter needs to master the pronunciation of the B language and sound as much as possible like a native speaker because mispronunciation may cause misunderstanding of the interpreted output (Imon, Kilyeni, & Suciu, 2015). By the same token, Lin, Chang and Kuo (2013) state that mispronunciation and non-native accents play a role in achieving accuracy in SI. To achieve accuracy this, the element of obvious and clear pronunciation should therefore exist.

An examinee taking the speaking part of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam will score a high grade if he or she uses plenty of correct linking words and prepositions, as their accurate use is a sign of his or speaking competency; inaccurate use has the

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

opposite effect. Baxronovish (2016, p. 92) sheds light on the importance of using linking words in a spoken language by saying that “knowledge of the functions and the correct use of linking words are indispensable conditions for the development of coherent speech skills”, adding that the absence of prepositions in a language could cause serious problems. Interpreting numbers demands high levels of accuracy because any mistake in rendering a specific number may have a negative effect on the consequences of interpretation. Mead (2015, p. 286–287) considers numbers, proper names and acronyms as “problem triggers” and states that accuracy in rendering numbers in SI is less than that in consecutive interpreting (CS). Directionality plays a massive role in accuracy; both Mazza (2001) and Pinochi (2009) refer to its relationship with accuracy and state that rendering numbers into the A language should be easier than into the B language.

The establishment of the UN organization in the 1950s initiated the necessity of rendering acronyms into the target language. Bankole (2006, p. 3) considers that “acronyms are a problem for translators, and could easily derail a smooth translation or interpretation”. Fixed

expressions are double-edged swords, as correct use may enhance an interpreter’s performance, while misuse can lead to inaccurate or vague interpreting. Ghazala defines a *fixed expression* as a “phrase which always has one single grammatical and lexical form and word order that cannot be changed, interrupted or reversed” (2008, p. 128). Acceptance of this definition means that job titles are also considered fixed expressions. Mohammed and Al-Daqs (2015) point to the tendency of some Arabic fixed expressions to appear in opening and closing speeches in conferences and international gatherings; they urge interpreters to learn these expressions by heart and thus save time during their SI assignments. In contrast, Katoh and Aizawa (1995) state that any trouble in rendering fixed expressions into the target language decreases the level of accuracy. With respect to interpreting titles, Mubaideen (2015, p. 18) concludes in her empirical study on translating English into Arabic that “there is a significant influence of neutral gender words translation on job titles that may result in hindering the process of translation, if the translators do not possess the knowledge of these words’ meaning”. In other words, she calls

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

for knowledge of the profession or job title to obtain an accurate rendition.

In any interpreting assignment, preparation for the task is crucial; it takes many forms, such as reading about the required topic and memorizing specialized terminologies. Donelan et al. (2009) confirm that interpreters' general knowledge may help to achieve accuracy. Likewise, the empirical study of Anazawa, Ishikawa and Kiuchi (2012) shows the direct link between accuracy and the adequate knowledge of terminologies. However, Li (2010) draws attention to fast delivery and considers it a factor that may challenge the bank of terminologies and the excellent knowledge that interpreters acquire. Li also suggests preparation before any SI task to overcome the problem engendered by the speaker's speed (ibid).

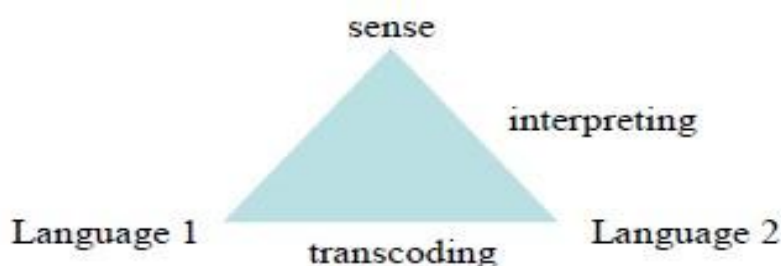
2. Methodology

Tiselius states that "few researchers have investigated accuracy as a construct in its own right or ventured evidence-based definitions. It remains largely unclear what type of information, and how much of it, needs to be conveyed in order for communication to occur" (2005, P. 4).

This paper offers an in-depth study of the elements that have a negative effect on the accuracy demonstrated by Iraqi SI students. The language direction that the research intends to investigate is Arabic into English; this is because students of SI commit more mistakes when interpreting into their B language (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989); in addition, Lim (2005) confirms that "when working into their B language, students and interpreters struggle and have to make an extra effort in order to work in that direction".

The triangle model was adopted in this paper to test the elements of inaccuracies committed by Iraqi SI students, as suggested by Seleskovitch and Lederer (1984). The main concept of the triangle model is the three-formula hypothesis: meaning (sense) is located at the top of the triangle and both source and target languages are at the bottom; this means that the highest priority is to convey the meaning or the sense in order to create communication. (as shown in figure 1). This theory was selected as it has been practised on SI students for decades, and its main goal is to carry the whole of the speaker's sense rather than linguistic elements.

Figure 1. The Triangle Method



2.1 How to Measure Accuracy

Originally, accuracy was measured by its faithfulness to the source, as interpreters need to be faithful in rendering the main sense of the original speech (Seleskovitch, 1978). However, Gile (1995) mentions the probability of doing editing while interpreting in the conference interpreting domain. Barik and Altman (1994) use error analysis. In this respect, Pym (2008) classifies errors into high and low risk. Also, Gile (2011) confirms this approach to assess accuracy in SI.

In this paper, qualitative methodology is used to assure precise and accurate examination for those elements that lead to lack of accuracy in the performance of Arabic–English SI learners. Quantitative methodology is then used to test the findings of the qualitative data and to confirm validity. Daniel (2016, p. 91), among many scholars, stresses the importance of applying both methodologies as they are “aimed at identifying educational problems using

different approach”. Although they belong to completely different continua, the two methodologies are combined to reach the goal of this paper.

2.2 Qualitative Data

The qualitative data took the form of an experiment conducted in the simultaneous interpreting laboratory of the Department of Translation/ Mustansiriyah University in the academic year 2018–2019. The word of al–Abadi in the International Conference to Combat Terrorism in Brussels 2014 was chosen as the test subject; it is linguistically varied and contains many of the linguistic elements on which the researcher aims to shed light. The experiment involved 105 fourth–grade students with very limited levels of SI professionalism. Five interpretations were excluded (two recorders had technical problems while three participants refused to use their interpretations, claiming they kept silent and felt tired and confused during the experiment). One hundred recordings were therefore

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

available for analysis. The SINEW DBS (Data Broadcast System) was used to record the participants' interpretations.

The subsections below list the main elements revealed to affect the accuracy of the learners' performance.

2.2.1 Linguistic Elements

This subsection describes the linguistic errors committed by the Iraqi SI students that led to lack of accuracy in their rendering.

i. Incorrect word choice

Rostami (2009) states that making the correct technical word choice is one of the fundamental requirements of a good interpreter. However, Dueñas González et al. (1991) refer to the inability of interpreters to find the exact equivalent in the target language. Here, different types of incorrect word choice are examined.

Yule (1996) focuses on the importance of rendering semantic and pragmatic utterances to achieve accurate interpreting. Analysis shows that, in spite of the students' awareness of the semantic importance of communicative interpreting, 31% of the participants failed to use the correct and equivalent word choice in various parts of their renditions

of the source speech. Examples are given below.

ان الحضور في هذا الاجتماع- ما يقارب ٦٠ وزير خارجية من دول العالم - يؤكد ان العالم قد أفاق لحقيقة داعش

(Back translation: **Attending** this meeting – by almost 60 foreign ministers from the world countries – confirms that the world is aware now to the ISIS reality.)

A student misinterpreted الحضور by saying “the **coalition** of 60 foreign ministers affirms that the world is aware of Daesh's reality”. The participant's choice of **coalition** was unsuccessful. Although the interpreted sentence makes sense in its context, it lacks the required accuracy; The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus defines *coalition* as “a **temporary alliance**, especially of political parties forming a government” (Waite, 2007, 181). It is likely that **conference** and **assembly** were also used to refer inaccurately to the same word, **attending**.

نحن نعمل على المصالحة الوطنية في جبهات متعددة
(Back translation: We are working to achieve the **national reconciliation** and on different aspects.)

73% of the students failed to pick the correct English terminology of the Arabic expression المصالحة الوطنية, rendering it as **national coalition, international**

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

reconciliation, regional acceptance or **national recognition**. They gave different meanings for **national**, using **international** or **regional**. The triangle method shows that the students failed to achieve accuracy when they chose the wrong words **recognition** and **acceptance** for the original word **reconciliation**. By the same token, many students did not instantly find the correct equivalent for the Arabic word الائتلاف (**coalition**).

نحن ممتنون للدعم الذي تقدمه الولايات المتحدة وأي
عضو اخر في الائتلاف

(Back translation: We are grateful for the support provided by the US any other members of the **coalition**.)

The word **coalition** was incorrectly rendered by 41% of the participants as **gathering, union, organization, federation** or **troops**.

ii. *Misinterpreting titles*

The title خادم الحرمين, **the custodian of the two holy mosques**, was not consistently rendered correctly into the target language. One quarter of the participants said **Saudi President** and said **Saudi King**.

By the same token, **cabinet** was rendered by 10% as **ministers' committee, cabinet of ministers** or **senate; council**

of representatives was interpreted by 12% as **council, representative committee** and **representatives' board**. Again, the output interpretation included errors in the sense that directly affected the accuracy of the students' performances.

لقد راجع مجلس الوزراء الموازنة العامة التي ينبغي ان
ترسل الى مجلس النواب لغرض المصادقة عليها قريبا
(Back translation: The **council of ministers** reviewed the general budget that should be sent to the **council of representatives** to be approved shortly.)

iii. *False interpretation of numbers*

Gile (1995, 1999) acknowledges that the interpretation of numbers is somewhat challenging; by the same token, Braun and Clarici (1996) refer to the difficulty of predicting numbers.

When students encountered numbers during the speech's delivery, some rendered them incorrectly, and therefore inaccurately.

ان حكومتنا تنجح بتنفيذ البرنامج الذي اعدته خلال
الثلاثة أشهر الاولى، ونحن نحرز تقدما في البرامج التي
اقترحناها خلال الستة أشهر الاولى لنحقق كافة
التزاماتنا تجاه الشعب العراقي

(Back translation: Our government has succeeded in implementing the **3-month** program, and we are achieving progress in the first **6-month** suggested program

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

to achieve all our commitments toward the Iraqi people.)

Nearly half (49%) of the students were unable to concentrate sufficiently, swapping **six** and **three**.

Similarly, the number **sixty** was interpreted mistakenly by 38 trainees as **sixteen**, **six** or **six hundred**.

ان الحضور في هذا الاجتماع مايقارب ٦٠ وزير خارجية من دول العالم..

(Back translation: Attending this meeting by almost **60** foreign ministers from the world countries...)

Once more,

لقد بدأنا بناء قواتنا الامنية على نحو مهني، حيث اقلنا أكثر من اربعة وعشرين قائدا عسكريا كجزء من جهودنا لاجتثاث الفساد

(Back translation: We have started building our security forces vocationally, where **24** military leaders were discharged from the service as part of our effort to eradicate corruption.)

More than half (53%) of the trainees dealt incorrectly with the number **twenty-four** by rendering it as **forty-two**, **twenty**, **fourteen** or **forty**.

iv. *Wrong rendering of acronyms*

According to the oxford dictionary and thesaurus, an *acronym* is “a noun formed from the initial letters of other words” (Waite, 2007: p.10).

In his word, al-Abadi thanked NATO for hosting that conference by saying:

كما اشكر حلف شمال الاطلسي (الناتو) لاستضافته هذا المؤتمر في مقره الرئيس

(Back translation: Also, I would like to thank **NATO – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization** – for hosting this conference in its main headquarter.)

NATO was rendered incorrectly by 64 participants (64%) as **Atlantic**, **Atlantic Ocean** or **North Party**. Clearly, they failed to render this acronym into the target language, and their choices lacked a sense of logic from the triangle method.

الدول المجاورة في الشرق الاوسط وشمال افريقيا

(Back translation: **MENA regions – Middle East and North Africa**.)

This acronym was rendered incorrectly by 76 students as **Middle East countries**, **Arab countries** or **Middle East and African countries**).

v. *Misinterpreting fixed expressions*

Boers et al. (2006, p. 245) define *fixed expressions* as “standardized phrases such as collocations and idiomatic expressions”. Of the 100 students tested, 34 were unable to render successfully some components of the fixed expressions found in the delivered speech.

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

The speeches of Arab leaders are characterized by the use of honorific and figurative fixed expressions (Barkho, 1987, cited in Al-Hamad and Al-Shunnag, 2011). Therefore, it is very usual for any Arab leader to start a speech with "In the name of God, the most merciful, the most compassionate" before starting the address. The formulaic language interpretations errors committed by the 34% are explained below.

When al-Abadi started his speech with السلام عليكم (Back translation: **In the name of God**) and السيدات والسادة الحضور (Back translation: **Ladies and Gentlemen**), 30 % rendered these fixed expressions wrongly in many different ways, including **Bissm Allah, As-salamu alaykum** and **Hello**; 10 students omitted them. The first and second interpretations were incorrect as they transliterate the religious opening statement; in English, this interpretation according to the adapted theory is nonsense and not idiomatic at all, although the Islamic expression might be familiar to some listeners. The third interpretation, **hello**, is completely unacceptable as an interpreter must be very aware of the register. *Hello* is used among friends and in informal speech, while the register used in conferences

should be formal. This is what Kellett Bidoli calls for when she states that "an interpreter must identify the correct register in a given situation" (Kellett Bidoli, 2002, p. 174). The last student's interpretation was also unacceptable and inaccurate, as he omitted the fixed expression, jumping directly to the second formulaic phrase, **Ladies and Gentlemen**. In addition, around 20 students (20%) employed completely incorrect grammar, saying **ladies and gentlemens**.

vi. Incorrect use of prepositions and linking words

James (2007) considers prepositions hard for the non-native English speaker. This is because each language has its own preposition rules. Some students misuse prepositions while interpreting and thus lose accuracy. Some examples follow.

وبالنسبة عن الشعب العراقي الذي عانى ما عاناه لفترة طويلة

(Back translation: **On behalf** of the Iraqi people who suffered for a long time)

Incorrect prepositions were used by 19% of the students, who said **in the behalf of, for the behalf of** or **at the behalf of**. Incorrect preposition use led to inaccuracy in the interpretation.

بيد اننا نعلم ان القتال على الارض هو مسؤوليتنا الاولى والاخيرة

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

(Back translation: **However**, we know that fighting on the earth is our first and last responsibility.)

However was wrongly rendered by 15% of the participants, who used words such as **and**, **also** and **in addition**.

لن نتمكن من هزيمة الارهابيين الدوليين الحاقدين الذين
يعتاشون على الفشل الا بعد اعادة بناء

عراق آمن ومستقر في شرق اوسط آمن ومستقر

(Back translation: We cannot defeat the international terrorists who live on the failure **unless** we rebuild a stable and secure Iraq in a stable and secure Middle East and secure Middle East.)

Here, 16 students out of 100 (16%) failed to render the bold linking word. They either deleted it or replaced it with a wrong choice, such as **so**, **and** or **moreover**. None of these matches the main meaning **unless**, according to triangle method, they all led to inaccurate interpretation and grammatically they are nonsense.

vii. *Mispronouncing words*

As stated by “Imon et al. (2015, p. 2157), “correct pronunciation is essential for any interpreter”. Similarly, Mohammed (2017) states that SI students under training mispronounce words and that this may negatively affect their performances. Misinterpretation of words is another

linguistic element that leads to inaccurate interpretation. Some students failed to pronounce English terms or names correctly. For instance, the English word **terrorist** إرهابي was rendered by 39 students (39%) as **tourist** سائح. As the whole context of the speech deals with terrorism and how to combat it, the mispronunciation of this main word negatively affects the degree of accuracy. By the same token, 9% of the participants said **regions** مناطق instead of the main word **religion** اديان. The term **Iraqi National Guard** قوات الحرس الوطني العراقية was mispronounced by 17 students (17%), as they said **Iraqi international guard** قوات الحرس الدولي العراقية where *Iraqi* refers to a locality while *international* refers to regions beyond the country's border. And **recruitment** تجنيد was mispronounced by 4%, who said **retirement** تقاعد.

2.2.2 Non-Linguistic Elements

Non-linguistic elements mean the element that not related to language features such as:

viii. *Lack of knowledge*

At the beginning of the experiment, the researcher pointed out, using the words below, that the Prime Minister of Iraq had

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

delivered the speech at a meeting devoted to combatting terrorism.

كلمة السيد رئيس الوزراء الدكتور حيدر العبادي في
المؤتمر الدولي لمكافحة الإرهاب

(Back translation: The words of **Dr al-Abadi, the Prime Minister**, at an international conference to combat terrorism)

Some students could not render the job title of the Iraqi Prime Minister correctly. Surprisingly, all the students are Iraqi, but their general knowledge of politics is limited. Almost 23% of the students showed their intellectual weakness as they chose incorrect equivalents for official titles. For example, **Prime Minister** was rendered into **Iraqi Present, President of Iraq** or **Fouad Masoom**. The participants' interpretation reflects their very limited general knowledge of one of the top political figures in Iraq; they thought that the Iraqi Prime Minister was the Iraqi President himself. They should have known that the Iraqi parliamentary system means that the Prime Minister is the key figure in the government; he and the President are two persons with two different titles. Three students named the Prime Minister as **Al-Maliky**, an interpretation that shows their lack of knowledge; they did not recognize that al-

Abadi had succeeded Al-Maliky as prime minister.

In another example that clarifies this point, 83% failed to interpret the title of John Kerry correctly as the **former United States Secretary of State**.

واشكر معالي وزير الخارجية الاميركي جون كيري

(Back translation: Also, I would like to thank the **American Secretary of State**)

The subjects of the study offered many wrong English versions of **US Secretary of State**, such as **American Foreigner Minister** and **Foreigner Minister of America**. This reflects the students' lack of knowledge that the correct title for the American foreign minister is **Secretary of State**, and not **Foreign Minister**.

3. Survey

To check the applicability of the elements described in section 2.1, a 25-item questionnaire was distributed to each of the 100 students. Only 75 responses were received, as 15 participants did not return the survey and 10 returned incomplete surveys. As gender is not important in this study, the light did not focus on the students' gender. The questionnaire was in English, and it included various questions about each element and was designed to use the five-point Likert scale. For each item, the

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

student chose one out of five possible answers (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree), each answer being numbered from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). SPSS was used to analyse the data and draw graphs in which the vertical axis refers to the numbers of students and their responses to survey questions drawn in the horizontal axis. Regarding the way of examining the survey, the questions were divided into eight groups and each group included three or four questions to

test the elements underpinned in the experimental work.

The first three questions were about finding equivalents while interpreting.

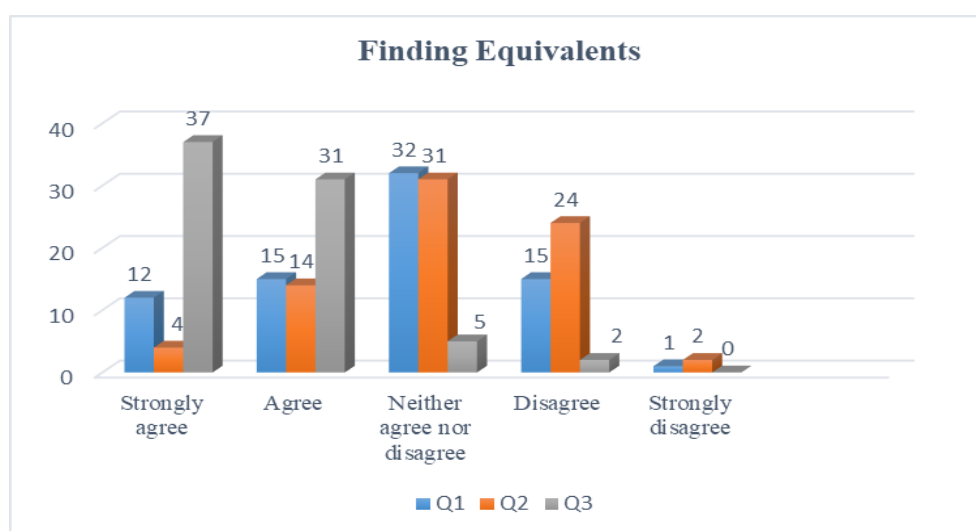
i. Difficulty in Finding Equivalents

Q1 When I interpret into English; it is hard to find the correct English equivalent.

Q2 When I interpret into Arabic; it is hard to find the correct Arabic equivalent.

Q3 I need to learn more terminologies.

Figure 2. Finding Arabic and English Equivalents While Interpreting



When the participants were asked about the difficulty in finding English and Arabic equivalents while interpreting, 27 students agreed 36% (12 strongly (16%)) that it is hard to find English equivalents, 32 (42.6%) were undecided and 16 (21.3%)

rejected this idea (one strongly (1.3%)). These reactions did not apply to the Arabic language, as only 18 agreed (24%) (4 strongly (5.3%)) that they faced some difficulties in finding Arabic equivalents while interpreting; 26 (34.6%) refuted this

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

statement (two strongly (2.6%)). As in the first question, nearly 41% (31 students) gave no opinion. This could explain the 90.6 % agreement with the third question; 68 students agreed (37 strongly (49.3%)) that they needed to learn more new terminologies in both mother and target languages, while five neither agreed nor disagreed and only two disagreed.

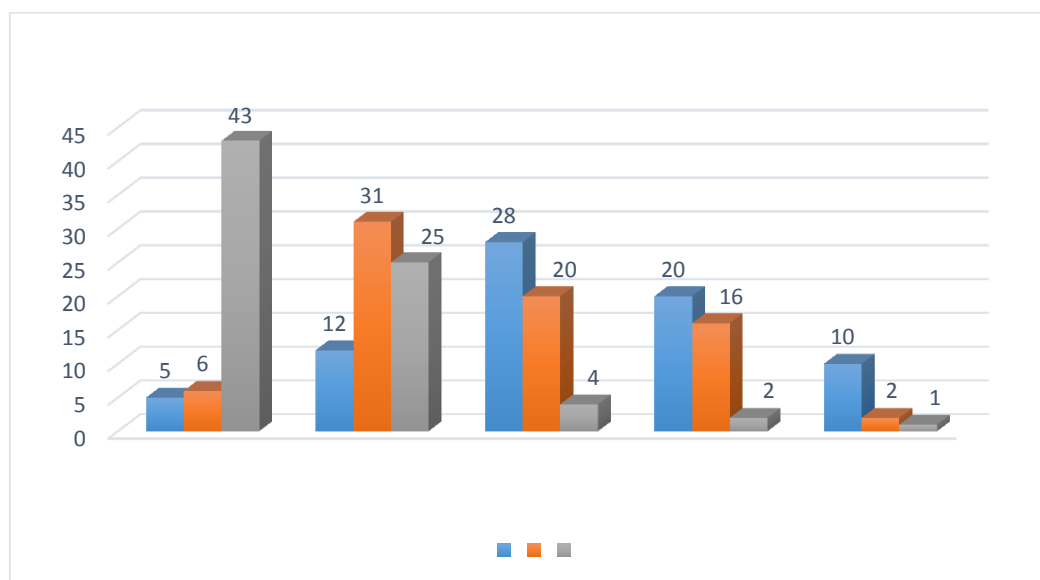
ii. Difficulties in Interpreting Tittles

Q4 I find interpreting Arabic titles difficult.

Q5 Interpreting titles into English is harder than into Arabic.

Q6 I need to learn more English titles (such as *secretary of state*) and their interpretation.

Figure 3. Difficulties in Interpreting Arabic and English Titles



Only 17 participants (22.6%) agreed (five strongly (6.6%)) that interpreting Arabic titles is hard; 30 students (4%) (10 strongly (13.3%)) disagreed and 37% (28) could not give a clear-cut opinion. However, nearly half of the students (49.3%) found difficulty in interpreting

Arabic titles into English and slightly over a quarter (26.6%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Only 18 (24%) students disagreed (two strongly (2.6%)) with this statement. As with the terminologies in the earlier question, the percentage of those wanting to learn more titles and their

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

equivalents rocketed to 90.6 %, with 68 agreeing (43 strongly (56.3%)) that they needed to learn; only two (4%) disagreed and four (5.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

iii. Difficulty in Interpreting Numbers

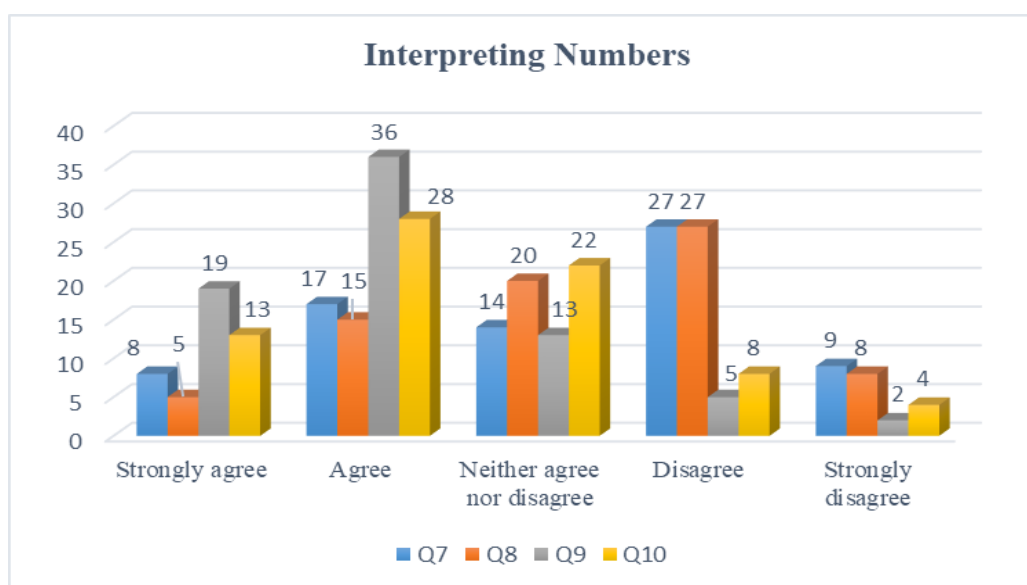
Q7 Interpreting English numbers is difficult.

Q8 Interpreting Arabic numbers is difficult.

Q9 I need to write down numbers while interpreting.

Q 10 I need more practice on interpreting number.

Figure 4. Difficulty in Interpreting Arabic and English Numbers



Numbers in Arabic are written and pronounced very differently from those in English. This dissimilarity may confuse simultaneous interpreters under training. This is why 25 (33.3%) students agree (eight strongly (10.6%)) that interpreting numbers in English is difficult. The response for numbers in Arabic is similar, with 20 students (26.6%) agreeing (five

strongly (6.6%)) on the difficulty of interpretation. Fourteen students (18.6%) failed to take a decision on Q7 and 20 (26.6%) on Q8. Thirty-six students (48%) disagreed (nine strongly (12%)) that interpreting English numbers is difficult and 35 (46.6%) disagreed (eight strongly (10.6%)) that interpreting Arabic numbers is difficult. Fifty-five participants (73.3%)

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

agreed (19 strongly (25.3%)) the necessity of writing down numbers while interpreting, five disagreed (6.6%) (two strongly (2.6%)) and only 13 (17.3%) could not make a decision. Over half of the students 41 (54.6%) agreed and strongly agreed that they had a need to practise number interpretation, 22 (29.3%)

hesitated to reveal their opinions and 12 students disagreed or strongly disagreed.

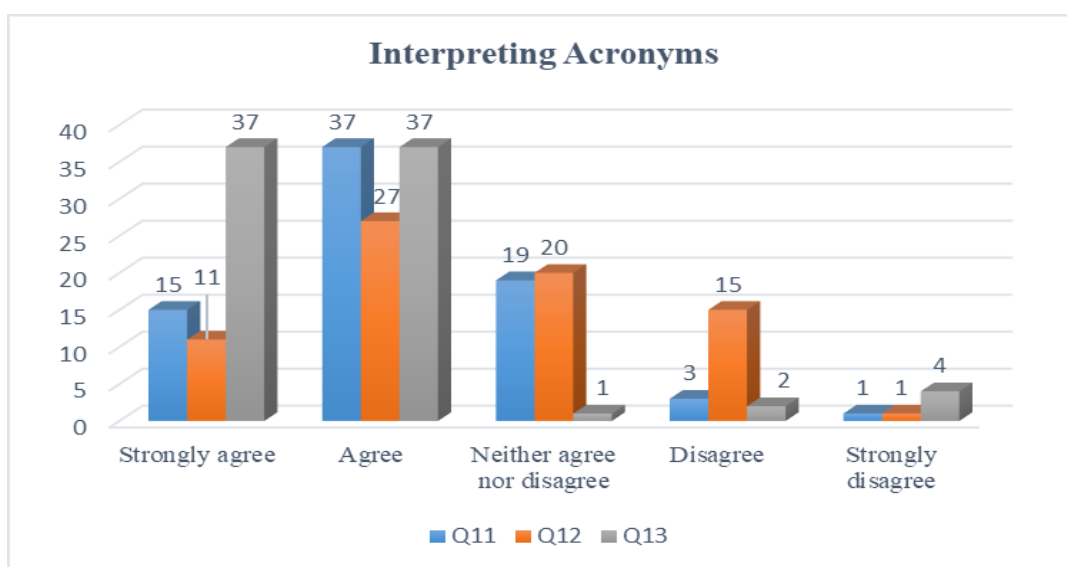
iv. Difficulty in Interpreting Acronyms

Q11 Interpreting acronyms is challenging.

Q12 Rendering acronyms into English is harder than into Arabic.

Q13 I need to learn more acronyms.

Figure 5. Difficulties in Interpreting Arabic and English Acronyms



When asked about interpreting acronyms, 52 students (69.3%) agreed (15 strongly (20%)) that interpreting acronyms is a challenge, 19 (25.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed and only 4 participants (5.3%) disagreed (one strongly (1.3%)) with this idea. Again, 38 participants (50.6%) agreed (11 strongly (14.6%)) that rendering acronyms into English is harder than rendering them into Arabic, about half

(20) students (26.6%) had no opinion and 16 ones (21.3%) rejected this idea (one strongly (1.3%)). A large proportion of the students 68 (90.6%), agreed or strongly agreed that they needed to learn more new acronyms, only one student (1.3%) declined to give an opinion and six participants (8%) felt no necessity to learn more acronyms.

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

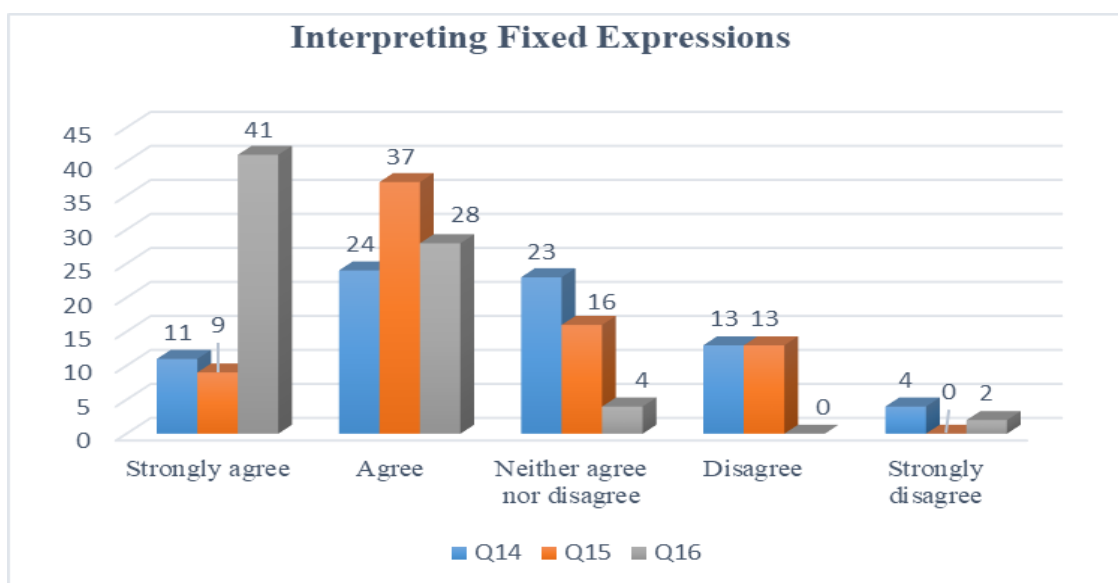
v. Difficulty in Interpreting Fixed Expressions

Q14 I found interpreting fixed expressions is hard

Q15 Rendering fixed expressions into English is harder than into Arabic

Q16 I need to learn more fixed expressions and their interpretation.

Figure 6. Difficulty in Interpreting Arabic and English Fixed Expressions



Learning fixed expressions enriches the knowledge of second-language learners. When asked about these expressions, 35 students (46.6%) agreed (11 strongly (14.6%)) that interpreting them is hard, 23 (30.6%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 17 (22.6%) disagreed (only 4 strongly (5.3%)). Asked whether rendering fixed expressions into English is harder than into Arabic, 46 students (61%) agreed (nine strongly (12%)), 16 (21.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 13 (17.3%)

disagreed (none strongly). In terms of learning new fixed expressions, 69 students (92%) agreed or strongly agreed with this idea but only two (2.6%) strongly disagreed. Only 4 students (5.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

vi. Difficulty in Interpreting Prepositions

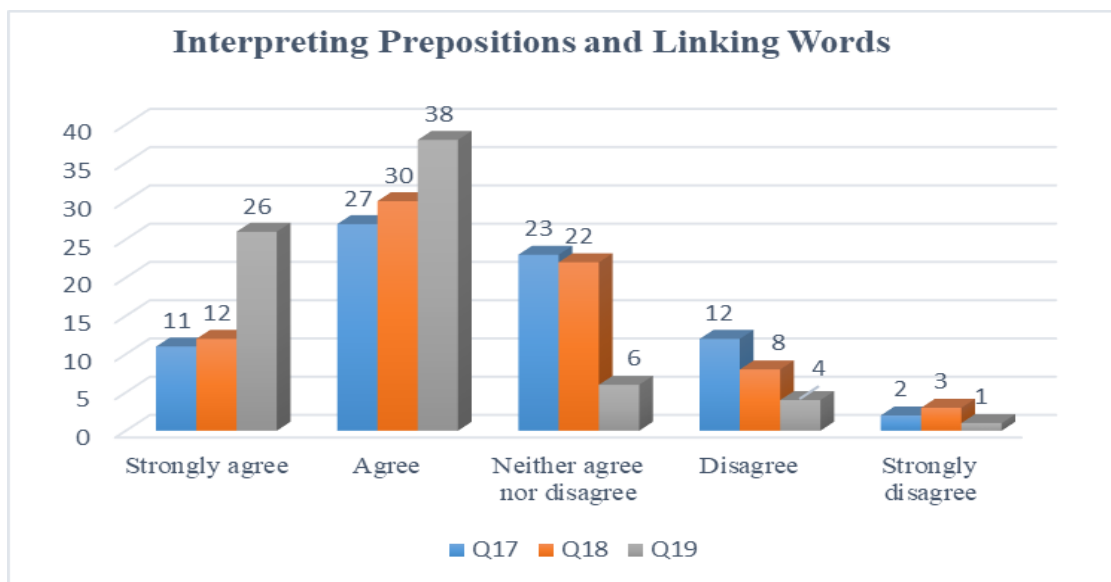
Q17 I misused some prepositions while interpreting.

Q18 English prepositions are harder than Arabic ones.

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

Q19 I need to learn more about the correct usage of English prepositions.

Figure 7. Misuse in Interpreting Arabic and English Prepositions and Linking Words



The responses of students to Q17 (I misused some prepositions while interpreting) were (from Agree to Strongly Disagree): 11 (14.6%), 27 (36%), 23 (30.6%), 12 (16%) and 2 (2.6%). The answers for Q18 (English prepositions are harder than Arabic ones) differed slightly: 12 (16%), 30 (40%), 22 (29.3%), 8 (10.6%) and 3 (4%). As we have seen for all the questions on the need to learn new material, 64 (85.3%) students agreed (including 26 students (34.6%) strongly) the need to learn about the correct usage

of English prepositions; six learners (8%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and five students 6.6% (only one participant (1.3%) strongly) disagreed with the opinion.

vii. Difficulty in Pronouncing

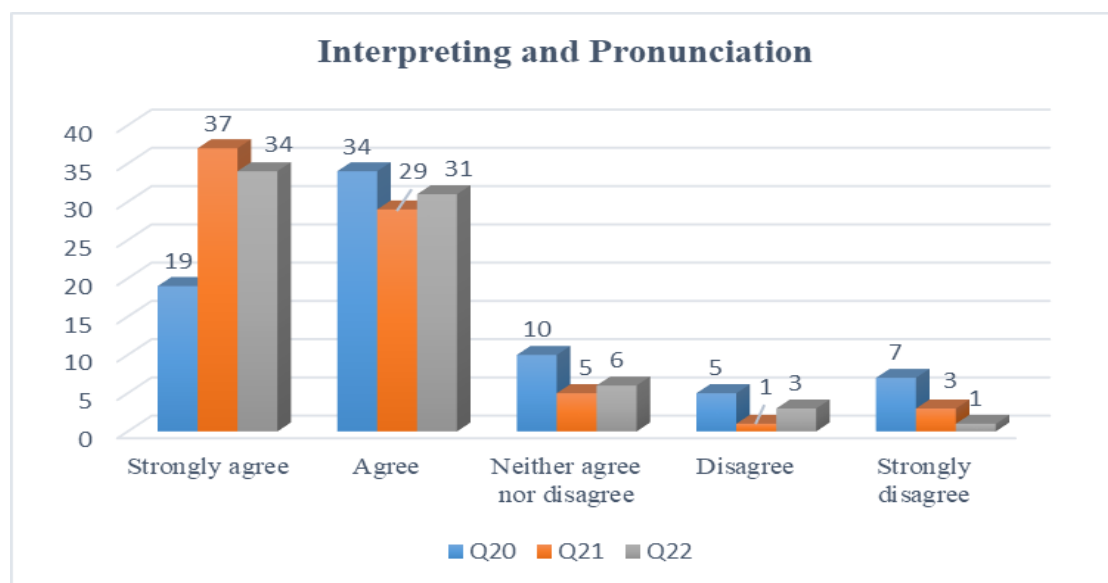
Q20 I have a problem pronouncing some English terminologies.

Q21 Mispronunciation negatively affects my performance.

Q22 I need to learn more about the pronunciation of English terminologies.

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

Figure 8. Negative Effect of English Mispronunciation on Interpretation



When acquiring a second language, pronunciation is considered somewhat challenging. This may explain why 29 students (45.3%) of the students agreed and 19 students (25.3%) strongly agreed that they faced problems in pronouncing some English terms; Five (7.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 6.6% disagreed and 9.3% strongly disagreed. It is acknowledged that mispronunciation negatively affects participants' performance. When students were asked about the link between mispronunciation and the negative impact on interpreting, 66 students (88%) agreed (37; 49.3% strongly) with this scientific point of view, five (6.6%) learners neither agreed nor

disagreed and four (5.3%) disagreed (three students (4%) strongly). As demonstrated above, the passion of learners to learn more material for their second language was high; thus, 65 participants (86.6%) wanted to acquire more new English terminologies, while six (8%) students made no decision and only four participants (5.3%) disagreed (one (1.3%) strongly).

Viii Difficulty in General Knowledge

Q23 My general knowledge of English is not good.

Q24 My general knowledge of Arabic is not good.

Q25 I need to raise my level of knowledge.

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

Figure 9. Usefulness of Knowledge for Interpreters

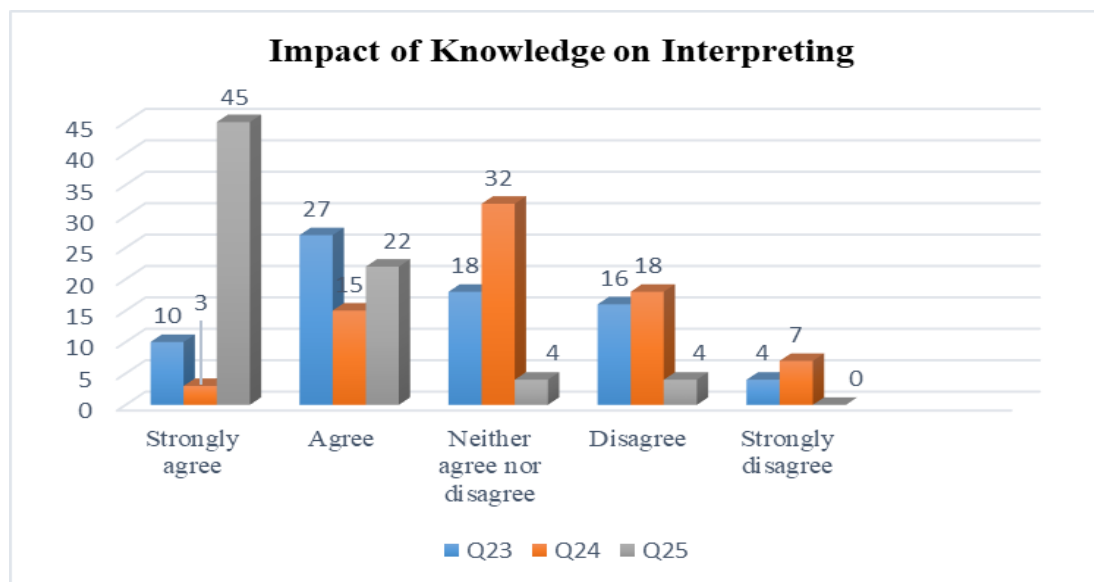


Figure 9 shows the students' responses to the three questions on the link between interpreters' general knowledge and its positive impact on the interpreting assignment. 10 students (49.3%) agreed and 27 ones (13.3%) strongly agreed that their general knowledge of English was not good, 18 participants (24%) were confused, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, 16 students (21.3%) disagreed and just four students (5.3%) strongly disagreed. The responses to Q24 (my general knowledge of Arabic is not good) were different, however, with values (from Agree to Strongly Disagree) being 4%, 20%, 40.6%, 24% and 9.3% for the

following responses 3, 15, 32, 18, 7 students. Most students 67 ((89.3%), with 45 students (60%) strongly) agreed, wanted to raise their knowledge levels; the students were therefore aware that the acquired information and knowledge would help them perform better in future, as reported by Kalina (2002). Only four students (5.3%) neither agreed or disagreed, and another four disagreed, none strongly. Surprisingly, over half of the students were able to make the obvious decision as to whether their knowledge of their mother language was good, although 89.3% believed in improving their knowledge. This means

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

that, unconsciously, they thought their knowledge in Arabic needed to be enriched as well as their knowledge in the English language.

3. Discussion

A detailed statistical table will facilitate discussion of the results obtained from the survey. Table 1 summarizes the percentages of the 25-item survey.

Table 1. Weighted Means of Survey responses

G	Q	St.agree		Agree		Nei.agree		Disagree		St.disagree		Likert scale
		%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	
1	1	0.16	12	0.2	15	0.427	32	0.2	15	0.013	1	3.293
	2	0.053	4	0.187	14	0.413	31	0.32	24	0.027	2	2.92
	3	0.493	37	0.413	31	0.067	5	0.027	2	0	0	4.787
	Total	Mean Linkert Scale Group (1)										3.67
2	4	0.067	5	0.16	12	0.373	28	0.267	20	0.133	10	2.76
	5	0.08	6	0.413	31	0.267	20	0.213	16	0.027	2	3.307
	6	0.973	43	0.334	25	0.053	4	0.027	2	0.013	1	4.427
	Average	Mean Linkert Scale Group (2)										3.498
3	7	0.106	8	0.227	17	0.187	14	0.36	27	0.12	9	2.84
	8	0.067	5	0.2	15	0.267	20	0.36	27	0.106	8	2.76
	9	0.252	19	0.48	36	0.174	13	0.067	5	0.027	2	3.867
	10	0.174	13	0.373	28	0.294	22	0.106	8	0.053	4	3.507
	Average	Mean Linkert Scale Group (3)										3.244
4	11	0.2	15	0.493	37	0.252	19	0.042	3	0.013	1	3.827
	12	0.147	11	0.36	27	0.267	20	0.213	16	0.013	1	3.413
	13	0.493	37	0.414	31	0.013	1	0.027	2	0.053	4	4.267
	Average	Mean Linkert Scale Group (4)										3.836
5	14	0.147	11	0.32	24	0.307	23	0.174	13	0.053	4	3.333
	15	0.12	9	0.493	37	0.213	16	0.174	13	0	0	3.56
	16	0.547	41	0.373	28	0.053	4	0	0	0.027	2	4.413
	Average	Mean Linkert Scale Group (5)										3.769
6	17	0.147	11	0.36	27	0.307	23	0.16	12	0.027	2	3.44
	18	0.16	12	0.4	30	0.294	22	0.106	8	0.042	3	3.533

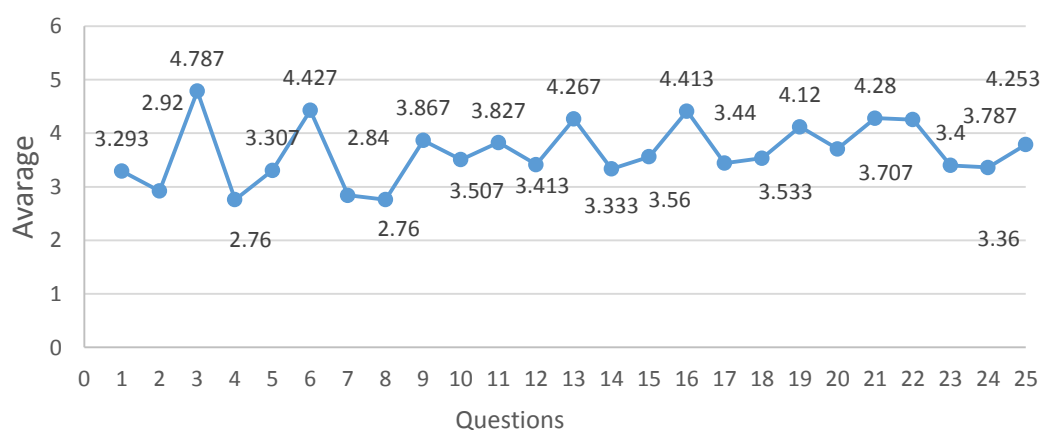
Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

	19	0.347	26	0.507	38	0.08	6	0.053	4	0.013	1	4.12
	Average	Mean Linkert Scale Group (6)										3.698
7	20	0.252	19	0.453	34	0.133	10	0.067	5	0.093	7	3.707
	21	0.493	37	0.387	29	0.067	5	0.013	1	0.042	3	4.28
	22	0.453	34	0.414	31	0.08	6	0.042	3	0.013	1	4.253
	Average	Mean Linkert Scale Group (7)										4.08
8	23	0.174	13	0.453	22	0.32	24	0.187	14	0.027	2	3.4
	24	0.067	5	0.44	33	0.453	22	0.187	14	0.013	1	3.36
	25	0.28	21	0.28	21	0.387	29	0.053	4	0	0	3.787
	Average	Mean Linkert Scale Group (8)										3.516

In Table 1, the extreme left column includes the 25 group questions divided into eight groups, each with three or four related questions. The second column shows each question's number. The following five columns show the Likert scale points (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly

disagree); each of these columns has two sub-columns, one showing percentages and the other the number of participants making each response type). Finally, the weighted average of the Likert scale results appears in the extreme right column.

Figure 10. Line Graph of Weighted Means



Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

The line representation of the weighted means in Figure 10 helps to clarify the statistical results. Careful examination of the graph, which shows the average of each question according to the Likert scale, can reveal some statistical facts.

In the first group, Question 3 (I need to learn more terminologies) holds the record with a 4.78 average, showing that students are eager to learn more terminologies and recognize the importance of acquiring greater vocabularies. This is exactly what Trabbing (2002) recommends when he states that interpreters and students of interpreting must have “a wide range of terminology” (p. 8) and they need to learn “three new words a day” (p. 60). However, a comparison of the averages for Questions 1 and 2) reveals a difference. When students were asked about the difficulty of finding the correct equivalent when interpreting into English and into Arabic, the averages were 3.29 and 2.92 respectively. This means that students felt that they were good at Arabic, as it is their A language, but that they needed to acquire more terminologies when working in the B language. Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989) justify their recommendation to work into the A

language – working into the B language has a negative influence on the quality of interpreting, as stress and the cognitive load are higher. On the contrary, Denissenko (1989) claims that interpreting into the B language is preferable and easier, as listening to A language speech means that the comprehension process is better.

The numbers obtained from group 2 show the students’ eagerness to learn more about titles and their interpretation, shown by a score of 4.42. This reflects the students’ awareness of the importance of being up to date, picking as many titles and their interpretations as possible. Scores of 2.76 and 3.307 reveal the participants’ preferences for interpreting into their A and B languages, as they considered interpreting titles into Arabic not to be difficult. This aligns with the survey of Nicodemus and Emmorey (2013), who found that interpreters under training and professional interpreters all prefer working into their A language.

Scores in group 3 reveal the closeness of students’ views about rendering numbers; they considered that English and Arabic numbers were difficult to interpret, with 2.84 and 2.76 respectively. Hurford (1987) confirms that serious problems can

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

be accrued while interpreting numbers. Again, the statistics in the line representation show the closeness of views on writing down numbers while interpreting and the desire for more number interpretation practice; Braun and Clarici (1996) suggest the usefulness of taking notes in the A language to increase the accuracy of rendering numbers.

The highest Ggroup 4 weighted mean, 4.267, reveals the students' tendency to want to learn more new acronyms. The weighted means of participants who considered interpreting acronyms to be challenging was 3.827; this big average may justify their need to learn more acronyms. This is what Bankole (2006) refers to when stating that translating acronyms in two unrelated and different languages is hard.

Interpreting in general – and interpreting fixed expressions in particular – requires a bicultural and bilingual mediator (Al-Zahran, 2007); this may explain why the highest weighted mean (4.413) in group 5 applied to participants' eagerness to know as many new fixed expressions as possible. The weighted mean of Question 15 (3.56) may specify the directionality of difficulty as the students see it, as they believed that interpreting fixed expressions

into the B language is harder than it is into the A language.

As was shown by all the responses above that were related to acquiring more knowledge and learning new language skills, the highest weighted mean in group 6 (4.12) is for those who want to study more about the correct usage of English prepositions. This corresponds with Jie's (2008) statement that prepositions are hard for B learners and explains the high weighted mean (3.533) for those who thought that interpreting prepositions into English was harder than into Arabic.

The approximate weighted means in group 7 for Question 21 (4.28) and Question 22 (4.253) reflect the students' recognition of the significance of pronunciation for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners of English in general and for simultaneous interpreters in particular. These numbers can be read as showing that the SI students have not reached a level of language proficiency that would qualify them as simultaneous interpreters and that their understanding of this may give rise to anxiety while interpreting; this in turn has a bad influence on their overall interpreting performance. Abed and Mohammed (2011, p. 1) carried out some experimental work and their statement that

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

“interpretation anxiety and FL learning anxiety are distinct though related” could prove this point. The students’ recognition of their actual language proficiency has a positive impact because it relates to their development and improvement in other abilities and skills.

All the weighted means in Group 8 point to the SI students’ awareness of the need to acquire more knowledge because it plays an essential role in facilitating the process of interpreting. Surprisingly, the weighted means of Question 23 (3.4) and

Question 24 (3.36) were very close. These statistics show the importance of gaining more information in both A and B languages and that the students do not depend only on their general knowledge of their A (Arabic) language. Lederer (1978) was one of the first pioneers to call for knowledge of the world, context and syntax. Today, many researchers, professional interpreters and academics stress the necessity of general world knowledge to bridge gaps while interpreting (Russo, 2011).

Table 2. Question Group Ranking According to Likert Scale Value

Rank	Group	Likert Scale Value
1	G7	4.08
2	G4	3.836
3	G5	3.769
4	G6	3.698
5	G1	3.67
6	G8	3.516
7	G2	3.498
8	G3	3.244

Table 2 ranks the survey responses in order of Likert scale value. The leftmost column shows the ranking numbers from 1

to 8, the second column identifies the groups and the right column shows the eight Likert values in descending order.

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

Table 3. Inapplicable Questions According to Likert Scale Value

Question Number	Group	Likert Scale Value
2	G1	2.92
4	G2	2.76
7	G3	2.84
8	G3	2.76

Of the three columns in Table 3, the leftmost lists the numbers of questions that were considered invalid as their Likert scale values were less than 3.0; the second column shows the groups to which those questions belong; the last column shows the real calculated Likert scale values, all four values being less than 3.0. Of all the questions summarized in Table 1, only these four (out of 25) were invalid; the limitation of the study meant that no investigation into their inapplicability was made.

A macroscopic look at Tables 2 and 3 can reflect the applicability of questions, as the Likert scale weighted average value of each group is greater than 3.0. However, a microscopic look at the two tables reveals the inapplicability of some questions inside each group, as they scored less than 3.0. More studies are

recommended to understand the reasons for these averages.

4. Conclusion

After conducting the experiment, distributing the survey and discussing the results, some conclusions can be drawn:

Two kinds of elements, linguistic and non-linguistic, have negative effects on the accuracy of students' simultaneous interpretation from Arabic into English and lead to loss in the conveyed meaning. Linguistic elements include incorrect word choice, misinterpretation of titles, false interpretation of numbers, wrong rendition of acronyms, misinterpretation of fixed expressions, incorrect use of prepositions and linking words, mispronunciation of words. The only non-linguistic element is lack of knowledge.

Although they are under training, the students realize their need to learn how to

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

pick new terminologies and titles, pronounce words, gain general world information, undertake number interpretation practice and study more fixed expressions and their interpretations. They show their eagerness to do these things.

Directionality plays an essential role in the accuracy of interpreting. Students, being Arabs and thus good in their native language, prefer not to know more about the pronunciation of Arabic words. Their attitudes to interpreting terminologies, prepositions and titles are the same, but they would like to improve their rendering of numbers and acronyms and gain more general knowledge in both Arabic and English.

The paper could proof the applicability of the utilised theory (triangle method) in reaching the main goal of this paper. Last but not least, the researcher hopes to serve academia with a practical study that encourages others to discover other lapses not covered here, to investigate other language directions to understand whether the same or different elements affect their accuracy and to investigate the reasons behind the inapplicability of the four questions.

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Appendix

The transcription of the whole speech can be found in: <http://www.pmo.iq/press/3-12-20142.htm>

عوامل الأداء غير الدقيق في الترجمة الفورية من العربية الى الإنكليزية: طلاب قسم الترجمة في العراق انموذجاً

المدرس

هالة غانم محمد

قسم الترجمة/كلية الاداب/ الجامعة المستنصرية

الخلاصة :

يهدف هذا البحث الى تسليط الضوء على العوامل الأكثر شيوعاً والتي تؤدي في الغالب الى عدم الدقة في الترجمة الفورية من العربية الى اللغة الإنكليزية لمتعلمي قسم الترجمة في العراق. إن إدراك هذه العوامل سيزيد من وعي المتعلمين فضلاً عن ذلك مساعدة مدربي الترجمة الفورية للتركيز على تدريس هذه العوامل من خلال المحاضرات لكي يتجنبها الطلاب في المستقبل. إذ استخدمت نظرية المثلث لتحقيق هدف البحث، كما استخدمت طريقة البحث النوعية والتي أجريت على هيئة تجربة اما طريقة البحث الكمية فأخذت منحى الاستبيان، حيث افرزت الدراسة وجود نوعين من العوامل: الأول

لغوي والذي يشمل عدم اختيار المفردة الملائمة والترجمة الخاطئة للعناوين الوظيفية وكذلك الترجمة الخاطئة للأرقام وترجمة المختصرات الخاطئة وكذلك الخطأ في ترجمة التعابير الجاهزة وعدم الاستخدام الصحيح لحروف الجر والربط وأخيراً عدم اللفظ الصحيح للمفردات. اما العامل الثاني فهو غير لغوي ويشمل قلة المعرفة العامة. اظهر طلاب الترجمة في العراق الرغبة لتعلم وحفظ المزيد من هذه العوامل في اللغتين العربية والإنكليزية. الكلمات المفتاحية: ترجمة فورية غير دقيقة، طرق بحث نوعية وكمية، طلاب قسم الترجمة في العراق، نظرية المثلث.

Elements of Arabic into English Inaccurate Performances

