Challenges of Translating Acronyms Used in Mobile text messages from English into Arabic

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges involved in translating acronyms from English into Arabic, particularly in the context of mobile text messaging. It explores the strategies employed by translators and the resulting translation methods utilized. The research examines the linguistic disparities between English and Arabic that contribute to the difficulties in rendering acronyms accurately. A practical analysis is conducted by providing five master's students in translation with five common English acronyms and analyzing their Arabic translations. The findings reveal that translators primarily employ strategies such as transference, literal translation, couplets, modulation, and naturalization to convey the intended meanings of acronyms. The study indicates a preference for the semantic approach over the communicative approach among translators, aligning transference with the semantic method and couplets with the communicative method. The research highlights the complexities involved in acronym translation and the need for nuanced strategies to preserve intended meanings accurately.

Key words: The Concept of Acronyms , Formation of Acronym , Acronyms and Translation and Acronyms in Arabic language.

صعوبات ترجمة النحت الاستهلالي المستخدم في الرسائل النصية للموبايل من الإنجليزية الى العربية

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة التحديات التي تواجه ترجمة الاختصارات من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية، خاصة في سياق الرسائل النصية عبر الهواتف المحمولة. تستكشف الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها المترجمون والأساليب الناتجة عن هذه الترجمات. تفحص البحث الفروقات اللغوية بين الإنجليزية والعربية التي تسهم في صعوبة ترجمة الاختصارات بدقة. يتم إجراء تحليل عملي من خلال تقديم خمس اختصارات إنجليزية شائعة لخمسة طلاب ماجستير في الترجمة وتحليل ترجماتهم إلى العربية. تكشف النتائج أن المترجمين يعتمدون بشكل أساسي على استراتيجيات مثل النقل الحرفي، الترجمة الحرفية، الترجمة المزدوجة، التغيير، والطبيعية لنقل المعاني المقصودة للاختصارات. تشير الدراسة إلى تفضيل المنهج الدلالي على المنهج الاتصالي بين المترجمين، مما يربط النقل الحرفي بالمنهج الدلالي والترجمات المزدوجة بالمنهج الاتصالي. تبرز الأبحاث التعقيدات المرتبطة بترجمة الاختصارات والحاجة إلى استراتيجيات دقيقة للحفاظ على المعاني المقصودة بدقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فهوم الاختصارات، تشكيل الاختصار، الاختصارات، والترجمة، والاختصارات في اللغة العربية.

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Acronyms are shortcuts used in modern life to save time and effort whether speaking, writing, or printing. So, translating these acronyms from English into Arabic is challenging due to a lack of terminological equivalence in Arabic, especially in Third World countries. These developing countries, and for certain economic reasons, were unable to keep up with the developed countries' rapid advancement. Accordingly, looking for replacements for terminological terms becomes one of the significant issues that these countries confront in dealing with these terms, added to the high gap between English and Arabic languages as

far as lexical and structural factors.This study has been carried out to shed light on the issues that translators face when translating these acronyms into Arabic. It also aims to find some solutions to these challenges by making a relationship between the procedures the translator used to render his/her data and the method he/she achieves.

Aims of the Study

The current study tries to achieve the following aims :

1. Detect the challenges that translators face when rendering English acronyms into Arabic.

2. Find out which procedures the translators depend on in translating English acronyms into Arabic.

3. Find out what type of method the translators followed when translating English acronyms into Arabic.

Value of the Study

This study is expected to be valuable for students of translation because it sheds light on some serious challenges that translators face when handling these acronyms. This study hopes to be of some sort of importance to linguists, translators, lexicographers, teachers of English, journalists, media and to all those interested in this field of study specialized for Arab translators in technical fields to understand the technical acronyms that are difficult to be translated in Arabic.

1. The Concept of Acronyms :

The English term "acronym" in English is defined by different interpretations among linguists, resulting in difficulty with nomenclature. According to Akmajian, et al. (1984:69) defined acronymization as"… just one of the processes of abbreviation, or shortening ". It involves choosing the initial letters of the words in a phrase, such as radar (derived from 'Radio Detecting and Ranging') and laser (which stands for 'Light Amplified by Stimulated Emission of Radiation').

Quirk (1985, p. 1581-2) highlights that acronyms may consist of more than just the initial letters to look like actual words, as seen in the case of "radar" (radio detecting and ranging). However, acronyms can also exclude certain non-lexical words from the original phrase, as exemplified by "laser" (Light Amplification by the Stimulated Emission of Radiation).

Crystal (1994:130) points out that acronyms must be distinguished from initialisms (alphabetisms) where the words are stated as individual letters such as BBC, MP and EEC. Acronyms are pronounced as a single word such as NATO and UNESCO. Such items would never have periods separating the letters, or opposing initialisms. Some linguists never see a sharp line between acronyms and initialisms, but use the former term for both.

Newmark (1988:200) described an acronym as the first letters of a phrase used "... for denoting an object, institution or procedure." He introduced the term 'internationalism' to refer to acronyms for international organizations, such as FAO for 'Food and Agriculture Organization'. According to Finegan and Besnier (1989:110), an acronym is considered a type of abbreviation that expands the vocabulary of a language. The variety of acronyms was limited to those formed from the initials of a phrase that may be spoken as a single word.

Fromkin et al. (2003:96) present important examples of the use of acronyms in everyday life, particularly in relation to the widespread use of computers. These instances include MORF (male and female), FAQ (often-asked questions), and FYI (for your information).

2. Reasons for Using Acronyms

Usually, the motive for creating acronyms is either brevity or catchiness in both speech and writing (Hartmann and Stork, 1976:1). Additionally, euphemism may be one of the reasons, for example, BO

(branch office), TB (tuberculosis), and VD (venereal disease) (Pyles, 1971: 299). Accordingly, succinctness and precision are highly valued and acronyms can contribute greatly to concise style. Furthermore, acronyms help to convey a sense of social identity, i.e., the group to which it belongs. So it wastes time and space if such acronym are stated fully and it would be strange indeed to hear someone routinely expanding USA, AIDS, UNESCO, SARS, ROM, DOS, RAM and all the other well-known acronyms of contemporary English (Crystal, 2004: 120).

Acronyms are being added to lexicon daily because of the wide- spread of the Internet and proliferation of computers. Examples of recent acronyms are MORF (male or female), FAQ (frequently asked questions), WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get), FYI (for your information), and BTW (by the way) (Fromkin et al. 2003: 96-7). Actually, even if the acronyms are proper names, they have to be entered in the dictionary. They cannot be left to have their meanings decided from the original phrases (Allan, 1986: 241).

3. Formation of Acronym :

Acronyms mostly consist of three letters (usually all capital), more intensively, acronyms may be built on acronyms. For instance, PROM (programmable read-only memory) is built on ROM (read-only memory) and EPROM (erasable programmable read-only memory) is created from PROM (Fromkin et al. 2003: 96). An acronym can also be formed from the first letters of the syllables in long polysyllabic words, (e.g. PABA (paraaminobenzoic acid) (Kleinedler, 1993: iv). There is no agreement on what to call acronyms whose enunciation involves the combination of letter names and words, such as JPEG [dʒeɪpəg] and MS-DOS [əməsdɔs].

In some cases, the name of a particular object is chosen to form the acronym and it spells something that sounds metaphorically right, for

example, BASIC (beginner all-purpose symbolic instruction code); WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant); and FIST (The Federation of Inter-State Truckers) (Bauer, 1983: 237). Thus, the lack of predictability in acronyms is because of two reasons. Firstly, the original phrase is treated freely to form the acronym. Secondly, not every acronym is enunciated as one word (ibid.: 237-8). Sometimes, acronyms like ATM (automatic teller machine) and PIN (personal identification number), are regularly written with one of their elements repeated, as in "I sometimes forget my PIN number when I go to the ATM machine" (Yule, 2006: 57).

4. Acronyms and Translation :

Acronyms pose an important task for non-literary and professional translators, as translating acronyms across different languages can be challenging. Newmark (1988:193) says that in this particular form of translation, the sole task is to translate words, ensuring that each word is accounted for in the target language text. Occasionally, certain words may not be translated, since a literal translation would result in an excessive translation. Furthermore, these words are affected by a certain linguistic, referential, cultural, and personal context. Moreover, this form of translation is seen as challenging due to the ongoing development of new things, concepts, variations, and processes in this area of technology. Each language obtains around 3000 new words yearly, with these terms often arising in response to specific demands (ibid:140).

It is unnecessary to spend time searching for the acronym in reference books if it has been specifically created for the text, such as in an academic paper, and can only be found there (ibid: 200). Because of this, acronyms are often made for specific topics and are used to name products and processes based on how important they are. In translation, there is either a standard term that means the same thing or, if there

isn't one yet, a term that describes the thing. (ibid: 148). Acronyms used for international institutions usually differ throughout different languages. A few instances of such acronyms include 'ASEAN', 'UNESCO', 'FAO', and 'OPEC'. These acronyms are considered internationalisms and are commonly written without punctuation. When a national organisation gains significance, it is customary to transfer its acronym and provide a translation of its name (ibid:148). Therefore, international acronyms are commonly translated, such as EEC and CEE, but national acronyms usually stay as is. However, in cases where the function holds more importance than the description, they are often conveyed by transfer, such as in the example: 'CNAA-CNAA degree awarding body for higher education colleges (non-university) in the United Kingdom' (ibid: 33-34). There are a lot of cultural elements that determine whether it is beneficial to use acronyms, such as the target audience and potential for translation.

On the other hand, Arabic is opposed to the majority of acronyms and supplies explanations for them (ibid: 148). Also, all acronyms are transcribed in Arabic, and their entire meanings can be preceded by them. However, some acronyms are transcribed as words, such as FAO, which is written as الفاو, and UNESEF, which is written as اليونيسف. Other acronyms are written as letters, such as (لـ أي إم إف) (Ghazala1995: 189). Since three consonants cannot follow one another in this manner in either English or Arabic, the word "UNICEF" can be pronounced perfectly and easily in both languages depending on the order of the vowels and consonants in either language. This is because the arrangement of vowels and consonants makes it possible to pronounce the word in a flexible and possible manner (ibid).

This type of translation can be seen as the process of rephrasing acronyms from one language into another. The sequence of initials can be altered in certain instances, depending on the grammatical structure

of the language in question. For example, in English, the initials "UNO" can be rearranged as "ONO" in French. (Bankole, 2006: 6). Sometimes, initials can be totally substituted, such as in the case of ISPC (International and Service Provider) being replaced with FAT (Fournisseur d'accès à l'Internet) (ibid).

5.1. Acronyms in Arabic language :

The act of creating a new word in Arabic by combining a group of letters that appear at the beginning of a sequence of words (at least three) is known as "alnaht al istihlaliy" and is represented by the phrase النحت الأستهلالي. The new word's meaning must be related to the meaning of the original words (Abd il- Nur, 1979: 278, Wahba wa Al-Muhands, 1979: 402). This kind of linguistic phenomenon shortens and abbreviates speech in order to simplify communication. As a result, while it first appeared to shorten speech, it is today utilized for improving communication with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Hijazi (2000: 95-96) says that acronyms have historically been employed in the Arabic language. Several famous linguists have referenced them in the Arabic heritage of culture. Furthermore, they collected the acronyms found in the old writings and explained what they meant for contemporary readers. Some of these acronyms are "اه" (which stands for "انتهى") and "الخ" (which stands for "الى اخره").

In Arabic, it stands out from foreign languages because of its distinctiveness, as exemplified by words such as "حماس" (Hamas), derived from "حركة المقاومة الاسلامية" (harakat al mukawamma al Islamia), and "الحشد" (alhashd), derived from "حزب الشعب الديمقراطي الاردني" (hizb al sha'b al dimuqrati al urduni), which advocates for the unification of all political parties. In Arabic, acronyms must have a precise and meaningful representation. Therefore, the word "واف" (waf), derived from "وكالة الأنباء الفلسطينية" (Palestinian News Agency), is modified to "وَفَا" (wafa), which conveys the idea of faithfulness towards Palestine. On the other

hand, acronyms that lack meaning, such as "واس" (was), derived from "وكالة الانباء السعودية" (Saudi News Agency), are not acceptable in Arabic due to their ambiguity (Haziim, 2010, 18).

Based on the previous explanation, it is evident that the concept of "alnahtn al istihlạliy" in Arabic is highly restricted, and grammarians are all in agreement that it does not have any specific rules (ibid).

Some writers have classified "alnahtn al istihlạliy" as a form of derivation, or "alishtiqaq" in Arabic because both involve the creation of a new word. They have even coined the term "alishtiqaq al kabbar" to emphasize that "alnahtn al istihlạliy" plays a significant role in the phenomenon of "alishtiqaq." (Matlub, 2002: 11)

5.2. Reasons for not Spreading the Phenomenon of (Alnaht al Istihlạliy) in Arabic :

The main reasons for dismissing 'alnaht al istihlaliy' in Arabic may be connected to the organization of the sound system and the pronunciation of the Arabic alphabet. In English, the pronunciation of acronyms is influenced by the order of consonants and vowels in the alphabet. The pronunciation of a letter in English can be represented by a limited number of consonants and vowels.

The following example will prove this view:

B	→	/biː/	Consists of	CV
F	→	/ef/	=	VC
X	→	/eks/	=	VCC
Q	→	/kjuː/	=	CCV

(Al-abbass , no date.8)

The equal distribution of vowels across English letters simplifies the pronunciation process, leading to the creation of easily pronounceable acronyms such as C.I.A and NATO. Due to their frequent usage in language, these acronyms will become finally original words with a full

meaning. However, while studying the table below, it becomes obvious that the pronunciation of an Arabic letter requires an important combination of consonants and vowels.

الف	→	/ alif ?/	Consists of	CVCVC
باء	→	/ baa ?/	=	CVVC
عين	→	/ eain /	=	CVCC

(Al-abbass , no date.9)

Thus, the phonetic structure of each letter in the Arabic alphabet contains at least of four different sounds, including both consonants and vowels and occasionally more when inflections are used. Therefore, it is challenging to condense a phrase into a single Arabic word. Now, let's try to read the following: The acronym "ص.ن.د" is derived from " صندوق النقد الدولي" (International Monetary Fund). There are two possible readings for this acronym: the first is "د.ن.س" pronounced as "saad. nuun. daal," and the second is "سندا" pronounced as "sunada." The initial reading lacks semantic meaning, being purely alphabetical. In contrast, the second reading, resembling an English acronym, is phonetically and literally unsuitable in Arabic when compared to English. (Al-Abbass, no date, p. 10)

Now, let's take the words "حماس" (Hamas) and "امل" (amal). We can observe that these words are widely recognized in Arabic as well-known original terms with broad meaning. The first word is derived from " حركة المقاومة الاسلامية" (Islamic Resistance Movement), while the second word originates from "أفواج المقاومة اللبنانية" (Lebanese Resistance Brigades). These words symbolize the aspiration to provide hope to Lebanon in order to gain their rightful privileges (Haziim, 2010: 18).

Another reason of unaccepting acronyms in Arabic is that some acronymic words have become some compound words that are unacceptable in Arabic. Therefore, it is more appropriate to say خارق

للطبيعة   although it is too long– rather than   فو طبيعي   which is meaningless (Haziim, 2010 : 13).

8. Data Analysis and Discussion :

In this section, five Acronyms are chosen and distributed to five M A students at Translation department / College of Arts / University of Tikrit to find out which strategy they chose to render the Acronyms into Arabic and which method they achieve accordingly. Inappropriate translations are also detected.

ST 1 "Choosing a URL"

TT 1

1. يو ار ال
2. الصفحة
3. محدد الموارد الموحد
4. الموقع
5. يو ار ال

Discussion :

Translators 1 and 5 used a transference strategy to translate the term by replacing the English alphabets with Arabic ones. They achieve semantic approach since they were more concerned with preserving the meaning of the acronym.

Translators 2 and 4 gave an inappropriate translation for the term URL into Arabic as " الصفحة " and " الموقع ". They didn't give the specific meaning of this acronym. While Translators used a literal translation strategy because he translated the term in the direct meaning of its words. he achieved the semantic method because focusing on the SL of the Acronym.

Table (1): Analyzing ST 1.

Translators	Strategy used	Method achieved	Appropriateness
Translators 1	Transference	Semantic	+
Translators 2			
Translators 3	Literal	Semantic	+
Translators 4			
Translators 5	Transference	Semantic	+

ST 2 "Choosing a YOLO"

TT

1. يولو

2. اصفر

3. يولو

4. استمتع بحياتك

5. اصفر

Discussion :

Translators 1and 3 used a transference strategy, directly transferring the English acronym "YOLO" into Arabic letters as " يولو ". This is semantic method because Instead of translating each word, the translator transliterated acronym to preserve its phonetic and visual similarities.

Translators 4 used Modulation by changing the message from the source language to the target language due to differing perspectives in the source and target languages in doing this , he achieved communicative approach.

At last, translators 2 and 5 are completely unrelated to the meaning of "YOLO" and are considered inappropriate.

Table (2): Analyzing ST 2.

Translators	Strategy used	Method achieved	Appropriateness
Translators 1	Transference	Semantic	+
Translators 2			−
Translators 3	Transference	Semantic	+
Translators 4	Modulation	Communicative	+
Translators 5			−

ST 3 "Choosing an IDK"

TT 3

1. لا اعرف
2. ايدكي
3. ضايع
4. لا اعرف
5. لا اعرف

Discussion :

Translators 1 , 4 and 5 using literal translation accurately convey the meaning of the acronym "IDK" by translating it as " لا اعرف ". Since his main aim was to convey the acronym's semantic meaning in the target language, they used the semantic approach. This strategy is appropriate according to Newmark's model.

However, translator 2 used naturalization by adapting the term " IDK " as " ايدكي " from the source language to match the pronunciation to the target language because he has no knowledge about it. He achieved semantic method in this translation.

At last, The way that translator 3 translated "IDK" as " ضايع "(lost or confused) differed from the original meaning and doesn't seem to follow any of Newmark's strategies, making it an incorrect translation.

Table (3): Analyzing ST 3.

Translators	Strategy used	Method achieved	Appropriateness
Translators 1	Literal	Semantic	+
Translators 2	Naturalization	Semantic	+
Translators 3			−
Translators 4	Literal	Semantic	+
Translators 5	Literal	Semantic	+

ST 4 "Choosing a goat"

TT 4

1. المعزة

2. ماعز

3. الاعظم في كل الاوقات

4. المعزة

5. المعزة

Discussion :

All the translators gave an inappropriate translation except 3 who used literal strategy by no add or omit he achieve semantic approach and because the term " goat " does not mean " ماعز " or " المعزة ". This is an inappropriate translation as it completely misses the intended acronym meaning.

Table (4): Analyzing ST 4.

Translators	Strategy used	Method achieved	Appropriateness
Translators 1			−
Translators 2			−

Translators 3	Literal	Semantic	+
Translators 4			–
Translators 5			–

ST 5 "Choosing a RAM"

TT 5

1.الرام

2. ذاكرة الوصول العشوائي

3. الذاكرة

4. الرام

5. الرام

Discussion :

Translators 1, 4 and 5 used couplets strategy. They transference the SL alphabets into TL ones. These translators used the Arabicization procedure by including the Arabic definite article "ال" and adding it to the English term "RAM" since it is comprehensible but lacks an Arabic equivalent. this could be an acceptable translation. In this case, they followed the communicative method when adding the Arabization article to SL text.

Translator 2   rendered it as "ذاكرة الوصول العشوائي", which is a direct translation of the complete term "Random Access Memory." This translation is literal and achieved semantic approach. Translator 3 rendered it as "الذاكرة", which directly translates to "memory". RAM, or Random Access Memory, is a specific type of computer memory. However, when translated generically, the acronym RAM loses its original meaning. Therefore, these translations are likewise inappropriate.

Table (5): Analyzing ST 5.

Translators	Strategy used	Method achieved	Appropriateness
Translators 1	Couplets	Communicative	+
Translators 2	Literal	Semantic	+
Translators 3			–
Translators 4	Couplets	Communicative	+
Translators 5	Couplets	Communicative	+

9. Findings

According to the above analyses and discussions, it seems that the translators used different types of strategies and reached different methods of translations as represented below:

1 – Transference percentage is (16 %), see table (2).

2 – The literal translation percentage is (24 %), see table (2).

3 – Couplets percentage is (12 %), see table (2).

4 – Modulation strategy percentage is (4 %), see table (2)

5 – Naturalization strategy percentage is (4 %), see table (2). So, it seems that the translators prefer to use the literal because these acronyms have specific meanings in the target language and transference due to the lack of equivalent in the Arabic language.

6 – The translation methods used by translators in translating acronyms differ in percentage terms. However, a translator who depends on a semantic approach (with a percentage of 18 %) shows that translating acronyms in the source text takes much work. Therefore, translators find it difficult to add or omit a word to a translation, which leads to errors, so they see it doesn't need clarification. Translators used a communicative

approach (7 %). This is because the language of these acronyms needs more clarifications, see Table (3)

7 – It seems that those who use modulation and couplets strategy achieved a communicative approach.

8 – It seems that translators who use literal translation, transference and naturalization tend to achieve a semantic approach , so there is a relation between the type of procedures used to achieve a specific method.

9 – It seems further, that the inappropriate translation seems to have a percentage of 40 % and the appropriate translation percentage is 69%. See Table (1).

Table (1) Percentage of appropriate translation of the acronyms

Total translators	Appropriate translations	Percentage
25	15	60 %
	Inappropriate translations	Percentage
	10	40 %
Total	25	100 %

Table (2) The Strategy Used in Translating Each Term.

Strategy used	ST 1	ST 2	ST 3	ST 4	ST 5
Transference	1 , 5	1 , 3			
Literal	3		1 , 4 ,5	3	2
Couplets					1 , 4 , 5
Modulation		4			
Naturalization			2		

Table (3) The percentage of used methods in Translation

Methods	Used	Percentage
Semantic	11	18 %
Communicative	4	7 %
Total	15	100%

Conclusions

The translation of acronyms from English to Arabic poses significant challenges due to the lack of terminological equivalence and structural differences between the two languages. This study confirms that translators face difficulties in rendering English acronyms into Arabic and translators do not predominantly rely on literal translation for acronyms, as these terms have specific meanings requiring nuanced translation methods. Additionally, the study reveals that translators favor a semantic approach over a communicative one. Finally, it verifies that the transference procedure aligns with a semantic approach, while the couplets procedure aligns with a communicative approach.

The findings underscore the complexities involved in acronym translation and the need for translators to employ a range of strategies to preserve the intended meaning accurately. The selection of an appropriate strategy is influenced by factors such as the familiarity of the acronym, the availability of equivalents in the target language, and the context in which the acronym is used. Effective acronym translation requires a deep understanding of both languages and their cultural contexts, as well as a nuanced approach to convey the precise meaning while maintaining conciseness and readability.

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