

The Impact of Using Paper Dictionaries in Exams on Iraqi Student Translators' Translation Quality

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31973/19aja098>



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Abstract:

Bilingual paper dictionaries are very useful in translation. However, they can also be tricky because they do not provide definitions and are restricted to indefinite equivalents. This means that when searching for a word in the source text, there are often some possible alternatives. The difficulty arises for those unaware of the adequate operation of the different equivalents in the target language, or how to associate them in terms of structures. This is the problem that many Iraqi student translators encounter, as they are not competent enough to decide the most acceptable alternative. Therefore, they spend much of the exam time translating individual words, i.e., their overall product lacks cohesiveness. The absence of a systemic approach they can follow in the exams can negatively contribute to the quality of their translations. The present paper addresses such a problem with special reference to literary discourse. Like AlFayez (2023), a hybrid approach is followed, one that allows the use of paper dictionaries, but with a crucial modification in the procedure; dictionaries are allowed only in the first third, not the first half of the exam allocated time. After that, dictionaries are withdrawn, and trainees have to complete their assignments depending on their knowledge. Results indicated that translations produced according to the first third of the allocated time approach are more cohesive, accurate, and stylistically appropriate than those relying on dictionaries for half the time. The findings underscore the significance of time management and efficient dictionary usage in achieving high-quality translations, emphasizing that excessive reliance on dictionaries can impede coherence and overall translation quality.

Keywords: *equivalents ,literary discourse, paper dictionaries, student translators, translation quality,*

I. Introduction

It is essential for translation students to use dictionaries during exams. While some scholars agree that dictionary use impacts translation quality, others argue that it disrupts coherence, and some more believe it increases accuracy. The quality of a translated text produced using paper dictionaries is influenced by several factors, time is one of the most crucial. Students can either utilize their time effectively to achieve satisfactory outcomes or fail to do so, resulting in suboptimal translations. As the saying goes, "Time is like a sword; if you do not cut it, it will cut you."

House defines translation as "the replacement of a text in the source language by a semantically and pragmatically equivalent text in the target language" (House, 2015: 31). Thus, the quality of the target text is central to this definition. Therefore, translation is an essential process in today's world, but there are certain obstacles that can weaken its effectiveness. When comparing a translated text to its original, one may notice numerous common disruptions, including grammatical errors, issues with linguistic rules, and even discrepancies in semantic and pragmatic meaning. It is important to note that the dictionary is one of the most crucial tools in the translation process, whether used during translation itself or in exams. A dictionary helps students understand terms that may be difficult for them.

Some researchers link the use of dictionaries during exams to higher translation quality. However, others argue that using half of the exam time for dictionary consultation can negatively impact the quality of the target text, as it might lead to time wastage. This forms the core problem of the research: does using the dictionary for half of the exam time affect the quality of the translation?

1. Review of Related Literature

Studies exploring the relationship between dictionary use and the quality of translation exam texts are limited. Findings from these studies have been inconsistent; some show little to no effect, while others demonstrate a positive impact on accuracy. To fully understand the link between effective dictionary use in translation exams and the time spent using them, further research is needed. This research could inform universities and colleges on whether allowing students to use paper dictionaries half of the exam time, or perhaps 30%, would be sufficient to produce a well-translated text.

Krings (1986) identifies three essential processes for achieving coherent translation. First, the translator reads the text and notes potential issues. Second, using dictionaries, the translator creates the translation. Finally, the translator reviews and refines the target text (TT). This suggests that in order to achieve coherence, the translator must allocate adequate time for revising the final TT. If students spend excessive time translating each word separately without dedicating sufficient time to editing and reviewing the translation, the final outcome may not be as cohesive or accurate. In contrast, intelligent use of dictionaries, along with adequate time for revision, would yield a more satisfactory translation.

A common mistake that many students make when translating for exams is over-relying on dictionaries. Students should not solely depend on dictionaries but instead use their own memory to recall meanings they already know. Many students waste valuable time looking up words they are already familiar with. This can lead to time pressure and reduced focus on the overall quality of the translation. If students allow exam stress and time constraints to distract them, they may overlook the importance of producing a text that readers can easily understand. This, in turn, affects the first step in Krings' process and impacts the final quality of the TT.

Mackintosh (1998) conducts an empirical study on the use of dictionaries by translation students translating from a foreign language (L2) into their native language (L1). He finds that students tend to use dictionaries during translation rather than beforehand, a practice not favoured by teachers and experienced translators. Therefore, several translation educators, including Delisle (1988) and Roberts (1992), recommend that students first read the text and then consult a dictionary to improve their understanding and help select appropriate translation strategies.

Al-Musawi (2014) emphasizes that the main goal of translation is to convey the correct meaning of a word or sentence in a pragmatic, linguistic, and semantic way. When done effectively, translation achieves its purpose, producing a coherent and unified TT. The coherence and cohesiveness of a text can also be influenced by grammatical differences between languages, such as between English and Arabic. This highlights the importance of the translator being aware of such differences and taking the time necessary to ensure the translated text maintains its coherence. If students do not manage their time well while using paper dictionaries, the resulting translation may suffer in terms of grammatical structure, coherence, and cohesion.

2. The Impact of Using Dictionaries on Translation Quality

It is commonly agreed on that in translation, the content of one language should be transparently conveyed in another. The translator's task goes beyond simply transferring words from the source language to the target language; they must also ensure that their rendering captures the meaning and intent behind the original message (Cronin, 2003). To achieve this, the translator's language knowledge and other translational skills are essential. For example, they may rely heavily on memory to perform the assigned tasks, but this approach carries a significant risk—the limitations of one's memory capacity (Gile, 1999). Therefore, translators need various tools to effectively complete their work. One of the most important of these is the dictionary, which plays a crucial role in the translation process. Dictionaries, in their various forms, are essential tools and valuable resources.

Nevertheless, when evaluating the importance of dictionaries in translation exams, it becomes apparent that their contribution to the total quality of the assignment depends on various factors, the most important of which is time management (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997; Mossop, 2001). However, their use under time pressure introduces both benefits and challenges. On the one hand, they allow the translator to verify word meanings, identify synonyms, and ensure correct translation of technical terms. This enhances accuracy, especially when dealing with complex or specialized vocabulary. On the other hand, when time is limited, there is a temptation to over-rely on the dictionary. This can result in interruptions to the translation process, reducing overall efficiency. Frequent dictionary consultation can lead to delays, which is detrimental under time constraints. That is to say, while dictionaries can significantly improve accuracy, excessive reliance on them can slow down the process, leading to missed deadlines or/and diminished quality. Translators must find ways to efficiently manage their time, prioritize tasks, and use resources wisely to ensure their translation is both accurate and fluent (Munday, 2016). By mastering strategies such as skimming, focusing on contextual understanding within the first-third of the exam allocated time, which is the approach adopted by the present study, translators can overcome time pressure while maintaining high standards of quality.

3. Research Methodology

As stated above, the study tries to prove that time management in translation exams plays a pivotal role in improving translation quality, especially when dictionaries are used within the first-third of the exam time. To gauge the contribution of such approach, thirty undergraduate (fourth year morning) students from the Department of Translation / the University of Basrah/ the academic year 2024-2025 are invited to participate. As the students are officially alphabetically organized and divided into three sections, the first ten of each section are selected wherein variables such as age and sex are excluded. The sample the participants are asked to translate consists of excerpts taken from Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, a famous novel that enables the author to receive the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954 and is instantly integrated into the curriculum of many Iraqi Departments of English.

With the kind approval and assistance of the Literary Translation Tutor, the participants are prepared to undergo a voluntary exam on 27 November 2024. They are asked to translate short excerpts from the sample into Arabic using paper dictionaries within three hours. They are divided into two equal groups, each group consists of fifteen. The participants of the first group (**Group A**) are informed to use the dictionaries they have brought from home or borrowed from the library for ninety minutes, i.e., half of the exam time. On the other hand, the participants of the second group (**Group B**) are asked to use dictionaries for sixty minutes, i.e., one-third of the exam time.

4. Results and Discussion

After the finish of exam, the collected answer sheets of each group are kept separately. The research, an instructor with a Ph.D. in translation and has twenty-years of academic teaching experience, started to mark the errors of each participant. Al Fayez's (2023) error typology is adopted, as it has proved its productivity in English/Arabic language error analysis (although some subtypes are excluded because of their marginal contribution to the present). These errors are summarized in Table (1) & (2) below and mainly consist of groups: meaning transfer errors such as terminology, omission, edition, meaning shift, cohesion, and verb tense, and mechanical errors such as punctuation (including spelling).

Table (1) : Errors Identified in Group A Answer Sheet

Error Type	Participant Number															Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Terminology	7	7	6	6	6	7	5	6	5	5	6	5	5	6	7	89
Omission	5	6	5	6	6	5	5	6	5	5	6	5	5	6	6	82
Addition	5	4	4	5	4	3	4	5	5	6	4	4	4	3	4	64
Meaning Shift	11	9	19	9	8	7	9	10	11	9	8	8	7	10	11	125
Verb Tense	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	0	2	2	2	1	22
Cohesion	3	2	4	5	5	6	5	6	6	5	7	5	6	7	5	77
Syntax	4	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	0	2	1	0	2	2	1	28
Punctuation	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	26
Collocation	5	5	4	4	4	5	6	4	5	4	5	6	6	4	4	71

Table (2): Errors Identified in Group B Answer Sheet

Error Type	Participant Number															Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Terminology	4	5	3	2	2	3	4	5	3	2	2	4	3	4	2	48
Omission	3	1	2	2	3	1	3	4	4	3	3	4	2	2	1	38
Addition	2	3	2	3	2	0	3	2	3	2	1	3	1	2	0	29
Meaning Shift	6	4	3	2	1	0	2	3	2	1	0	2	1	1	2	30
Verb Tense	2	1	1	1	2	0	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	0	18
Cohesion	3	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	15
Syntax	5	3	2	2	2	1	0	0	2	2	1	0	1	2	0	24
Punctuation	4	3	2	2	1	2	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	21
Collocation	4	5	3	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	18

Undeniably, all participants' versions contain errors, which is very likely as they are still trainee translators. In this respect, the investigation of the factors that impede producing error-free versions and other related aspects is out of the scope of the present study and is a very fresh area for further examination. As we have already hinted, the current focus is on the strategic use of dictionaries in exams. Hence, an in-depth analysis of the participants' answer sheets reveals significant differences between the translations of each group, especially in meaning-related variables such as terminology, meaning shifts, cohesion, and collocation, while there is no insightful change in grammar-related aspects such as verb tense, syntax, and punctuation (see Table (3)). On the one hand, Group A participants, i.e., students who have used the dictionary for half the exam time are distracted by the availability of the dictionary for too long. They seem to have looked up even for words they already know due to anxiety about the time limit. They translate sentence by sentence, one at a time. This translation approach has resulted in increasing the quantity of errors leading to weak, disconnected texts that are not appealing to readers. On the other hand, Group B participants, i.e., students who have used the dictionary for one-third of the time, understood the risk of being distracted by the dictionary and not managing their time properly. Therefore, they identified unfamiliar words, set the dictionary aside, and focused on translating the text. Their translations are more cohesive, with a hint of literary sensitivity for those who enjoy literature. These translations have lesser errors, and the reader could easily understand the text's message and the author's intent. The overall results reflect the significance of adopting and employing the third of the time exam dictionary-based approach as it has decreased the percentage of committed errors to 44.019 %, the most apparent of which are cohesion (62.391 %), meaning shift (61.290 %) and collocation (59.550).

Table (3): Comparison between the Total Translation Errors Identified in the Participants' Answer Sheets

Error Type	Group A Errors	Group B Errors	Both Groups Errors	Mean Difference	Percentage of Improvement
Terminology	89	48	137	41	29.927
Omission	82	38	120	44	36.666
Addition	64	29	93	35	37.634
Meaning Shift	125	30	155	95	61.290
Verb Tense	22	18	40	4	10.000
Cohesion	77	15	92	62	62.391
Syntax	28	24	52	4	7.692
Punctuation	26	21	47	5	10.638
Collocation	71	18	89	53	59.550
Total Errors	584	227	811	357	44.019

Time management is a crucial factor in translation. If a student can manage time properly, pay attention to the text's meaning and the cultural differences between the two languages, adhere to spelling and grammar rules, and avoid literal translation while adding a touch of literary flair through continuous exposure to literature, the results will be impressive and satisfying for both the student and the reader. However, if time is not managed effectively, the translation will be weak in style, lack fluency, devoid of literary sensitivity, overly literal, and full of linguistic errors and inconsistencies that make it unappealing to read. Clear evidence on the impact of lessening the time of dictionary-reliance can be seen in the following table which indicates sample translations taken from Participant no. 1 from Group A and Participant no. 1 from Group B answer sheets. Only the second translation gives the reader the impression that it was done by a professional as the student conveys the importance of understanding the knowledge that a translator must have when translating a literary text. It seems that s/he started the exam by quickly reading the original text to understand its purpose, the writer's intention, and the cultural differences between the two languages.

Table (4): Sample Translations taken from the Participants' Answer Sheets

Source Text (Hemingway,1952 ,p.10)	Group A Sample Translation	Group B Sample Translation
<p>Sometimes someone would speak in a boat. But most of the boats were silent except for the dip of the oars.</p> <p>They spread apart after they were out of the mouth of the harbour and each one headed for the part of the ocean where he hoped to find fish. The old man Knew he was going far out and he left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into the clean early morning smell of the ocean.</p> <p>He saw the phosphorescence of the Gulf weed in the water as he rowed over the part of the ocean that the fishermen called the great well. Because there was a sudden deep of seven hundred fathoms where all sorts of fish congregated because of the Swirl the current made against the steep walls of the floor of the ocean.</p> <p>Here there were concentrations of shrimp and bait fish and sometimes schools of squid in the deepest holes and these rose close to the surface at night where all the wandering fish fed on them.</p>	<p>أحياناً شخص يتكلم في قارب. لكن معظم القوارب كان صامت فقط ما عدا صوت غمس المجاديف. بعد ما خرجوا من فم الميناء تفرقوا وكل واحد راح إلى جزء من البحر الذي هو يتوقع أن يجد فيه السمك. الرجل العجوز كان يعرف أنه يذهب بعيداً، وترك وراءه رائحة اليابسة وبدأ يجذّف نحو رائحة الصباح النقية للبحر.</p> <p>هو رأى التوهج الفسفوري لأعشاب الخليج في الماء لما كان يجذّف فوق المكان الذي الصيادين يسمونه البئر الكبير لأن هناك كان في هبوط فجأة بعمق سبعمائة قامة حيث تتجمع كل أنواع السمك بسبب دوامة التيار الذي تصدم جدران قاع البحر. هناك كانت توجد كميات كثيرة من الروبيان وسمك الطعم وأحياناً مجموعات من الحبار في الثقوب العميقة، التي تصعد فوق قريب من السطح في الليل وتأتي الأسماك المتجولة لتأكلها.</p>	<p>أحياناً، كان الصمت يلف القوارب وهي تشق طريقها عبر المياه الهادئة، لا يقطعه سوى همسات المجاديف وهي تغمس في البحر برفق. وبعد أن تجاوزت القوارب فم الميناء، تفرقت، كلّ منها تمضي إلى أفق بعيد، حيث يأمل كل صياد أن يعثر على رزقه من الأسماك. أما الرجل العجوز، فكان يعلم أن رحلته ستأخذه بعيداً، فودّع رائحة الأرض وجذّف إلى حيث النقاء المنعش لهواء الصباح القادم من قلب المحيط.</p> <p>بينما يجذّف، لاح له بريق فسفوري ينبعث من أعشاب الخليج البحرية المتمايلة تحت سطح الماء. كان يعبر فوق بقعة يطلق عليها الصيادون "البئر العظيم"، حيث يهوي قاع البحر فجأة إلى عمق سحيق يبلغ سبعمائة قامة. هنا، تلتفت التيارات الدوامية حول الجدران الحادة للهاوية، مجتذبة إليها أسراباً من الأسماك والروبيان وقطعاناً من الحبار، التي تصعد من أعماقها المظلمة إلى السطح في جنح الليل، لتكون وليمة للأسماك الجائعة المتجولة.</p>

5. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that strategic use of paper dictionaries during translation exams can significantly influence the quality of translated texts. Allowing students to use dictionaries for one-third of the exam time has led to better translation outcomes, as students focused on understanding and conveying the text's overall meaning rather than translating word-by-word. On the contrary, excessive dictionary reliance distracted students, resulting in disjointed translations with errors. Effective time management, awareness of cultural nuances and the ability to balance dictionary use with linguistic intuition are crucial for producing high-quality translations, so yes using dictionaries for a specific time can effect on the translation quality. In light of the above findings, and to improve the status quo of trainee translators' outcomes during exams, the study highly calls for the following steps:

1. Limited Dictionary Usage: Iraqi Departments of Translation should encourage students to restrict dictionary use to essential terms rather than prolonged reliance, advocating for a maximum of one-third of exam time.
2. Time Management Training: Translation curriculum designers should incorporate modules into the curriculum that enhance students' time management skills during translation tasks.
3. Cultural and Stylistic Sensitivity: The curriculum designers should also offer courses that help students appreciate cultural nuances and develop a stylistic flair for literary translations.
4. Contextual Practice: Translation teachers/ trainers should promote exercises that emphasize understanding the text as a whole rather than resorting for word-by-word translation.
5. Exam Guidelines: Universities should establish clear guidelines on dictionary use during exams, aligning with findings that prioritize quality over duration.

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أثر استخدام القواميس الورقية في الامتحانات في جودة الترجمة لدى الطلبة المترجمين العراقيين

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المستخلص

تعدُّ القواميس الورقية ثنائية اللغة مفيدة جدًا في عملية الترجمة لكنها ممكن ان تولد بعض الصعوبة، لأنها لا توفر تعريفات وتقتصر على مكافئات غير محددة. وهذا يعني أنه عند البحث عن كلمة معينة، غالبًا ما تكون هناك بعض البدائل الممكنة. وتتولد الصعوبة لدى أولئك الذين لا يمتلكون خبرة في استخدام المكافآت المختلفة في اللغة المستهدفة، أو كيفية ربطها بالسياق. وهذه هي المشكلة التي يواجهها العديد من الطلبة المترجمين في اقسام الترجمة في الجامعات العراقية لأنهم ليسوا مؤهلين بما يكفي لتحديد البديل الأكثر قبولًا. لذلك، فإنهم يستهلكون الكثير من وقت الامتحان بالتركيز على ترجمة الكلمات الفردية، أي أن عملهم الإجمالي يفتقر إلى التماسك. إذ يمكن أن يسهم هذا الافتقار إلى النهج النظامي لتصفح واستخدام القاموس المتبع في الامتحانات سلبيًا على جودة ترجماتهم.

تتناول الدراسة قيد البحث مثل هكذا مشكلة وخصوصا عند ترجمة خاصة الخطاب الأدبي. كما هو الحال في الدراسة التي أنجزتها AIFayez (2023)، تشجع دراستنا على اتباع نهج هجين، وهو النهج الذي يسمح باستخدام القواميس الورقية، ولكن مع تعديل مفيد في الإجراء؛ لا يسمح باستخدام القواميس إلا في الثلث الأول -وليس النصف الأول- من الوقت المخصص للامتحان. وبعد ذلك، تُسحب القواميس ويتعين على الطلاب إكمال إجاباتهم اعتمادًا على معرفتهم. وتوصلت النتائج إلى أن الترجمات التي تم إنتاجها في ثلث الوقت المخصص لاستخدام القواميس كانت أكثر تماسكًا ودقة وملاءمة أسلوبياً مقارنة بتلك التي تعتمد على القواميس لنصف الوقت. وتؤكد النتائج على أهمية إدارة الوقت والاستخدام الفعال للقواميس في تحقيق ترجمات عالية الجودة، مؤكدة أن الاعتماد المفرط على القواميس يمكن أن يعيق التماسك وجودة الترجمة بشكل عام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القواميس الورقية، الطلبة المترجمون، نوعية الترجمة، الخطاب الأدبي.