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Translation Quality Assessment of Steve Harvey Talk Show's Translations: A Case Study

¹ Mahmoud Mamdouh Baker Nassar, ² Omar Mohammad Bani Mofarrej
^{1,2} Jordanian Ministry of Education, Jordan

Corresponding Author: Mahmoud Mamdouh Baker Nassar

Abstract

The present study is an attempt to examine and assess the quality of various translations of spoken discourse in media, namely in Steve Harvey's talk show "Ask Steve". Following Assafi (2011), the researchers analyzed a large number of YouTube videos translated into Arabic. The researchers found that there were several problems and fatal translation

errors the translators made. These included: The lack of accuracy in most of the cases, the lack of grammaticality and acceptability, wrong choice of diction, and problems in idiom comprehension. For each mistranslated expression, the researchers suggested two possible translations, one in Standard Arabic and the other in Egyptian Arabic.

Keywords: Acceptability, Assessment, Steve, Translation

1. Introduction: Preliminary Remarks

Language is claimed to be an indispensable social tool that facilitates human interaction. As people communicate, they send and receive messages in a way that suits the norms, values, and conventions of a particular society. However, the problem in communication is magnified when cross-cultural interaction is encountered. When interlocutors from two different languages need to communicate, awareness of social norms and values as well as politeness routines is badly needed to avoid conflict and misunderstanding and to achieve successful communicative interaction. This gave rise to the need for a means that facilitates cross-cultural communication; i.e. translation of written and/or spoken texts. In this connection, House (2015: 4) ^[8] maintains that "translation is not only a linguistic act, it is also an act of communication across cultures".

Farghal and Shunnaq (2011: 2) define translation as "a process for transferring meaning from one language to another". In other words, it involves conveying the intended meaning of the original text allowing for the form to be changed due to linguistic as well as cultural differences between the source and the target language. Further, House (2015: 23) ^[8] claims that translation "is the replacement of a text in the source language by a semantically and pragmatically equivalent text in the target language". These two definitions set clear the idea that translators may opt to change the form of the text, but must keep the meaning, and message, unchanged.

Translation, as an essential tool for cross-cultural communication, is a human activity that has been performed for thousands of years. However, the assumption that anyone who has a good command of two distinct languages could perfectly be able to produce adequate translation has been falsified by theoretical as well as empirical research. Translation requires more than just linguistic proficiency in two languages. Instead, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic knowledge as well as cultural knowledge are among the requirements a translator should possess to produce adequate translation. The translator works as a mediator who simplifies and facilitates the intended message. In this connection, Gerding-Salas (2000) ^[6] maintains that a translator plays an essential role as a cross-cultural transmitter when trying to interpret concepts in the target language as faithfully and accurately as possible.

It may be argued that the main reason behind producing influential, awkward target text is the translator's perception that to be faithful to the source language text, is to stick to the source language words and grammar. According to Savory (1957: 57) ^[11], "The reason for the advocacy of faithfulness is that the translator has never allowed himself to forget that he is a translator. His job is to act as a bridge or channel between the mind of the author and the minds of his readers". Furthermore, many scholars (Halliday, 1964; Baker, 1992; Bassnett, 2014) ^[7, 1, 2] suggest that languages are different; they describe their surroundings and reality in various ways. A particular word in one language does not mean the same or even exist in some other languages. Particular structure may be used for different functions in different languages although the words of this structure are

translatable in both languages.

2. The Present Paper

In this paper, the researchers argue that cultural knowledge is crucial for a successful translation of the source text, English in our case and that it is one of the most important factors that determine the appropriateness of the translation. This could be because all cultures utilize their linguistic and nonlinguistic behavior, to follow their syntactic, semantic, and/or pragmatic structures, in a way that suits their cultural values and norms.

Translation is not an easy task, especially when it comes to translating spoken language like those used in talk shows. One of the most influential talk shows is "Ask Steve". Spoken discourse tends to be a fast "interactive, informal, and unplanned way of communication" (Degand and Bergen, 2016: 47). Thus, since *Ask Steve* is a talk show that has spontaneous questions and responses, rather than planned ones, it is reasonable to assume that there is always a space for dialect translations rather than standard translations. However, looking at the various videos on YouTube, one notices that most translations are formal.

The present study, therefore, aims at examining media translation into Arabic from a translation assessment perspective. The researchers followed Assafi's (2011) proposed Tri-Criterion Assessment to diagnose losses or errors in translations. Assafi's (2011) approach to quality assessment stems from three constituent phases that are related to the following parameters of assessment: 1. Accuracy, which can be checked in terms of comprehension and equivalence; 2. the language of the target text where losses can be found in punctuation and spelling, grammaticality and acceptability, and choice of diction; and finally, literariness.

3. Methods

3.1 Material

The present study aims to investigate strategies translators use when attempting to translate spoken discourse. Steve Harvey's talk show "Ask Steve" is taken as a case study. The material for the present paper was short videos from YouTube; each is about three minutes long. These videos were translated by different translators.

3.2 Procedure

The examples provided in the analysis are taken from four videos only. Twenty-four errors were detected, and then analyzed based on Assafi's (2011) proposed Tri-Criterion Assessment. We started our analysis by providing readers with a brief description of the video to be analyzed, followed by the extracted examples that contain the erroneous utterance(s), and then an analysis of the errors and why they are not appropriate translations. After analyzing the errors, we suggested some modifications and corrections for each error. At the end of the analysis of each example, we suggested two translations, one in Standard Arabic and the other in Egyptian Arabic that we think better describe each context.

The researchers first watched a large number of YouTube videos translated into Arabic. Then, they looked for strategies adopted by translators to translate English spoken language into Arabic. The videos were then analyzed to assess the quality of the translations. When we analyzed the videos, we were looking for the translator's ability to

comprehend the source text, which will certainly result in appropriate translations. It is worth noting that each video may have more than one strategy. However, we focused only on one strategy at a time. This is, of course, for the sake of emphasis and economy as it may take the reader away from the target strategy. So, we opt for one strategy for each video to make the reader a little more focused. Nevertheless, in some cases, as will be seen in some videos, we were obliged to talk about more than one strategy due to the importance of a given situation.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The present study is an attempt to provide readers with an analysis of some problematic issues concerning translations of spoken discourse from a translation assessment perspective. This section deals with various strategies adopted by translators in trying to manage the linguistic behavior of Steve Harvey and his guests on Steve's talk show.

4.1 Literal Translation

The first strategy that translators of Steve's videos follow is *the literal translation*; i.e. word-for-word translation. Literal translation can be defined as the rendering of text from one language to another one word at a time with or without conveying the sense of the original whole. We argue that, in many cases, literal translation distorts both the structure and the meaning of the source text, and does not express the intended message appropriately simply because a translator usually encounters idiomatic expressions that cannot be translated literally, or he/she may encounter some cultural issues that are impossible to be translated into the target language. This goes in line with Assafi (2016: 6) who maintains that this kind of literal translation is "awkward, unusual, unintelligible and sometimes even unreadable because literalism distorts the sense and the syntax of the original, impedes the translator's work and stifles her/his creativity". This is not to deny that literal translation is possible, acceptable, and appropriate in many cases.

In the first video, Steve is talking to three young men who have problems dating and who find it difficult to talk to girls. He is trying to understand where the problem is to be able to give them suitable advice that would help them overcome the problem. The example translations are given first, and then the discussion follows so that the problematic issues can be raised by the authors of the present paper. Please, notice that the underlined Arabic expressions are the mistranslated ones.

Example 1:		
Steve	What would you say is your biggest problem when it comes to dating?	ما الذي ستقول له هو أكبر مشكلتك عندما يتعلق الأمر بالتواعد؟
Albert	I don't understand the protocol of women of dating I feel like I'm a Samsung trying to get into an iPhone plug. I just don't understand it.	: أنا لا أفهم بروتوكول النساء من المواعدة. أشعر كأنني "سامسونج" تحاول الوصول إلى قابس "الآيفون". أنا لا أفهم ذلك.
Steve	You're a Samsung trying to get into iPhone plug?	هل تحاول سامسونج الوصول إلى Phone قابس

Generally, we argue that the overuse of Standard Arabic is problematic when translating talk shows as it indicates that the discussion is formal, which is not the case because talk shows are usually spontaneous and informal. In addition, when it comes to the translation itself, the underlined Arabic

translations have so many fatal errors. First of all, the translator tries to manage Steve's question in a literal way which distorts the structure of the overall translation. For example, the translator uses (ستقوله هو) which is a literal translation of (would you say), which is inaccurate. The problem, here, is that in Arabic the inflection (هو) is a pronoun that is attached to the verb, so no need to write the separate pronoun (هو) as it shows redundancy.

Further, the word (مشكلة) is also a literal translation that violates the Arabic conventions as it should be used in the plural form (مشاكل) in the given structure. We believe that if the translator would keep (مشكلة) in the singular form, he should have added the word (لديك) for the structure to be acceptable in Arabic. And finally, the word (التواعد) is never used in Standard Arabic. Instead, the word (المواعدة) should be used. In this respect, Assafi (2011:337) maintains that the bad choice of diction "gives rise to inappropriate, ambiguous and/or imprecise equivalents". Therefore, we believe that the translator was not successful in selecting the appropriate words for the proper context, which resulted in poor translation.

All the above-mentioned examples are examples of lexical errors which Farghal and Al-Hamy (2004)^[5] claim to be "a clear indication of a deficiency in the translator's lexical competence". Based on the above discussion, we would suggest the following Standard Arabic translations for Steve's question to Albert:

1.	ما الذي تعتبره أكبر مشاكلك فيما يتعلق بالمواعدة؟
2.	ما هي أكبر مشكلة لديك فيما يتعلق بالمواعدة؟

Or we may opt to translate the question using a dialect. We argue that the Arabic dialect that would be understandable in most Arab countries is the Egyptian dialect as it is widely spread and known all around the Arab world, so the following translation is suggested:

3. إيه هيا أكبر مشكلة عندك لما بتحب تواعد بنت؟

On the other hand, Albert tries to explain that he is usually unable to understand girls and how things go wrong with him when trying to date. So, he compares himself to a Samsung Smartphone that uses the wrong plug (that the iPhone's) to charge, which certainly does not fit. The problem with the translation is that it is misleading in the sense that the word "Samsung" is the name of a huge company that produces many electric devices including Smartphones.

Therefore, translating "Samsung" literally as "سامسونج" gives the impression that the company itself is trying to get the plug that is produced by the "iPhone" company. This does not reveal the intended message: Those things usually go wrong when Albert tries to understand girls, just like when one tries to use an iPhone mobile phone plug to charge a Samsung phone. We believe that the intended message can be managed by adding extra items to the text so that the Arabic reader will not get confused by the translation, so we suggest the following translation in which we add to the text:

أشعر وكأني هاتف من نوع سامسونج يحاول الاتصال باستخدام فيشة (قابس) هاتف من نوع آيفون.

Or we may opt for the dialectal translation using Egyptian Arabic which goes with the following lines:

بحس نفسي عامل زي موبايل سامسونج اللي يحاول يشحن بشاحن آيفون.

We claim that the translator was successful when he translated the intonation of Steve's reply (You are a Samsung trying to get into an iPhone plug?) To Albert in the form of a question. This kind of paralinguistic management is essential to translation. However, we believe that the translation itself is, again, misleading for the same above-mentioned reason.

Example 2:		
Steve	What about you Charlie?	ماذا عنك يا تشارلي؟
Charlie	I just I can't read girls I don't know what they're thinking and then I overthink what they may be thinking and it just goes south quickly.	أنا فقط لا أستطيع قراءة الفتيات. لا أعرف ماذا يفكرون. ثم أفكر فيما يفكرون به. وهو فقط يسير جنوبا سريعا.

Again, the literal translation is obvious when translating Steve's question to Charlie. However, we argue that the translation is acceptable as it goes right with the Arabic grammar rules and it does reveal the exact intended meaning. Nevertheless, we would suggest the following translation using Egyptian Arabic:

ستيف: إيه الوضع بالنسبة ليك يا تشارلي؟

The problem is clear in Charlie's response because the literal translation completely distorts the intended message at different levels. At the lexical level, Charlie is trying to explain his problem when dating, so he uses the word "read" which is translated literally as "قراءة". We claim that this is not suitable, though it might be acceptable. Instead, we claim that the Arabic word "أفهم" (understand) may be better in this context. In addition, Charlie utters the word "overthink" which is mistranslated as "أفكر" because it doesn't just mean to think; rather it means to think a lot about a certain topic.

At the morphological level, the translator fails to use the appropriate inflections when translating the words "they think", which was translated as "يفكرون". The problem here is that the inflection (ون) in the word (يفكرون) is always added to the verb to refer to masculine in Arabic. However, the translator uses this inflection to refer to feminine, which is, of course, not acceptable as it violates the Arabic grammar conventions. Assafi (2011:336) maintains that such lack of concord in gender is one of the errors in grammaticality and acceptability. Instead, the translator should have used the word "يفكرن" to better refer to females.

At the Semantic level, the problem is magnified when Charlie uses figurative language in his answer to Steve's question; he uses the idiom *it goes south quickly*, which means that things don't go the right way or they go wrong. However, the translator failed to translate the intended message appropriately, so he opted for the literal translation using the Arabic translation (وهو فقط يسير جنوبا سريعا). which is completely wrong as it does not reveal the exact idea Charlie is trying to express. Therefore, we suggest the following Standard Arabic translation:

تشارلي: مشكلتي أنني لا أستطيع فهم الفتيات. لا أعرف بماذا أفكرن.
و أحيانا أبالغ في التفكير فيما قد يفكرن به لذلك تسوء الأمور سريعا.

Or we may translate it into Egyptian Arabic:

تشارلي: المشكلة اني ما بندرش افهم البنات بفكروا ازاي. وبفكر
كتبيير اوي همه بفكروا في ايه, عشان كدة الأمور بتتلخبط في
بعضيها.

The third question was directed to Fletcher. Steve's question was translated literally in an acceptable way. However, Fletcher's response was mistranslated, as the example below shows:

Example 3:		
Steve	What about you Fletcher?	ماذا عنك يا فليتشر؟
Fletcher	Kind of like Charlie I overthink things too and then I just get nervous sometimes I probably just can be a better listener than talk too much maybe and then other than that I'm just getting really shy and nervous.	نوع من مثل تشارلي, أنا أفكر في الأشياء أيضا. ثم أشعر بالتوتر الشديد. في بعض الأحيان ربما أكون مستمعا أفضل أنا أتحدث كثيرا ربما, ثم بخلاف ذلك, أنا فقط خجول, عصبى.

The third example shows how literal translation can, in many cases, distort the intended meaning. Fletcher's response is full of misinterpretations at various levels. Translating the word "overthink" as "أفكر" is a mistake that should be corrected. Therefore, we think that the expression "أبالغ في التفكير" is better as it reveals Fletcher's worries and nervousness when talking to girls. Further, the use of "نوع من" is also neither appropriate nor acceptable. Instead, the utterance "kind of like" is better translated as "تقريبا مثل" or "زي تشارلي" in Egyptian Arabic. Fletcher is trying to tell Steve that he finds it difficult to initiate speeches with girls and that he sometimes prefers listening to speaking, which turns his dates into a complete failure. The problem is that the translator failed to establish the intended meaning in a way that suits the Arabic structure, so he mistranslated the utterance.

4.2 Avoidance

Another strategy that some translators of spoken discourse adopt is that of *avoidance*, which can be achieved through three various ways: A) completely ignoring some items in the original text, b) replacing a certain word or expression with another one more culturally appropriate, or c) by suppression which is the avoidance of translation by using something similar. We argue that this could be either because the translators could not find an equivalence, or it could be the case that the translators do not understand what is being said.

In the following video, a female is asking Steve for advice on how to understand her husband's reactions to her actions. The thing is that she bought a two-thousand pair of shoes, which her husband was not satisfied with. She is trying to convince Steve and the audience that her husband's reactions were not good and confused her. The underlined expressions show that the translator was not successful in translating the underlined idiomatic expression in (1) below. And that he/she completely ignored what, we think, is an important part of the conversation; that her husband never says "No" to things she would ask for.

The following example illustrates:

Example 4:	
Okay so I've been married for seven years next week I love my husband to death (1) <i>he spoils me rotten</i> , but he confuses me sometimes (2) <i>how he responds to things that I do</i> so I'll give you an example.	حسنا اذا انا متزوجة منذ سبعة أعوام الاسبوع القادم. أحب زوجي كثيرا وهو يحب روتيني. لكنه في بعض المرات يقوم بتشويشي (.....) لذلك سأعطيك مثالا.

As can be seen from example (4) above, the translator completely ignores the expression in (2) [*at how he responds to things that I do*]. The dots (.....) in the Arabic translation illustrate that. We claim that the translator may opt for this choice because they think that the underlined utterance does not change or affect the meaning. However, we believe that it does affect the meaning of the overall sentence simply because the mistranslated idiom *he spoils me rotten*, which we will discuss later, explains where the confusion comes from. The wife is confused because her husband gives her anything she wants or asks for, but this time he is, kind of, complaining about the shoes' price. To the wife, this is some kind of contradiction; i.e. how would one say: Do whatever you want, and then criticize what you do?

This kind of pragmatic knowledge that the translator should have noticed is important to the appropriateness of the translation. House (2015: 22) [8] clearly states that "pragmatics relates to the correlation between linguistic units and their user(s) in a given communicative situation". Therefore, we claim that ignoring this part of the conversation is because the translator was not able to infer the relationship between the whole text and the ignored part of the source text. Based on the above analysis, we would suggest the following translation for the sentence:

Standard Arabic	لكنه في بعض المرات يقوم بتشويشي بردة فعله على أفعالي.
Egyptian Arabic	بس هو أحيانا يلخبطني بردة فعله ع الي بعمله.

Although we were only interested in talking about the strategy of *Avoidance*, we found ourselves obliged to talk about a fatal mistranslation in this video. This is when the translator mistranslated the utterance [*he spoils me rotten*] in (1) above as (وهو يحب روتيني). This expression is an idiom that simply means: *To give somebody everything they want or ask for*. However, the translator was not able to understand the idiom correctly and, therefore, mistranslated it. In this respect, Farghal (2004: 274) [5] maintains that such mistranslation will definitely "cause the target reader to pause and think hard in an attempt to reconstruct the linguistic reality in terms of form and/or content".

The problem with mistranslating this idiom is that it does not reveal the reason why the wife is that much confused. She is confused simply because her husband loves her so much and gives her everything she wants, but he sometimes complains about her actions, which confuses her. We believe that this particular idiom can be better translated as (وهو لا يرفض لي طلبا) or (وهو يعطينيكل ما أريد) in Standard Arabic and as (وهو دايما بيديني (بيعملي) الي انا عاوزاه) in Egyptian Arabic. We argue that this translation of the idiom is more appropriate as it shows where the confusion comes from. This way, the reader will be able to infer that the confusion comes from the relationship between the expressions and the users in this specific situation.

4.3 Comment Insertion

The third and last strategy that the translators opt for is that of *comment insertion*. Comment insertion in translation is a strategy in which the translator attempts to add to the form and content of the original text (source text) to make it better understandable. Usually, the target text bears a strong structural resemblance to the source text and footnotes or bracketing are used to allow the readers to gain access to the language and customs of the source culture.

In the following video, a young female is telling Steve that she is fond of the British and Australian accents and that she gets attracted to young people who have these accents. She also comments on how American young people lack this "sexy" accent. Steve, in his reply, tries to imitate the British accent to please the questioner. At this point, the translator inserted some comments to clarify the situation. The following examples illustrate the idea:

Example 5		
Girl	I travel a lot internationally. I meet a lot of great guys over there with really sexy accents.	اسافر كثيرا دوليا. اقابل الكثير من الشبان الرائعين مع لهجة مثيرة جدا.
Steve	What type of acceptance?	ما نوع اللهجة؟
	British, Australian.....	اللهجة البريطانية، اللهجة الاسترالية.
At this point, Steve tries to speak with a British accent:		
Steve	Hello there how are you today?	1. (يططق على اللهجة البريطانية) مرحبا هناك كيف حالك اليوم
	Be British, but say hood stuff. I dare say "I sure would love some pork rinds".	كن بريطانيا وقل كلمات من الاحياء الفقيرة. اود ان اقول اود الكثير من النوك راينز. 2. (اسم اكلة).

The above examples show instances of comment insertion in the Arabic translation of the source text. The first example is the bracketed expression (يططق على اللهجة البريطانية). The problem with this expression is that it is a dialectal expression that is mainly used in the Gulf Area, more specifically in Saudi Arabia, whereas the whole translation is in Standard Arabic.

Further, this expression means that Steve Harvey starts to make fun of the British accent, which is not the case of course. This is simply because Steve was trying to speak with a British accent to please the girl as she loves the accent. However, since Steve is a comedian, he is funny when speaking in a British accent. So, we believe that the translator mistranslated or, say, misunderstood the pragmatic effect of the utterance and, thus, misinterpreted it. This translation is also problematic because not many Arabic speakers would understand it. We would suggest the following comment be inserted to better understand that Steve is just trying to please the girl:

Standard Arabic	ممازحا باللهجة البريطانية
Egyptian Arabic	بيهزر مع البنت باللهجة البريطانية

The other example (2) above is the name of a meal (pork rinds) that Steve mentioned when speaking using a British accent. We believe that the translator was successful when he inserted the comment (اسم اكلة) to clarify the English expression. Although the translator used a dialect, we think that the translation is appropriate and acceptable as it can be

easily understood by almost all native speakers of Arabic, irrespective of their origin.

5. Conclusion

The present paper is an attempt to analyze and assess three strategies for translating spoken discourse. Following Assafi (2011), we found that there are several translation errors or losses in the videos we analyzed like, for instance, accuracy, grammaticality, acceptability, choice of diction, and idiom comprehension. Take, for instance, the expression (they think) which was mistranslated as (يفكرون) in Arabic. This mismatch between the Arabic and the English expression is referred to as "lack of concord in gender" in Assafi (2011: 336). The mismatch originated from the fact that the English expression was used to describe how girls think. However, the Arabic translation indicates that the expression refers to males rather than females, which of course is not acceptable in Arabic; i.e. to use a feminine inflection to describe a masculine reference.

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