

**Error analysis as an effective  
procedure for improving translation  
product: Evidence from Egyptian EFL  
Prospective teachers**

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**Error analysis as an effective procedure for improving translation product: Evidence from Egyptian EFL Prospective teachers<sup>1</sup>**

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**Introduction:**

The valuable contribution translation can make to the national development maximizes the importance of attempting effective methods for its instruction (Abdel Rahim, 1998: 83). As a human activity that enables human beings to exchange ideas and thoughts (Badawi, 2008: 3), translation can be viewed as a complicated process requiring a thorough command of the source and target languages in terms of their syntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties, in addition to a great deal of creativity and imagination (Zenngin & Kacar, 2011: 275).

Nation (2003: 1-2) argues that L1 has a small but still important role to play in communicating meaning and content that could take place by means of translation. This role is important across all strands of the well balanced FL course in order to allow equal opportunities for learning. Kern (1994) adds that mental translation during L2 reading may facilitate the generation and conservation of meaning by allowing the reader to represent portions of L2 text that exceed cognitive limits in a familiar, memory-efficient form.

Translation activities in the classroom can thus help students better understand the influence of one language on the other because translation involves contrast, which enables them “to explore the potential of both languages, in terms of their strengths and weaknesses.” (Duff, 1992: 7)

In addition, Cumining (1990) and Uzawa (1994) report that language learners, when they write in an SL/FL, often

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compare and contrast L1 and L2, and translate/back-translate, consciously, in order to express what they really want to say. Accordingly, translation can be aimed at helping learners develop communicative skills and strategies, oral fluency and a skill of using the FL, creatively. Activities can be used which extend the skills of note, letter and essay writing, summarizing, paraphrase, simplification, etc. Conversely, the same activities can be used at a higher level of proficiency, to prevent undesirable avoidance strategies.

### **Error analysis:**

Before the 1960, when the behavioristic view point of language was the dominant one, learner errors were considered as something undesirable. With the appearance of the concept of “Universal Grammar” proposed by Chomsky in 1957 and his rationalistic claim that human beings have innate capacity which can guide them through a vast number of sentence generation

possibilities, cognitive approach instead of behavioristic viewpoint was emphasized by many scholars. The largest contribution of this new linguistic theory is the interest it raised from researchers into learners’ errors as a means of hypothesis formation. (Farrokh, 2011: 677).

Accordingly, a more favorable attitude has developed for error analysis that has been looked at as a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It is a comparison between the errors made in the Target Language (TL) and that TL itself. The interest in errors stems from the fact that they are believed to contain valuable information on the strategies that people use to acquire a language (Richards, 1992; Taylor, 1975; Dulay & Burt, 1974).

According to Corder, the “Father” of Error Analysis, (1974), error analysis has two objects: one theoretical and another applied. The theoretical object serves to elucidate what and how a learner learns when he studies a second/foreign language. Moreover, the applied object serves

to enable the learner to learn more efficiently by exploiting our knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes. The investigation of errors can be at the same time diagnostic and prognostic. It is diagnostic because it can tell us the learner's state of the language at a given point during the learning process and prognostic because it can tell course organizers to reorient language learning materials on the basis of the learners' current problems (Corder, 1984).

### **Problem of the study:**

As it represents an important classroom procedure that allows teachers to identify the degree to which students master the target language (English), error analysis is argued to have a significant role in improving students' translation performance and products. In light of this, the present study tries to investigate the effectiveness of error analysis as a procedure for improving EFL Prospective teachers' translation products. This problem will be tackled through answering the following two questions:

1. What are the frequent errors committed by EFL Prospective teachers during translation?
2. How does error analysis help improve EFL Prospective teachers' translation products

### **Review of literature:**

There has been a vast body of literature that investigated the various aspects of translation as well as translation instruction. Some studies focused on testing and evaluation in the field of translation (for example: El-Sheikh, 1990; Al-Banna, 1993; El Zeini, 1994; Aly, 1995; Gabr, 2001; Solhy, 2007). Another studies focused mainly on testing the effectiveness of given interventional techniques in an attempt to improve students' translation skills, as well as developing the teaching methods, materials, and curricula employed in teaching and/or learning translation (Abdel Rahim, 1998; Ayad, 1982; El-Shafie, 1992; Kamel, 1990; Massoud, 1995; Abdel Rahman, 1996; El-Sakran, 2002; Dadour, 2004).

As for analytical studies, Künzli (2003) investigated translation strategies and translation principles in technical translation. 20 participants were asked to translate a user guide from French into German and from French into Swedish, respectively. Data was carried out by means of TAPs and content analysis of certain linguistic features of technical texts. Results indicated that students often displayed uncertainty regarding translation principles, and conflict between the principles verbalized and those actually followed. Language-pair specific differences were mostly found in connection with translation strategies.

Farrokh (2011) investigated the Linguistic errors of Iranian translation trainees. 50 junior students of translation training programme were selected randomly to participate in the study. They were given 20 Persian sentences. For the analysis of errors “Corder's” taxonomy was used. The analysis indicated that the errors resulting from wrong selection of words, permutation and errors of incorrect use of tenses were the most frequent errors respectively.

Popescu (2013) identified the error patterns produced by EFL students in Business and Public Administration at an intermediate level of English language proficiency, who translate journalistic texts. The corpus under inquiry consisted of 30 students’ translated journalistic texts. The identified errors were classified into three main types: linguistic, comprehension and translation errors

Recently, Presada and Badea (2014) investigated effectiveness of error analysis within the translation classes attended by 40 students in Philology at Petroleum – Gas University of Ploiesti. The study has been developed on the basis of a theoretical framework (contrastive and error analysis) and an investigation of students’ achievements as regards their translation skills, the main aim being to identify the most frequent types of errors and their causes.

**Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of the present study is to demonstrate the effectiveness of error analysis as a procedure for improving EFL Prospective teachers' translation products.

**Participants of the Study:**

The student population of the present study is university female and male majors of English in the faculties of Education in Egypt. These students attend 30 Faculties Education (at Ministry of higher education, Al-Azhar, and Private Institutions). On average, they join these Faculties when they are 18 years old and finish their 4-year study when they are 22 years old. A sample of 17 students in two Faculties of Education (at Al-Azhar University, Cairo; and Damanhur University) took part in the present study for the quantitative data collection purposes.

**Procedure of data collection:**

Two translation tasks were developed: an Arabic-English task, and an English-Arabic task. The first consisted of thirteen Arabic sentences to be translated from Arabic into English, while the second involved an English paragraph to be translated into Arabic. The material of the Arabic-English task was taken from previous related studies, while the English-Arabic paragraph was extracted from the introductory chapter of Jonathan Lyons's (2012) book entitled "Islam through Western Eyes: From the Crusades to the War on Terrorism<sup>2</sup>". The tasks were administered in the university year 2013-214, to 17 students who also completed think aloud sessions. The participants completed the translation tasks on their own and alone, one by one separately. There was no limit time in order for the participants to complete the tasks. Printed monolingual and bilingual dictionaries (Longman, and Al-Mawred), as well as electronic dictionaries (Al-Wafi gold translator, and Al-Mawred Al-Qareeb) were made available to students, in

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<sup>2</sup> Lyons, Jonathan (2012). Islam through Western Eyes: From the Crusades to the War on Terrorism: Columbia University Press.

addition to providing computer and internet access. The translation tasks were validated by a jury of five experts in the field<sup>3</sup>.

### **Data Analysis:**

The researcher has developed, based on the literature (Corder, 1974, 1984; Taylor, 1975; Richards, 1992; Brown 1994), a Taxonomy for Error Analysis including the following categories and sub-categories: grammatical errors (prepositions, articles, reported speech, singular/plural, adjectives, relative clauses, irregular verbs, tenses, and possessive case), syntactic errors (coordination, sentence structure, nouns and pronouns, and word order), lexical errors (concerned with word choice), semantic errors, organizational errors (these related to claim/thesis, transition words, support, process, logical progression, and flow of ideas), and substance errors (mechanics: punctuation & capitalization and spelling).

### **Results and discussion:**

Seventeen students completed the translation tasks. Out of their final translated texts, the researcher could conduct the error analysis and collect the necessary data that would enable him identify the major problems and obstacles facing EFL students in translation products. The total number of errors found in the (13) sentences for the seventeen students was (291). The greatest percentage of errors are grammatical and substance errors (26% for each), followed by syntactic errors (18%), then semantic and organization errors (10% for each), and finally lexical errors (9%) (See table 4-8 for more detailing).

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Table (1) Frequency of errors

Error Category	Total no. of errors	Error sub-category	Number of Errors
Grammatical Errors	75	Prepositions/ Particles	19
		Articles	12
		Reported sp.	0
		Sing/Plural	9
		Adjectives	7
		Relative clauses	0
		Irregular verbs/	2
		Tenses (wrong tense) + omission of 3rd pers. "s" + agreement of tenses+	22
		Possessive case	4
Syntactic errors	53	Coordination	9
		Sentence structure	25
		Nouns & pronouns	5
		Word order	14
Lexical Errors	27	(word choice)	27
Semantic errors	30		30
Organization errors	29	(claim/thesis, transition words, support, process, logical progression, flow of ideas) + Discourse/Process	29
Substance errors	77	Punctuation	14
		Capitalization	10
		Spelling	53
Total	291		291

Results presented in table (4-8) show the different errors committed by students. These errors are divided into six categories, these are: grammatical errors, syntactic errors, lexical errors (concerned with word choice), semantic errors, organizational errors (these related to claim/thesis, transition words, support, process, logical progression, and flow of ideas), and substance errors (mechanics and spelling). The following is a more detailing analysis of these errors.

### **Grammatical errors:**

Grammatical errors relate to the standardized grammar system of the language. The total number of grammatical errors is (75), divided as the following (22) tenses errors, (19) in prepositions/particles, (12) in articles, (9) in singular/plural errors, (7) in adjectives, (2) in irregular verbs, and (4) errors in possessive case. The following is an analysis for some examples of these errors.

- Ex1: Reading books through their computers. (على حواسيبهم) => incorrect preposition
- Ex2: The purpose of this book is for assist graduates in the area of education). => incorrect preposition.

Prepositions pose a great difficulty for an EFL learner since there are various prepositions in English that have the same function. As a result, when students are not sure which preposition to use in a certain sentence, they often compare that sentence with its Arabic equivalence, giving a literal translation of that Arabic preposition in English. However, prepositions seldom have a one to one correspondence between English and Arabic. An Arabic preposition may be translated by several English prepositions while an English usage may have several Arabic translations.

- Ex3: at ?? fall of Communism (سقوط الشيوعية) => omission of the article in Arabic.
- Ex4: of the Islamic civilization (الحضارة الإسلامية) => use of article in Arabic.

In English, abstract words referring to ideas, attributes, or qualities are used without the article 'the' to refer to that idea or attribute, etc. which belongs to everybody or everything. In Arabic, however, such abstract words are preceded by a definite article equivalent to 'the' in English. Hence, errors pertaining to the misuse of the article 'the' occur.

- Ex5: So far this reasons (لهذا السبب) => wrong plural formation, in addition to incorrect translation for the singular word.

- Ex6: Good citizens knows his rights and duties ( يعرف (المواطن الصالح) => wrong plural formation.

In Arabic, the singular verb is put without any addition or modification. In English, on the contrary, there is an (S) added to the singular verb (in the present simple form).

- Ex7: I was loving with, Islamic of civilization ( الحضارة الإسلامية) => Adjective disagreement.

In Arabic, adjectives agree in number with the nouns they modify. They also come after the noun modified. As a result, agreement errors of this type occur in the English writings of students.

### **Syntactic Errors:**

Syntax errors occur when the text in a document being analyzed does not conform to the required structure defined by the grammar. They are chains of syntactic units that do not conform to the syntax of the source language. Syntax error detection is more complicated than lexical error detection because there is not only a need to make the best guess about what the problem might be, but it also needs to make the best guess about what the solution might be so it can provide meaningful error messages. It is an error due to missing colon, semicolon, parenthesis, etc. Syntax is the way in which we construct sentences by following principles and rules.

The total number of errors is (33), divided as the following coordination errors (9), sentence structure errors (25), using nouns and pronouns errors (5), and word order errors (14). The following are some examples these errors:

- Ex1: old Egypt of civilization (حضارة مصر القديمة) => incorrect sentence structure, coordination problem, as well as word order problem.
- Ex2: The test has finished (الاختبار أوشك على الانتهاء) => incorrect sentence structure, in correct use of passive voice.
- Ex3: In the past, It is said that Egypt is the gift of the Nile River (وقديماً قيل أن مصر هبة النيل). => Incorrect sentence

- structure; wrong verb form for standard English singular past tense: the verb (is) has to be in the past form.
- Ex4: The Egyptian family face (تواجه الأسرة المصرية) => singular/plural disagreement (wrong plural formation).
  - Ex5: Good citizens knows his rights and duties (يعرف (المواطن الصالح) => singular/plural disagreement (wrong plural formation), in addition to incorrect use of pronouns.
  - Ex6: human of civilization and longest age. (واحدة من أقدم الحضارات البشري) => incorrect sentence structure, plus a word order problem .
  - Ex7: Recently said that Egypt (وقديماً قيل أن مصر) => omission of the pronoun (it).
  - Ex8: I was and still love Islamic civilization (كنت ولا أزال) => wrong verb form for Standard English singular past tense.

### **Lexical Errors:**

While grammatical error is when the rules for grammatical structure in the language are actually broken, a lexical error refers to make the wrong choice of word for the stylistic context. The word is roughly correct, but wrong in flavor. It may also refer to the right form of the word in the wrong place, using the correct root but incorrect suffix, or incorrect form of the word in the right place. Lexical errors are badly formed identifiers or constants, symbols which are not part of the language, badly formed comments, etc. The following are some examples these errors:

- Ex1: which consent of development their abilities (يهدف (لتطوير كفاءاتهم ومهاراتهم) => Right form of the word in the wrong place (using the correct root but incorrect suffix).
- Ex2: un employment edittings between young (معدلات (البطالة) => Malformation (incorrect form of the word in the right place).
- Ex3: I have always been interested in Islamic civilization (مولعا بالحضارة الإسلامية). => Misselection (Incorrect meaning for the source word).

- Ex4: consist of development their abilities and skills in search of educat (في البحث التربوي) =>Malformation.
- Ex5: Recently said that Egypt is the gift of the nile. (قديما قيل). => Malformation.
- Ex6: I was and still fond of Egyptian culture or civilization (الحضارة الإسلامية). => Mis-selection of the equivalent word.

### Semantic Errors:

Semantic error is an error in the meaning. It is a logical error that is due to wrong logical statements. Semantics is the interpretations of and meanings derived from the sentence transmission and understanding of the message. Semantics errors are Logical, while Syntax errors are code errors. They are operations conducted on incompatible types, undeclared variables, double declaration of variable, reference before assignment, etc. The following are some examples these errors:

- Ex1: an employment editings between young this area it is realy from hieghest edittings in the world. (إن معدلات البطالة (بين شباب المنطقة هي بالفعل من أعلى المعدلات في العالم) => Malformation, confusion of sense relations (incorrect term is used where a specific one is needed. Therefore the meaning is underspecified).
- Ex2: Unemployment rates are among (or between) young people (بين شباب المنطقة)=>Confusion of sense relations (Using a wrong near synonym).
- Ex3: The exam has finished (الاجتبار أوشك على الانتهاء) => Borrowing from the source language, which is inconsistent with the standardized system of the target language.
- Ex4: I have always been fond of Egyptian culture or civilization (كنت ولا أزال مولعا بالحضارة الإسلامية). (Semantically undetermined word selection).
- Ex5: old egypt of civilization was (حضارة مصر القديمة)=> Calque (Translation of a word or a phrase from L1 words).

- Ex6: Recently said that Egypt (وقديماً قيل) => Calque (the new meaning of existing word is calqued on cognate words in the target language).

### **Organizational Errors:**

Organization error is related to claim/thesis, transition words, support, process, logical progression, and flow of ideas. It also concerned with discourse and/or process.

- Ex1: an employment edittings between young this area it is realy from highest edittings in the world (إن معدلات البطالة (بين شباب المنطقة هي بالفعل من أعلى المعدلات في العالم => Distortions (misordering and blending, illogical progression).
- Ex2: Recently said that Egypt (وقديماً قيل) => Distortions (Inappropriate collocation).
- Ex3: I have always been fond of Egyptian culture or civilization (كنت ولا أزال مولعاً بالحضارة الإسلامية) => Inappropriate collocation.

### **Substance Errors:**

Substance Errors are machinery produced errors. They are the errors related to punctuation, capitalization and spelling. Total substance errors of students were (77) errors; where they committed (14) punctuation errors, (10) capitalization errors and (53) spelling errors. The following are some examples these errors:

- Ex1: my children dont have any problem. => Omission of apostrophe in don't.
- Ex2: We sometimes admire with a lot of things, we see it in the first time => Unnecessary insertion of the comma (,) in the middle of the sentence.
- Ex3: I was loving with, Islamic => Unnecessary insertion of the comma (,) in the middle of the sentence.
- Ex4: Unemployment rates among young people are already the highest on the world?? => Omission of the dot (.) at the end of the sentence.
- Ex5: was the gift of the nile. => Lack of capitalization
- Ex6: the test is almost over. => Lack of capitalization

- Ex7: my students and my children have no problem.=> Lack of capitalization
- Ex8: islamic civilization => Lack of capitalization  
Lack of capitalization in the Arabic alphabet and very different punctuation conventions. No distinction is made between upper and lower case.
- Ex9: Disemployment (البطالة).
- Ex10: Un employment (البطالة).
- Ex11: is realy from hieghest edittings in the (معدلات البطالة من (أعلى المعدلات
- Ex12: have any problevis reading boxes ( ليس لديهم مشكلة على (الإطلاق في قراءة الكتب
- Ex13: this books aims to helpe grownding ( هذا الكتاب يهدف (لمساعدة خريجي حقل التربية

### Discussion of results:

Results of analyzing errors of students' translation tasks revealed that the most problematic error categories in the data are grammatical and substance errors (26% for each). This means that students encounter problems in inter-lingual transfer from the native language, and in intra-lingual transfer within the target language itself. The formal takes the form of performance errors in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. It comes as a result of learners' drawing on the linguistic system of the native language, which is a prominent feature distinguishing beginner translators, while the latter is a noticeable deviation from the standardized system of the native language, which refers to in competency within the target language itself due to incorrect (incomplete or over generalized) application of language rules.

At an intermediate level, learners' previous experiences and existing sub-assumptions begin to influence structures within the target language itself. This, in turn justifies syntax, semantic, and organizational errors committed by students that occur as a result of interference between the lexical and

grammatical structures of the native language and the ones of the target language.

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile mentioning that the first type of transfer is predominant, demonstrating that the students that took part in the present study still resort to the linguistic system of their native language as a mechanism of L2 acquisition. A possible explanation lies in the pedagogical approach itself. It is a fact that “translation classes rarely include any type of analysis or help provided on systematic basis as far as translation problems and ability are concerned. The absence of clear objectives for teaching translation, random choice of unrelated passages and the irrelevance between the type of training students get and final examinations they set for all contribute to the low quality performance of students.” (Abdel Rahim, 1998: 84-85).

These results are supported by those reached by (Attia, 1975; Aly, 1986; Armellino, 2008; Mendoza & Ponce, 2009). Moreover, the reasons behind committing such errors are consistent with those reported by (Corder, 1974, 1984; Taylor, 1975; Kiraly, 1990; Richards, 1992; Brown, 1994; Zhao, 2004) who referred these errors to three major sources: inter-lingual/transfer errors (attributed to the native language and take place when the learner’s L1 habits (patterns, systems or rules) interfere or prevent him/her, to some extent, from acquiring the patterns and rules of the second language; interference (negative transfer) that refers to the negative influence of the L1 on the performance of the L2/FL; and intra-lingual/developmental errors, which are items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language.

### **Implication and conclusion:**

In light of the results reached by the present study, it is argued that analyzing students’ translation errors can indeed constitute a data base necessary to conceive a more effective



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teaching and learning processes that focus not only on translation classes, but also on the acquisition of English as a foreign language in general. They also revealed useful insights into methodological approaches, on how best to develop students' awareness of their own types of translation errors. This in turn justifies the purpose of the present study. As it represents an important classroom procedure that allows teachers to identify the degree to which students master the target language (English), error analysis has proved its major role in improving students' translation performance and products.

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